



## **The Writing in the Sand**

**The Part of the Story that You Were Never Told about:**

### **MARY MAGDALENE**

Introduction

- 1: Mary, the Call Girl of Magdala
- 2: The Prostitute Who Went Insane
- 3: An Illuminating Excursion into related Traumatic Experiences of 1983 A.D.
- 4: Return to the Reactions of the Abandoned Mother two Thousand Years Before Our Time
- 5: The Miracle of True Love
- 6: The Loving Impulse of an Exceptional Woman
- 7: A Horrifying Eros Case
- 8 The Critical Instances When Even Jesus Remained Speechless

### **Introduction**

Did you ever hear about the author Jesus of Nazareth? Some of the most famous men in the world of letters have not left us one single word from their own pen. Take, for instance, Socrates. He wrote nothing. It was his pupil Plato who took care of the writing in that learned fraternity. A most deplorable fact, I am tempted to say. For this super-genius of a disciple was, sadly enough, going to put sentences into his late teacher's mouth that I can hardly believe that good Socrates himself would have formulated that badly.

But, then, what about Jesus? Did there not exist a publisher who could be depended upon to give out this writer's collected works, at least posthumously, in leather binding and gold edge

"The collected works of Jesus!" I think I hear your hesitating voice. "How does this fit into the picture of the historical Jesus? Did Jesus write anything at all?"

Most people never seem to think of the man of Nazareth as a known writer. But, just the same, there seems to be no doubt among his first biographers that He did write.

"Well," you say, still a little skeptical, "this can hardly be an authorship that left any significant traces in the world. Did what Jesus wrote really make so little impact? Or why has it otherwise

fallen so totally into oblivion? Did Jesus perhaps have certain difficulties getting through to His readers?"

No. Far from it. The very few who managed to read the writing from the hand of Jesus probably never forgot it, so thoroughly were they shaken in the core of their being by the reading material submitted to them. All at once, they stood speechless, to all appearance paralyzed in body and soul.

But why do you never hear eulogies about the literary production of Jesus today?

The reason is very simple: The only thing we are entirely positive that He has produced of literary work was something He deliberately wrote upon a material of a most destructible kind. And then there was only one destiny possible for His modest manuscript. For the great multitude of potential readers, it was doomed to remain illegible, to crumble into nothingness. Jesus, you see, wrote His message in sand. A few minutes later, the writing was blotted out forever. What else could one expect, by the way? Could one imagine a material of lesser durability? Jesus himself warns us strongly against depending on sand, for a less stable foundation cannot be found.

But why, then, did He write His impressive message in sand after all? Well, there is hardly a more suitable type of parchment to write on when the purpose is to give a specific man a glimpse of his own life history without having the secret betrayed to every prying Tom, Dick, and Harry. Jesus, you see, was the kind of author who had a predilection for calling back to people's minds certain dark spots in their past history. Snapshot biographies were manifestly one of His specialties as an original writer. And here is something we all know: A biography may turn out to be a rather embarrassing thing for the person concerned. You will probably understand this even better when the main theme of the biographical disclosures there on the sandy plains in Palestine is revealed.

It happened to be a particularly delicate one, namely sex. What Jesus wrote in the sand was the old story about woman and man.

I think we know a number of authors who have built up quite a name for themselves, making best-sellers just on this topic. Our world today is practically in the process of going down in a veritable deluge of daring sketches dealing with the relationship between the sexes. It may be a matter of dubious scandals or real masterpieces of pornographic art. The Greek word pornography means "a depiction of whores," if you can bear a direct translation of the original into English.

Imagine what a blessing it would have been to the world if these modern writers were just as discrete and careful in their selection of writing material as Jesus of Nazareth was. Above all, it would be well for their own sakes in the future if their writings would be erased in that painless manner, just as the desert winds tend to erase the soft traces in the sand. But, alas, not quite so cheaply will they evade the responsibility of their literary heirloom. What a relief it would have been for many a writer--even those entirely outside the pornographic guild--if he, in his turn, had had the good luck of mistaking a strip of desert sand for a sheet of writing paper!

Of course, you will never run any risk of winning the Nobel Prize in literature if you have the weird idea of creating your main literary productions in a sand pile. Under such circumstances, the glory of outstanding authorship is not very likely to come your way. It was this strangely fascinating allurements Schiller talked about, and so longingly yearned for, in his green youth. He called it "die Unsterblichkeit des Namens," "the immortality of the name." Could one imagine

anything more piteously illusory than that? We can express it a little more in harmony with intelligible realism: a purely nominal immortality. There is nothing much to boast of in an immortality as phantomlike as that, is there? There is evidence enough that Jesus Christ had no use for such vanity. To Him, it was of no importance to assert Himself as the immortal one, one way or the other. His decision, on the contrary, was to die a painful death--not for His own sake, but for the sake of the other ones. And during His whole life on earth, one thing was quite remarkable: Jesus' specialty was to obliterate Himself. He practiced this attitude of humility consistently, whenever it could benefit others.

This is the plain truth about the most self-erasing "Sand Author" of all times. It was mere tact and consideration and a desire to protect the reputation of other people that made Jesus write the message with His bare finger in the sand, instead of cutting the characters with a chisel into solid rock, as some would like to do in order to secure literary immortality.

## **1-Mary, the Call Girl of Magdala**

We find the story in chapter 8 of the Gospel of John.

"And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto Him a woman caught in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, they said unto Him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now, Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting Him, that they might have to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down, and with His finger wrote on the ground, as though He heard them not. So when they continued asking Him, He lifted up Himself, and said unto them, he that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up Himself, and saw none but the woman, He said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more. John 8:3-11"

Who was she, this woman who had been hauled forth and stood trembling in front of Jesus, charged with adultery?

You may recall her name from Bible history: Mary Magdalene. The surname "Magdalene" is derived from the city of Magdala. Did Mary come from this city? People called her Mary of Magdala, but one who has a deeper knowledge of her origin would know that she was from quite another town, Bethany, a Sabbath journey east of Jerusalem.

The girl's name Mary is well known from the Bible. It is a modification of the name Miriam. And that name we know particularly well in connection with the story of Moses. Semantic study has revealed that it is of Egyptian origin and means "the beloved."

In the Gospel story, we find biographical details concerning the famous-or infamous-Mary of Magdala. One thing we know for certain: During a sad period of her life, she had been in the power of the demon world.

A modern psychiatrist would simply have called her insane.

But what, exactly had happened to this girl, driving her into the night of insanity? I say "night," and there is indeed every reason to, on the basis of the short sketch given in the Gospel. An

further sources of information, open to historical studies, confirm the serious nature of the case. Seven times Jesus had fought against the powers of darkness to help Mary emerge into the realms of light again. The theologian thinks of the number seven in terms of perfection or totality, perfection for good or for evil. We have no reason to doubt that the dark night of insanity, which once enshrouded Mary Magdalene, was total enough. From a human point of view, there was hardly any hope left that the poor, deluded girl would ever again see the light of a new dawn for those regions of her consciousness that had once been under the control of will and reason.

But how did she get into this misery? We have before us a most remarkable case: the pleasure girl of Magdala, a mad prostitute. What had brought about her madness? What had driven her into prostitution? At the time when Jesus, according to the Gospel, wrote His inspired message to that proud group of self-righteous men, Mary did not show any special signs of either madness or devil possession any longer, as far as I can see. But she had certainly fallen once more into the depths of prostitution. Was the guilt of those repeated falls exclusively her own, or could it be that the merciless rabbis condemning her were the most guilty ones?

Their mercilessness was not directed only against the frightened woman. IT was, first and foremost, directed against Jesus, whom they hated. He was their target. It was indeed their main aim to find occasion for complaint against Him in order to get rid of Him. Not that they did not relish the stoning of a woman taken in adultery. But why not kill two birds with one stone, as long as such efficiency in systematic sadism was within reach? Jesus, however, was certainly the principal object of accusation in their mind. How could He possibly get away with it this time? He was facing two alternatives, both of them apparently equally impossible, humanly speaking:

1. He could pronounce an acquittal, a clear pardon, of the woman. Then he would be accused by His own people of contempt of the law of Moses.
2. He could sentence her to death. But then the consequences would be even more precarious. His enemies would have Him summoned to appear before the Roman courts of justice. Here is a man, they would say, who has assumed the authority of execution, without any respect for the proper offices of government. The Roman courts of justice was, after all, the supreme authority in the country at the time.

Jesus' keen mind caught, in a flash, the whole situation: first, the quivering girl, overtaken by shame, particularly in front of her Benefactor and Rescuer; second, the prominent men of the Jewish hierarchy, with their hard, unrelenting faces. He could read their hearts and profoundest thoughts like an open book. And what He read made Him shudder in the depths of His soul, a soul so entirely penetrated by purity and justice.

To Jesus, the facts of the matter were plain. He could see that the staunch guardians of virtue standing before Him had themselves been implicated in leading the unfortunate girl onto the road of sin in the first place. And their final goal was to get Jesus out of the way.

At first, He did not with one word answer their question. He only bent down. Why did He fix His eyes so intently on the ground? What was it He so suddenly started to write in the soft sand?

The men probably interpreted His behavior as a means of diverting attention from the issue at hand. Jesus Christ, the author, was surely the subject farthest away from their minds. They could not guess that they themselves were in for the worst literary shock experience of their lives. What they were anxiously awaiting was the answer Jesus would have to give in reply to

their mercilessly put question. So why did He waste time in this irrelevant way? Why did He persist in this stubborn silence? They closed in on Jesus. Now He would have to make up His mind and answer them.

But as they crowded around Jesus, their eyes had to follow His. What in the world was He doing down there on the ground? They were impelled to follow the movements of His writing finger. Suddenly, their faces took on a new expression. What they saw drawn up with clear letters in the sand had a most uncomfortable address to them personally. It was the hidden dealings of their lives He there described briefly and with striking accuracy.

The crowd of people standing beyond the inner circle noticed a sudden paleness creeping into the features of those hitherto so bold and self-assured gentlemen. What could the reason be for the silent surprise and curious embarrassment of these men who only recently had condemned the prostitute? Shame was seen portrayed clearly in their faces as they slunk away from the arena with downcast eyes and ash-grey complexions. Curious onlookers stretched their necks forward in anticipation. They wanted to share in the exciting reading. But the author had already wiped out with His hand every letter of the unique message.

One thing, however, was clear to all: The rabbis, with all their simulated respect for the law, had left out some essential details pertaining to the case in question. First, it was the husband of the unfaithful woman who was under obligation to start whatever steps of prosecution were to take place against her. Second, she was not the only offender. There would necessarily have to be two guilty parties. Both of these were to suffer the same punishment. The penalty was death by stoning.

In this matter, Jesus could meet the hypocritical legalists on their own ground. The law was also quite explicit as to the process of stoning. A particular pattern was to be observed. Not just anyone had the right to execute sentence. The witnesses in the case were called upon to throw the first stones. Thus a guarantee for a trustworthy testimony was secured.

The would-be prosecutors in the case had not anticipated such a turn of events in favor of the defence. The true and faithful Witness had delivered His statement of the evidence. It had been a silent delivery, but no less impressive and authoritative for all that.

The rabbis were forced to acknowledge a crushing defeat. So suddenly stripped of their resplendent cloak of boasting self-righteousness, they were left completely naked. Guilty and condemned, they stood face to face with Him, the one altogether pure and perfect.

How did the woman react to this unexpected turn of events? She was, at first, as one paralyzed by the encounter with the righteous One. "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." This verdict from the supreme judge hit her hard, like a death sentence. She did not even dare to raise her eyes and look into the Savior's face. With her head bowed, she awaited her execution. She waited in panic for the first stone to reach its mark, but the stone did not come. On the contrary, and to her amazement, the accusers went away with stooping necks and shameful faces, one by one, "beginning at the eldest, even unto the last." And then she heard this message so filled with hope: "Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more."

These words melted Mary's heart completely and for all the future. She threw herself down at the feet of Jesus. Sobbing, with the tears streaming down her cheeks, she poured out her thankfulness and confessed her sins.

This experience prevailed upon Mary to make a firm decision. She was determined to start afresh. From now on, she wanted to live a pure life in accordance with the will of God. Every day from now on was dedicated to His service.

By performing this radical change in Mary's existence, Jesus wrought a greater miracle than when healing many a hopeless physical disease. This repenting woman with the broken heart became one of Christ's most faithful followers. She returned the Savior's forgiving mercy with a life of self-sacrificing love.

The world had nothing but ridicule and scorn for this lost soul. But Jesus spoke to her words, filled with affection and sympathy. He, the sinless one, felt deep compassion for the weakness of the sinner and reached out to her a helping hand. The self-righteous Pharisees had condemned her unconditionally. Jesus, however, said, "Go and sin no more."

But this is just one detached incident in Mary's life history. We do not know how it started. neither do we know the stream of dramatic events following. And even less information do we have concerning a dark period in between. How did it come to happen that she sank into the fathomless darkness that certainly is not unto life, but unto death?

## **2- The Prostitute Who Went Insane**

What is the deeper significance of the surname Magdalene? We have already indicated that Mary of Magdala was not from Magdala at all. She had her home in Bethany, a little town—or should we rather say suburb of Jerusalem had their residential quarters there. Among others, some of the prominent leaders of the people lived in Bethany. this was a spiritual elite that had their daily affairs in the capital. In all respects, they belonged to the aristocratic circles of Jerusalem. In Mary's family, we know of no such publicly prominent persons, either in the field of politics or that of deeper learning. But those whom we don know seem to have filled quite a worthy place in the community. Mary was the youngest of three children. Her sister Martha was an unusually industrious and capable woman, and Lazarus, her brother, enjoyed a respected position among the first Christians.

But how does the lugubrious chapter involving Magdala fir into the picture? One of my colleagues, Professor Joseph Barnes, has tried to put the few pieces of information we have from inspired pens into a most thought-provoking mosaic.

But let me introduce another resident of Bethany, the rabbi Simon. The first time Mary met this dignified leader of Israel was probably when her elder sister, Martha, was in charge of the practical arrangements of a special feast in the town. Simon was not only a learned and highly respected man,, but he also took pleasure in social gatherings. We can easily imagine how fascinated he became, in the course of the feast, by the unusually intelligent and charming young Mary. He decided to provide for this bright little head a literary education. This was no matter-of-course, even in the distinguished circles of Bethany. An academic education was at this time traditionally reserved for boys in the Jewish society.

The outcome, however, was that Simon one day became somewhat of a private tutor for Mary. By and by, a more romantic conception of this tutor-student relationship came to prevail. Simon conveyed to Mary, with all the eloquence he possessed, in words and deeds, that he loved her dearly. And the "beloved" (Miriam) could not deny that she was becoming more and more attached to her charming tutor. This ended by no means well. We have quite trustworthy sources to the fact that Rabbi Simon seduced his young protégée. Like so many other men

down through the centuries, rich in initiative, but rather egocentric in character, Simon had a poor value standard for his sex ethics. It consisted in placing his own pleasure higher than the consideration of a girl's future and virtue. It did not take long before he whispered into his beloved's ear, "Mary, you know how dearly I love you. If you also love me, just a little, you will give yourself completely to me. Believe me, it will increase our happiness and make us feel we belong to each other even more. It is only natural and right. In fact, it is what all lovers do in our day. You and I love each other more than many others do. So why should we deny ourselves that which is the supreme right of love?"

How noble and fascinating all this sounded coming from the lips of Simon. Of course, she had heard about adultery and a definite commandment against that. But Simon, the great expositor of both the Talmud and the Torah, assured her that this was a category that they had no possibility of falling into. Adultery meant "unfaithfulness to a marriage partner." In other words, if neither of the parties were married she might be assured that no harm would result. Mary was easily persuaded by these "logical" arguments, set forth in such a warm tone of voice. So it happened.

Of course, premarital sex in a society like Bethany was not a rare phenomenon at that time, even though it never reached any height similar to that of "decent" circles today, especially in our Western world. But the unlawful practice could trigger off explosive consequences in one particular case, namely where a Jewish girl was unfortunate enough to become pregnant as a result of the experiment, so that, in due course, the breach of the law came to the notice of the Jewish authorities. Then it was only a matter of time before the deeds that had taken place in secrecy were brought out into the open. This was the destiny of Mary. In such cases, it usually did not take long before the identity of the man as well became known. And, according to the letter of the law, both were to be stoned to death.

Now, we must remember that Israel no longer was a sovereign state. It was under Roman dominion. And what attitude did the Romans take toward matters of this kind? As you may well imagine, their view and tradition was very different. The governing powers of administration proclaimed, in no uncertain terms, in every province with a population majority of Jews, that the death penalty of stoning for the misdemeanor of adultery would not be tolerated. Such radical measures, taken against a very common human weakness, were strictly forbidden by Roman law. The Romans had probably given up fighting adultery in this sense, inasmuch as it was the normal trend of the whole empire. In other words, punishing adultery with the pain of death would be tantamount to declaring the extermination of the greater part of the population. The legislative bodies felt they had good reason to wink at the promiscuity dominating the area.

It is not difficult to predict a tendency resulting from this situation:: Pregnant Jewish girls had one place where they could feel safe, at least for their lives. That was in the cities where the Romans had concentrated their garrisons and civil administration, thus putting their special stamp on all features of urban life. In the midst of a Roman military zone, the unwed Jewish mother could not only save her life, but even be greeted as a welcome guest, a necessary component in the general pattern of a soldier's disrupted life. It was, at the same time, a relief for the girl to be far enough away to avoid gossip in the hometown. This is not to mention the relief felt by the man concerned, the lover. He could again breathe more easily now that the daily reminder of his more doubtful deeds was so completely out of the picture, and he was able to pursue his daily life and career as if nothing had happened.

As yet, however, there were no apprehensions in Mary's childlike heart. Her faith in Simon's integrity and love for her were implicit. One day you might even hear her say with a secret

smile, suggesting happiness rather than misfortune, "Listen, Simon, can you guess what has happened to me?"

"No," he answers rather abruptly. Both his voice and the expression on his face might convey a mood of indifference. Or is there perhaps in that voice a discordant element of embarrassment, some unpleasant anticipation?

Mary, though, hardly seems to be conscious of any such negative reactions. For that she is too absorbed by her own candid point of view. "I am going to have a child," she says, a little tense, but still exuberantly happy.

He fights against the anger welling up inside him by preserving a tone of unconcern as long as possible. But right through it flashes a component of hard aggression, bordering on bitter irony: "Oh, is that so? Is there any other news?"

She looks up into his face with some surprise mingled with consternation. "But Simon, did you hear what I just told you? I am going to have a child. And the child is yours."

"Keep your voice down, girl. Don't you dare say that aloud again. Surely you know my position. If this became known it would ruin my career. DO you understand me? You must understand how important it is that Rabbi Simon's reputation is kept absolutely spotless."

"What about my reputation then, Simon?"

"Oh, you are just a girl, Mary. One girl more or less makes no difference to the future of the Jewish nation. You only have one thing to do now. You must go into hiding right away."

It is hardly necessary to draw up in detail the shock reaction Mary's sensitive mind had to endure this fateful morning, as she so suddenly, and for the first time, was confronted with the facts about Simon's real character and his so-called love for her. How could any person to that extent lack decent feelings in his heart? She had existed only for him, doing everything in her power to please him without any reservations.

Mary cries her eyes and heart out, all the tenderness of her young life. but her sobs do not tend to make the man's heart grow softer or more responsive. They only make him more and more apprehensive. His apprehension grows into panic. He fears the possible consequences of being found out. This would cause him to lose his good name and high position. He would forfeit his calling to be a spiritual leader in Israel.

Mary must, at all costs, be persuaded to take her "problem" quietly and sensibly. Their false step must remain a secret between them. What is he to do with these loud wailings that can be heard far and wide? In order to calm down his "little beloved one" and bring her "back to her senses" again, before it is too late, Simon now starts talking to her in a more confidential tone. "Dear Mary, you must realize..." he whispers hoarsely and intently. "How in the world could you think it possible for me to marry you now? I just couldn't even if I wanted to ever so much. How naive do you think people are? They can count to nine both forwards and backwards. Or what do you imagine? The gossips in Jerusalem are not all that devoid of fantasy. They will find out, soon enough, that this birth comes much too early in any case. And what position will I be in then? In what position will the cause of the nation be?" said Rabbi Simon, the great teacher in Israel.



Then he passed into another aspect of the topic. "What about yourself, by the way, Mary? You ought to consider you own family a little also. How do you think they will bear the shame that you are bringing upon them so unexpectedly? To be sure, Mary, the only thing for you to do now is to pack up the few belongings you need most and take the shortest way to Magdala. Many a girl like you has found a good refuge there."

"A good refuge," she repeats with renewed surprise. "And what about the child?"

"Oh, the child," he says, again with increasing irritation at the thought of those undue shackles that life seems intent on imposing upon him, interfering so unexpectedly with his usual peace and tranquility. "The child is yours, Mary. You can do with it as you like."

There are many new experiences for poor bewildered Mary to ponder and grasp the full implication of all in one day, or rather, in the short interval of a few minutes. She is suddenly exposed to the harsh realities of a world she never knew existed. She must face the fact that some people are not only ready to take advantage of an innocent girl for their own selfish purposes, using her as one would a piece of household goods. But then afterwards, they may throw the poor wretch aside like a worn-out dishrag. They have no scruples about driving other people into suffering and shame, lacking as they are both in delicacy of feeling and a compassionate heart. The destiny of a human soul means nothing more to them than a number on an inventory.

We know little of the events following this dramatic episode, but the next historical fact we are sure of is this: The decent and lovable Mary of Bethany is in one day changed into the cheap harlot of Magdala, thrown about from one soldier to the other with in the precincts of the Roman garrisons. And then, by and by to crown it all, she becomes Mary the Insane, a crazy woman whom even the soldiers could not manage to derive any pleasure from any longer.

But we should not proceed too fast. How could this really happen? The critical historian, as well as the literary critic, will perhaps at this point raise his hands in protest. There must be certain limits to the element of the improbable.

I should here call to mind the diverging reactions of men and women upon meeting with extreme misfortune in their lives. Men have a tendency to fall into the dark back-alleys of inveterate crime. To women, another road stands open. That is the one we may statistically and historically establish as their traditional option. They choose prostitution. This road, as well, is a back-alley, and it is hardly less dark than the other one. But still it does have a different shade. It is, in a way, an evil "less hard-boiled" than regular crime as we find it in the inveterate criminal. In the background, there is still the shimmering hope of a possible return. Therefore, prostitution may perhaps seem to have a better chance of being softened down. Prostitution establishes itself as some kind of chronic disease. It is not likely to take the aspect of a wild delirium, and acute attack. No. According to criminology theorists in all lands, prostitution is a sort of "lukewarm compromise," and the luke warm compromise is something the radically split mind knows nothing about.

Now, what do the sociological reports have to say in the case where an unhappy love affair drifts into the last climax of sorrow, the sudden loss of an intensely desired and highly beloved child? The maternal instinct must be regarded as a most normal and natural feeling. Therefore, it can hardly ever become the source of an ethical perversion. The desperate mother does not normally seek her refuge in the dark alleys of crime. The natural extreme for the mother instinct

to turn to, when a child is lost, is rather insanity, the escape into mental oblivion. We are here confronted with the well-known "Ophelia alternative" from Shakespeare's Hamlet.

Of course, there may be a good reason to question whether one can at all defend looking upon madness as a kind of safety valve, put into function by nature in cases of extreme crisis. There may be objections, both religious and scientific, to this way of viewing the matter. We can only keep to the statistical facts that criminology and differential psychology have shown us. Then we may attempt to interpret them as well as we are able. It is a fact that up to three times as many women as men turn insane because of the tragic loss of a child.

One thing should be said about the psychopathological case of Mary. I happen to be a biblicist of the naive kind—that is, childish enough to think along these lines: When the gospel says that she was possessed by seven demon spirits, then this is not merely an expression for the "perfect measure" of devilry haunting the human mind. Or, expressed in other words, the number seven is not necessarily a mere religious symbol for the extreme degree insanity can reach. I think we have experience enough, even in our ultramodern time, with all its scientific focus, to know that possession by the devil is a reality. Nevertheless, I find Joseph Barnes's reflections on the mental case of Mary Magdalene highly interesting. We must acknowledge that every human being—also from a religious point of view—has a dimension in his life that you may call his personal spirit. It is composed of every trait of the thoughts and feelings constituting his individual personality. This "Spirit" takes total possession of us. Thus we are actually obsessed by it. The spirit of every man owns that man, flesh, blood, and bone.

And now, what about the phenomena of personality—the spirits—taking possession of poor Mary, one after the other? At this point, Barnes goes back to the stage when Simon came into her life. At that moment, she saw everything tinted in rose, as is the tendency of thoughtless youth. At this juncture, a rather dubious spirit enters upon the scene. We may call it the spirit of rationalizing. It endeavors to establish sensible reasons to make the basically irrational appear rational. The arbitrary desire of the heart has supreme dominion. Man takes what he actually knows to be evil and "makes it good." This is witchcraft, a stroke of genius, mastered to near perfection by certain obscure regions of the human intellect. It is man, the manipulation expert, in action.

Observers who have some experience in marriage counseling—or sex counseling—as it is, in fact, today openly called—seem to agree pretty much on one point: Seldom or never do they come across actual cases where a woman, at the moment of yielding to premarital sex, felt clearly convinced that she was doing something fundamentally wrong. No, the matter appeared to her in a veil of rapture—in the deepest sense good and right. How could anything so basically natural be objectionable, either intellectually or morally? Oh, how marvelously soothing to an uneasy conscience to know a "deeper ethic of the heart" so adroitly engaged in defense of a person's deeds! How comfortingly powerful that new ethical intuition is to sweep away all "Stiffened forms" of "legalistic narrow mindedness."

Only later does this state of mind change, as the situation adopts a different perspective. The evil spirit number two, using Barnes's expression, presents itself. The common name of the apparition in this case is the spirit of guilt. It is a question of a guilt one does not want to acknowledge, guilt in the negative sense of the word. The outward behavior is one of boasting self-assurance rather than of true regret. "Don't tell me that I am suffering from any guilt complex. On the contrary, there is nothing wrong in what I have done."

You had better pull yourself down a couple of notches, my dear friend. You know better than that. It is quite impossible—physically and psychologically—to depart so radically from the acknowledged path of good conduct and still remain free from any guilt feeling.

You may, of course, build up walls ever so high around this guilt. Yet it remains there in the depths beyond the barricades. It will go on forever, gnawing at the deepest layers of your consciousness. Just listen to what Dr. Max Levine writes in *Medical Digest*: "If only doctors and parents could get it across to our young generation that it is not the premarital pregnancy or general disease that is the major problem of unchastity. It is the impact upon especially the girl's health of mind."

We are all created alike in this respect. We cannot under any circumstances depart noticeably from that which we, deep down, believe to be true and right without a fundamental change taking place in our inmost personality.

And what about Mary, that naturally fresh and blossoming young girl—how did she get along, as time passed and as she found herself yielding to the gradually increasing advances of the sophisticated Simon? The feeling of guilt in no way failed to present itself, in spite of all attempts to rationalize it away. And it did not stir one inch from its assigned place, although, to all appearance, she had peace in her mind. by and by, it seemed as if the voice of conscience had, after all, been put to silence, the ethical awareness gradually dulled. The sober principles of right doing were at last taken completely captive, as it were. And yet it was useless to fight against the plain fact: The vital energies of the personality were waning away, slowly but surely.

Before Mary herself realizes it, the third intruding demon has entered her life. The demon of fear is at hand, ready to do his work of destruction. And he has no intention of moving one inch from the side of his victim. We know the obsessive questions haunting the mind of girls in all lands through the ages: "What would people say if they knew the truth about me? Secrets have a thousand ways of leaking out." and "What does the future hold? Will my lover marry me or let me down?" And: "Am I already drifting into the unwed mother's sad destiny?"

The demon of fright gradually tightens his cold grasp around the poor girl's heart.

Mary, of course, ran to Simon for comfort and assurance. Things might not be so bad as she, in her moments of honest soul-searching, had anticipated. But Simon could give her no comfort. On the contrary, she received such an icy shower from him that it was more than she could bear. This total lack of sympathy came from the quarter where she had least expected it. The hard words from Simon drove the fourth demon definitively into Mary's heart. The devilish spirit of flight psychosis had started its rummaging in her mind: Oh, let me get away from here, far away to a place where nobody knows me. For here my feet are burning under me. It would be a relief to move and do something, no matter what.

The Mary we now see before us is a Mary on the run, fleeing away from the present, away from the immediate environment. It is a flight without meaning, without plan or purpose, inasmuch as she just moves on and on, in pursuit of new regions, new shadows, new uncertainties, new issues of no return. Even so, the realms of the subconscious must have had some bearings. One day, Mary finds herself in Magdala. One last resort has to be tried.

What then could Magdala, the city of shadows, offer the fleeing Mary of Bethany? She had already become Mary of Magdala. The atmosphere hovering over the alleys and marketplaces there was very much the same as the one Dante was to sense at the entrance of *Inferno*: "The one who enters here, let him abandon all hope." It is the spirit of despair trying to occupy,

definitively, the irresolute heart. There is, however, still some flickering flame of hope burning feebly. Mary has yet a certain respite to contemplate upon her heavy fate and to range, in some order, her most obtrusive problems.

One central question continues to turn over and over in her mind. At the moment it is to her the question above all others: What is going to happen to her child? She is unable to make any plans for her own future, but feels the urgent necessity of finding some arrangement for the little one, at least. There are only a few possible solutions that she can think of. She herself is not in the position, financially, to provide for the needs of a growing baby. And what then? Should she let an orphanage or a childless family take care of it? She knows the consequences of such a step: It will always bar her from the right to intervene or have any influence whatsoever on the child's life. Only furtively will she be able to approach its new home. Wistfully and without hope, she will have to stand at a distance, looking over the fence into that secluded world belonging to her child, but not to her.

Her dear little one will live his own life, not even aware of her existence. Forever will she be shut out of what has become the most important thing in her life.

Her thoughts roam restless and like outlaws, far and wide. Even before she has seen her child, she must experience the tragedy of losing it.

Eventually the day arrives when Mary gives birth to the little human being she has been carrying under her heart. She gets to see him as a living reality--even more wonderful than she has ever imagined in her wildest fantasies. But, all at once, her joy is changed to bitter sorrow. Before she can hold the little one in her arms, he is taken away from her. She is not only at the point of heartbreak, but her heart is broken and her mind is at the initial stage of fatal wavering on the borderline between sane reason and insanity. What is the nature of this wavering in its deepest essence?

### **3-An Illuminating Excursion into related Traumatic Experiences of 1983 A.D.**

On the whole the world and man are fairly much the same in our time as they were in the Year of Our Lord 29. They are the same in our Western world as in a corner of the Roman Empire where Mary Magdalene wearily walked the streets, in a drab and gloomy Magdala. You may not, in a literal sense, have seen the sun go down over the market of love in Magdala. Nor may you have seen the same shadows of vanity and dull despair, in terms of cheerless prostitutes amid the stream of Jews and Romans, civilians and soldiers, moving ceaselessly back and forth. But, on the other hand, you have certainly observed similar shadows in the wake of the Eros patterns manifested in a sufficient number of continents in our modern world. You have witnessed the grey silhouettes of prostitution over Love Lane Fair, downtown San Francisco, in Paradis des Amoureux along Montmartre de Paris, or over Mercado del Amor, in Rio de Janeiro. Our knowledge of the tragedies centering around these places of lurid entertainment gives us the possibility to judge tolerably well the conditions of ancient Magdala also.

I shall add to Joseph Barnes's details from my own experience, for the purpose of drawing parallels between the modern and the old world. Early one morning, I noticed a young girl outside our help center in New York. Her expression revealed that she must be in some terrible difficulty. I went up to her and said, trying to inspire as much confidence as possible, "Can I be of any help to you?"

"I desperately need to talk to a paster."

"I am a pastor. Let us go inside." I took her up to our office. "What is your name?"

"I can't tell you that."

"That has nothing to do with it."

"Well, I must know something about your situation in order to be able to help you."

"Oh, I am in an awful mess."

"Now then, what is wrong? Tell me your story in your own way. And be confident. We shall do everything in our power to help you."

"Well, I was working in a factory, intending to save some money so I could continue my college education. Beside me worked a young man. He was very pleasant and attractive. We talked together whenever we had the chance. Soon I was very much in love with him and he with me—at least, that was what I thought at the time. We started going steady. After some time, as our friendship matured, we quite naturally began to talk about marriage. We had even fixed a date already. One day he said to me, 'Why don't we enjoy our love fully? We don't have to wait till we are married for that. After all, we live in a modern age, where no one bothers about formalities any longer. We love each other; that is the important thing. No harm can come of that.'

"Well, I did have my doubts about this. For I am really not all that modern. But his warm and loving words persuaded me quite soon, His main argument was always 'If you truly love me, you will show it by giving yourself completely to me.' Of course, I might have brought up a counter argument or asked a question on the same line: 'If you really loved love me, you would never ask me to go against the principles I have been brought up with, and which I still believe in, firmly and with my whole heart.' But I was not all that sober-minded and quick-witted at the time. I was probably far too much in love for that. Indeed, what he proposed seemed to me so intimate and good that to yield completely appeared very idealistic, even noble. There was no impression of wrong about it. So I finally gave in. And then one day I found myself confronted with the adverse side of the matter: I was pregnant. I must admit that I still reacted in an extremely naive way. As I realized my situation, my immediate thought was: It is his child, his and mine. I felt extremely happy. The next morning, I went to the factory very early, actually ahead of time. I was waiting anxiously to get a glimpse of my friend. As soon as I saw him, I ran up to him, saying, 'I have something very important to tell you.'

"However, there was no time to tell him anything before the shift was over. Then he was waiting for me as usual. And I at once told him my big news: 'I am going to have a baby. We shall have to set the wedding date earlier than planned.' He started abruptly. His entire attitude was suddenly changed.

"Set the wedding date earlier than planned? What are you talking about, girl? I guess I have some news for you, also. I am already married and have enough children as it is.'

"I heard him as if in a dream, an unbelievable nightmare. Only quite slowly did the whole significance of his words dawn upon me. It was as though my world had fallen apart. I ran off to a bus terminal. Then I went by Greyhound for days and days on end. I had no plan, only a desire to get away, far away, preferably from myself as well, if possible. I got off in New York. Why New York? I just don't know. Now I have been here for a week, wandering up and down

the streets as if in a stupor, day after day. The money I had saved is practically gone. Never in my life have I felt so lonely as in this teeming crowd of strange people. People, people, new streams of them all the time. Not one of them cares about me or my problems. Now I have no idea what I am going to do. Oh, I am so miserable and so dead tired. Please show me a way out of this tangle."

Her exhausted figure shrank in the chair. It was obviously my turn to speak—in terms of an answer, if any satisfactory answer is possible at all, that is.

"Cheer up now. Together we shall try to find a solution. Let us see. Do your parents know anything about all this?" She shakes her head. "Well, but then your family must be worried about you and terribly concerned as to what may have happened to you. Wouldn't it be best if I got in touch with them immediately, maybe through the local church? Let us notify your father and mother."

After some inner struggle, she finally consents, although reluctantly, to my suggestion. In the meantime, I assure her, we shall try to find her some suitable employment and also arrange for our medical doctor to give her a general checkup. She feels less tense already, and I try to assure her that things will turn out right in the end.

But, in time, an important matter has to be settled. It is a question of vital importance and one that cannot be evaded or put off indefinitely.

"What are your plans concerning the child?"

Here was the very struggle I had apprehended all the time. She was obviously just the kind of woman who longs intensively to hold a child in her arms, her own child.

Consider for a moment her situation: A girl with the strong desire to be a mother as the determining and dominating force behind her motivation! And then seeing the very object of those longings actually within reach already! She was carrying that very child in her own being. The most wonderful thing in the whole world, a wee human creature, was soon to be born. But at the back of her mind was the always-present thought: As an unwed mother, she was, unfortunately, on the wrong side of the fence, seen both from the Christian point of view and that of society. She already seemed to be on a hectic wandering, away from her unborn baby. The two were destined to meet only in order to separate again immediately. In short, we were dealing with the case of a mother who already found herself put to flight, away from the path she, as a woman, had intended to go—together with a companion, together with a family.

At long last she had, in this matter as well, fought her way to resignation—to all appearance. Confronted with the inevitable, she capitulated.

"I shall have to give up the child. It must have a chance to grow up under the best conditions. I myself can never contribute anything toward that end. He [It was clearly a little boy this prospective mother saw in her inner vision] must have the opportunity to grow up in a good home. Tell me, Pastor, do you know of a good Christian family, maybe a couple who cannot have children themselves and therefore would take him as their own?"

"Well, if this is the solution you have arrived at, I shall take good care of that side of the matter."

I did. And everything seemed to be settled properly. One evening, I eventually received the expected telephone message from our doctor, informing me that the boy had arrived, because, in fact, it was a boy. Early the next day, I went to the clinic where "our little girl" had her little

boy. Quietly, almost hesitatingly, I went into her room. As cheerfully as I could, I said, "I see you have come through it very well. The boy is here."

There was no trace of a smile on her face. What a contrast, I thought suddenly, to the reaction I had observed in my own wife. I remember distinctly the boundless joy shining in her eyes when I was allowed to see her after a successful childbirth. In this new mother, contrariwise, there was nothing of that, no sign of happiness. I realized the conflict going on inside her.

"Have you seen the baby?" I asked cautiously.

She burst into tears. her sobs were heavy and sore.

"Yes. I had to. I knew I shouldn't have. But I could not let him go on his way without having seen him, my own little boy. I actually took him in my arms for a while. I held him to me, close, close. Then I knew, as never before, how completely impossible the situation was. I don't understand how I can bear giving him away now. I just cannot endure the thought of it."

As an observer to the drama in this woman's heart, my own heart bled for her.

"You know of course what the law entitles you to," I said. "In a matter of this kind, the final decision is entirely up to you."

"No, no, no!" she cried, despairingly and resigned. "My duty is to give him up. For his sake, I must do it. but I really cannot bear it, not yet, not today."

I shall never forget the drama I was now witnessing right in front of me. It was combat against the hopelessness of a merciless world, a combat moving back and forth in the heart of this so deceitfully abandoned girl. I keenly felt her helplessness as if it were my own. It was indeed my own. Her tragedy was the lacking presence of God in her life. That makes a human heart so hopelessly vulnerable. It takes so little for terrible things to happen. Just a wrong maneuver, and suddenly that poor little human being finds himself cruelly separated from his (or her) dear ones, a mate, a friend, a child. And then he (or she) is left alone, so completely alone. There is no compassionate and almighty Father to fill the infinite void.. The loneliness seems definitive. As far ahead as human eyes can reach, one blue ridge behind the other, there is nothing but solitude and emptiness. Separation from god is the ultimate depth of that same solitude. The Bible calls it hell. That is how the most sensitive soul experiences his Gethsemane, his Calvary. In the last stage of this development, we have the eternal separation from god. It is the final darkness, as light after light is put out, mercilessly and forever.

This is the truth about life in our world's Mercado del Amor! As I was sitting there in our little haven of rest for the restless ones. I could not help wishing that the many men who play so thoughtlessly with a woman's heart and destiny could share with us, at least for a night or two, what we go through during weeks and months as counselors for the abandoned ones right here in the roaring midst of a modern metropolis. I am referring to our modest little New York help center, lost like a speck of dust beneath the looming silhouettes of Manhattan, a feeble voice of mercy, almost completely suffocated by the din of traffic and the shrill shouts from the thronging crowds in the tidal waves of a modern ghetto. If only the ruthless playboy for one moment could feel the struggle we have to endure throughout the weeks and months of prolonged crisis in order to save a sensitive girl from losing her mind! After such a fight, on the boundary lines between the dark night of insanity and the light of a gradually dawning day, the unscrupulous Eros playboy would get something new to think about.

What goes on of reckless play between men and women all over the world is drama of terrifying dimensions in the tragic theater of life in our twentieth century. And it is all launched under the name of "love"! This is a cynical crime against holy matrimony, against the individual marriage partner, and not least against the child. Every child deserves to be born into a home with parents who desire it and love it.

#### **4-Return to the Reactions of the Abandoned Mother Two Thousand Years before Our Time**

This was just an example designed to throw more light upon Mary Magdalene. We have seen a modern counterpart to her dramatic destiny beyond those lost horizons of bygone millennia. And we shall now continue the story as we discern it within the contours drawn up with the help of a bit of imagination plus a realism based on everyday human experience.

The tenderhearted and sensitive Mary, a lonesome fugitive in the busy Roman-Jewish town of Magdala, must also have had to face a traumatic dilemma in her young life when she became a mother. Quite alone, she had to suffer the tension involved in this new and unknown experience. She, too, on that occasion, unfortunately happened to have her feet "on the wrong side of the fence." She, too, was confronted with the hard necessity of saying good-bye—and that already from the first moment on—to her newborn child. All at once she felt completely engulfed by loneliness and emptiness, as one forgotten and forsaken, by both God and man.

it is interesting to note that some Germanic languages have a most descriptive expression for that absolute or desperate way of being alone. And here it is a very human word.

The German adjective is "mutter-seelen-alleine." That suggests "as heartbreakingly alone as an abandoned mother." The mother who has had her child taken away from her becomes the very symbol of the utter extremes of sacrifice and sorrow on the common human level. The one who is longing to get away from that desperate loneliness is the mother. In the Biblical language, the tradition would say "Father." We know, of course, the quintessence of the Gospel, the New Testament version of the theme: God had a son from everlasting. Christ was His Only-Begotten, monogenes, the Only One of a kind, the Unique One (John 1:14). During eternal ages in the past, God had never known the feeling of being Mutter-seelen-alleine or, if you prefer, Vater-seelen-alleine. To the very concept of love (the Biblical Agape), "aleness" would have been unbearably tragic. And tragedy is not in any way the climax of spiritual life, according to the philosophy of the Bible. It was Greek humanism, a polytheistic or rather atheistic cultural tradition, that placed tragedy on the throne of literary art. This is the best evidence of the boundless sentimentality, the hopelessness, the extreme irrationality of the cultural traditions in the Western world.

Few people, even intelligent Christians, realize fully what the doctrine of the Trinity really means to us in terms of understanding God's character. Without it, there would be no possibility of spiritual meaningfulness in our world. The whole concept of other-centeredness, as an eternal reality, would then have been made null and void. To think of God as totally alone in existence throughout endless time, until the first day of creation, would be to reduce Him to the pitiable destiny of loving one person only: Himself. In other words, we would have a clear case of self-love into love. In fact, nothing but the doctrine implying a real plurality in the Godhead could give us the adequate answer to this problem. The case for true meaningfulness becomes an entirely different one, only at the moment when you have the clear notion of three different individual persons in the godhead. From that moment on, you are satisfied that the Father could always love the Son, and the Son the Father. Both of them could love the Holy Spirit and,



in their turn, be loved by Him, the third indispensable Person in the Team. Any number of aeons during the precreation past, they could spend meaningfully, planning together, giving full attention to the minutest details of a post creation future. I am referring particularly to the heartfelt care required in order that being like you and me might enjoy the unique God-given quality called the freedom of the will (the image of God in man). The summit of all happiness consists in being like god in one marvelous respect; having the perfect freedom to give oneself in service to the other ones.

Now God had a Son, as we have pointed out, but it is evident, according to the genesis record, that He also longed for other sons and daughters. He longed for these with a yearning more intense than that with which any mother longs for her unborn child.

And what kind of drama does the gospel present? first there is the tragic account of how God's children lost their way in the desert of sin and of their fall into the hopeless abyss of death. But the individual beings he had created were God's special heart affair. His love for them increased to the point that He went to the inconceivable step of making Himself sonless, giving His own Son up to die, so that "whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

What was it that actually happened to the first Person of the Godhead? He went the whole way into the unfathomable experience of becoming "vater-seelen-alleine"; that is, completely alone in the most extreme sense this concept of sacrifice can convey; not in the form of the sentimental feelings that characterize the emotions exalted by the cover of Greek tragedy.. No, there was no comforting drop of romantic self pity in God's sacrifice of His son. It was on the contrary, the boundless grief over a Son that really died. OF the Father nothing less was required than the suffering of an everlasting separation. He had to take the full experience of becoming vater-seelen-alleine, just as the Son had to go through the agony of being forever forsaken by his Father, as well as by every other being in the world of love and togetherness. In the Gospel, there are no make-believe happenings. This is not the imaginative sphere of theatrical performances. It is the live arena of Hebraic-Christian realism.

We should now be able to understand more fully, even on a more modest level of existence, how things looked to Mary at the time when she became mutter-seelen -alleine.

We have already seen how thoroughly tormented she was by the demon of guilt, guilt as a consequence of sin against the seventh commandment of the Decalogue: "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Exodus 20).

In addition, another heavy burden weighed upon her conscience. She seemed forever destined to move within an evil circle. Every new resolution had to be taken with faltering steps, unable as she was to defend her actions, even to herself. Now, at a new crossroad, she found herself in the process of giving away her child without any real guarantee of having secured his happiness.

But the worst experience, and the one causing most damage to Mary's mind, was her past encounter with Simon. her restless thoughts constantly returned to this loveless theologian who, now as before, maintained his honored position in the Sanhedrin. A new emotion intruded into Mary's thinking, disturbing her with questions that never before had entered her mind. She began to experience nagging doubts concerning the whole system of religion in the established society. She especially wondered about God's righteousness, as she thought she saw it practically expressed in the lives of professed religious people. could there be any justice whatsoever in what was allowed to happen on the highest level of religious hierarchy? And all

the time, Simon stood in her mind as the foremost exponent for this "religiousness." A dangerous current of feelings ensued. She felt a surge of hate welling up in her, not only against Simon, but against men by and large. Furthermore, she hated the entire system of flagrant unrighteousness brought on by a masculine display of power, the hard, ruthless domination of the defenseless ones. Was God in this?

The fact that this increasing hate was consciously acknowledged by her led, in its turn, to new feelings of guilt. So deep, then, had she fallen, she thought despondently. She was harboring spite and evil surmisings in her heart. She saw her condition clearly. And this wickedness was evidently incurable. She might just as well proceed on the path of wickedness. For quite some time already, she had been considered a whore. That had certainly neither made her rich nor procured any other advantages for her. Why not prostitute herself, as so many others in the same position? The street girls eeling their way between the gutters like grey cats at least derived some profit from their whoredom. why not make it a profession, like they did? Then at least she would have something to live on.

The ultimate social decline is soon an accomplished fact: Mary of Bethany has definitively become the harlot of Magdala.

In consequence, her guilt complex takes on monstrous dimensions. It ends in what Barnes calls the seventh demon, the total hopelessness from which there is no way out, no advance and no return. In extreme cases, the result is fatal. The last flickering flame of balanced reason is about to be extinguished. A total darkness envelopes the mind. To her former reputation as a whore, Mary of Magdala has had a new title added. She is now the Mad Whore of Magdala. Mary is possessed not only by one, but by seven evil spirits. Love, to her, as to so many others, has become a cynical business.

But the ideal of her previous life could not accept the hawker mentality of such a behavior. Her mind was not flexible enough to establish a modus vivendi with this mediocre whore philosophy. Again hate became the "safety valve." An odd kind of valve, and a peculiar kind of safety! Every time, from now on, that Mary looked into the face of a man, the contempt and hatred became only more determined and bitter. Her mind was a monster of disruption.

Throughout a long period of time—we do not know exactly how long—Mary, maybe the most famous, or infamous, prostitute from antiquity, was more dead than alive. The door to the outer world was locked and barred. No human voice could reach her ear any longer. No beam of divine light could illuminate her vision.

## **5-The Miracle of True Love**

Even so, one day a crevice appears in the wall between light and shadow. The man from Galilee is passing by. A loving face lights up the gloomy darkness. The empty silence is pierced by the sound of a gentle voice calling, as it from far away and vaguely, "Mary!" Startled, she looks up. Before her she can discern the contours of a human form. A man! Oh, she knows the kind only too well. She knows men. A suitable range of fulminating oaths and damnations are all they deserve. But she does not even bother to condescend to curses at this time. Her silence is an appropriate token of her scorn and hate. Inside her, however, there is neither calm nor silence. The old nightmare has her, once more, in its power.

But again she hears the sound of His voice, gentle and urgent at the same time: "Mary!"

Six times—so writes the pen of inspiration—Jesus' mild but powerful voice challenged the haunting spirit world. And each time the same negative result was evident. Even that penetrating voice could not break through. There seemed to be some kind of barrier—on the inside.

You and I have probably had the same experience many a time. He, the same Jesus, stands knocking at the door of the heart. There is no lack of love and steadfastness, or power, in His approach. But the doorknob, according to the theology of the free will, is always placed on the inside. Often there is just a wall, strongly built and unexpugnable, without any observable doorknob at all. In fact, it does not have the quality of any door whatsoever. It is, in fact, not intended for opening. This is the most definite isolation in the whole world, and it is one we ourselves have set up. We have safeguarded ourselves quite securely against the possibility of the Savior reaching us.

Mary looked up a little longer each time she heard the voice of Jesus calling her name. but to her continual consternation, the form in front of her was still that of a man—in fact, a very ordinary type of man, as far as her limited comprehension could make out. And of men she had had more than enough already.

But loud and clear the voice of Jesus rang in her ear the second time; "Mary!"

She threw her eyes wide open this time, looking straight into the face of Jesus Christ—that is, the Messiah, the Anointed One, the King of kings. She had met the Savior. Her trembling, gradually awakening sensed had encountered Him. Merciful God, what kind of a Man was this?

Mary looks and looks, in boundless wonder and astonishment. Written on His face she sees no trace of the exploiting selfishness she has otherwise, time and time again, learnt to expect from ordinary men, especially her customers in Magdala. In the eyes of Jesus, she reads a message of the love that desires to give, rather than take, a devoting of self completely to the service of the other ones. The perspective is one as yet unfamiliar to her. Mary is again able to have faith in love, faith in the purposefulness of an almighty God's plan for man—from the very time when He started to create.

In the future, Mary may still have many experiences that will awaken her contempt anew: the inveterate egoism of old, the tactless exploitation of others, the cold indifference, face to face with other people's sorrow and suffering. but confronted with Jesus, her thoughts are drawn in quite another direction. For the first time she has looked into the eyes of a man who loves her for her own sake, not for what which he may get out of her. Hitherto she has had the misfortune to meet men with only one aim for their advances—namely, to satisfy their own desires. To Jesus she is a personality, not a plaything.

Deep down in that smoldering flax, symbolizing the pitiable life left in the soul of this woman, there was a new flickering in the embers. Soon the flame was again burning with renewed brightness and warmth. The sevenfold disrupted mind was healed and whole once more. The godless one had returned to her God. Mary of Magdala had found Jesus Christ. Accordingly, she had also found herself. Her long-lost personality had been reestablished. From the depths of despair, just before the light went out in her mind, she had cried out her strangled cry for help. At the appointed time, and in the right place, Jesus, the Redeemer and Life Saver, had come to work her liberation. With perfect timing, the Rescuer was on the spot.

Mary's thankfulness at being saved was boundless. From the moment on, her heart overflowed, exuberant with love for Jesus christ. her life was apparently not free from new

relapses into sin, but the love of Jesus raised her up again. The final victory took place on the day when the Master wrote his cryptic message in the sand of Judea. He wrote it, not to save Himself, but to set her free. after that day, Mary was among the little flock who "followed the Lord wherever He went."

The rabbis' hate toward Jesus during these last days of His life increased in strength and persistence. they showed it in a way that also had direct bearing on Mary. The scribes and Pharisees, it is said, found entertainment and delight in gathering at the city gates when Jesus was seen approaching Jerusalem. there they would stand whispering and mocking as He and His lowly little band drew near. "Pst, pst," they would whisper tauntingly. "There He comes. Behold the Messiah! And look at his company of followers, whores and lunatics. He apparently feels very much at home in the social class.'

Very likely, Jesus saw them. He heard them, too. He knew them so well. He also knew the little flock who were His faithful companions. he was quite aware how unsuited they were to throw any earthly luster or honor upon his heavenly assignment. But the scorn and ridicule he was exposed to was completely lost upon Him. He did not care what people said, either about His own lowly rank or the lack of status of those who followed Him. for that, his love was far too all-embracing. And what would the result have been if he had actually parted company with these outcasts of society, the men and women who formed His permanent retinue? Mary, for instance, would never have been able to endure the separation.

Nevertheless, one day Jesus said to her, "Mary, now is the time to go home!" No answer.

"Mary, now is the time to go Home!"

"Home? Do you mean Bethany?"

"Yes, Mary. You must go home to Martha and Lazarus."

"Oh, no, no, I cannot! I have brought upon them enough shame already."

"That is not important now, Mary. You must go home to them, all the same. You have a work to do there."

"I just cannot bear it. Simon too still lives in Bethany, you know."

"I am aware of that, Mary. But that is no reason. On the contrary. You must go home. Now is just the right time."

So Mary returned to the dignified old home in the suburban town. the timing was right. Martha and Lazarus were prepared for the reunion and gave to their home-coming "little sister" Mary a warm welcome.

## **6 - The Loving Impulse of an Exceptional Woman**

Not long after this, something quite unexpected happened. To the great sorrow of the two sisters, Lazarus was taken seriously ill and died. But the event, causing amazement in a wider circle and downright consternation among some, was in short as follows: In the presence of a considerable crowd of people, the same Lazarus was raised from the dead. With demonstrative power, the Gospel of John records the dramatic details.

Jesus' enemies on the high council agreed that they had an overwhelming problem on their hands. It was impossible for them to close their eyes and ears completely to the clear evidence of that remarkable happening. The rumor of the miracle was spreading rapidly far and wide and gave the people even further proof of the divine power and authority attending the ministry and teaching of Jesus. Only one course of action now seemed open to these leaders, and they were bent on taking that course. In order to retain their influence with the masses, they would do anything. Not only Jesus, but also Lazarus, his witness, who undeniably was very much alive, must be brought to silence. The Jewish Sanhedrin determined that even Lazarus would have to be put to death. This plan was never carried out, however, due to the upheaval, the general mistrust and rebuke coming their way as a result of the way they tried and crucified Jesus. His death and later resurrection aroused a storm of witnesses, who, thanks to These impressive events, were shaken up to a deeper understanding. Soon they would all act with courage, testifying openly to their convictions.

But one of the most stirring incidents told in the Gospel in connection with the last days of Jesus' earthly life is a chapter in the story of Mary. this time we meet her at a feast, a banquet, given in honor of Jesus. It is easily understood that many would take pleasure in having Him as their guest. Still it may astonish us somewhat that the host in this case was Rabbi Simon.

Simon, the learned theologian, is also known under another name: Simon the Leper. Leprosy, the living death, had struck him down, making him and outcast of society. He was among those unfortunate ones, detested and feared by other people, a man obliged to cry out from a far, "Unclean, unclean."

Jesus had healed him of the terrible disease, and so much gratitude did Simon feel toward his benefactor that he prepared a feast for Him. It is quite evident, however, that Simon, so far, had not accepted Jesus as his personal Savior from the disease of sin, resulting in everlasting death. For him, the Man Jesus had not, as yet, become the God-Man.

But now to the sensation of the day and of the feast: Mary was there. Simon was to have ample occasion to marvel at her presence. But the miraculous transformation that had taken place in her personality of late, owing to her encounter with Jesus, was evidently unknown to him.

And what had Mary made up her mind to do? No one could have the faintest premonition of her incredible plan. Luke presents her on the scene of events, as if she emerged from some backstage wing of complete obscurity. Yet, it was hardly a woman without a past he here introduced. "And behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisees' house, brought an alabaster box of ointment."

Should someone ask for the price of this "alabaster box," valued on the basis of a "budget" within the reach of a converted Mary, in respectable civil employment? then a fair estimate would be the equivalent of one good year's wages. in other words, measured by her economic standard, it was certainly no trifle she had determined to pour out upon Him who had rescued her from certain death in more than one sense. This generous gift of love must have been made at a considerable sacrifice.

There is something touchingly childlike about this story. Mary, the childlike one, hardly expected the hard criticism she was to suffer on the part of the sophisticated "grownups." It came upon her like a shock. For a moment, this criticism threw her extravagance in relief as something very thoughtless and very childish. It was almost as if she had permitted herself to throw money carelessly down the drain.

Nevertheless, in reality, Mary was probably the one most clear-sighted of all assembled on this occasion. Particularly remarkable is this clear-sightedness of the woman Mary (or categorize her as you please: the child Mary, the Christian Mary) on the background of the obdurate blindness we have to admit in the twelve disciples. Jesus had, clearly and explicitly, informed them about His death in the near future, a very realistic, literal death. But who had accepted the grave implications of this simple statement? Not one—with the exception of Mary! that prophecy, expressed in simple words by Jesus Himself had filled her with endless sorrow, and with even greater affection. In fact, she had at first planned to pour out the precious nardus ointment on the dead body of Jesus. That line of thought would also have been far more in harmony with the customs of the day. Such an act might even be commended and find approval as a sound way of spending one's means.

But then Mary radically changed her plan. Once more, the childlike love prevailed over both decent practice and reasonable thought. She wished to give pleasure and honor to her Lord and master while He was still alive! Indeed, what pleasure would He derive from that delightful perfume if its fragrance was allowed only to sink into His grave filling the gloomy crypt dripped with its magnificence? If, on the contrary, He received the gift now, he would have a chance to enjoy it as the humble token of her faith and love.

How much wiser was Mary's childlike love than the sophisticated caution of a Nicodemus or a Joseph of Arimathea! Jesus would go to His death without knowing the extent of these men's sympathy and comprehension of His sacrifice in their behalf. only after His death did their love grow and make them strong enough to take an open stand for Jesus Christ. With bitter tears, they brought their fragrant oils to the grave. Mary, at least, was comforted with the thought that Jesus, in approaching his hour of darkness and trial, carried with Him the memory of one act love.

There is nothing as oppressive as unrequited love. We know that Jesus died unexpectedly soon after He had been hung on the cross. it was hopelessness that took its heavy toll. But the main weight of this despair was the pang of unrequited love. Jesus' heart was broken by the heartlessness of the ones He loved and for whom He gave up His life. No one seemed to appreciate His sacrifice. Mary constituted the one precious exception. Her act in extremis became a token of the love He was to receive from His redeemed children throughout eternity. Mary's gift was a great encouragement to Jesus. It showed Him that His sacrifice was worthwhile. the Gospel prophet expresses the comforting experience in this way: "He shall see the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied" (Isaiah 53:11).

So many of us have a tragic tendency to show our love too late.

Only on the day when we form a mourning circle around the grave of a loved one, now cold and insensitive in the embrace of death, do we express our love and gratitude. There was a time, however, when that same person was desperately longing for a word of sympathy, some little sign of true affection. then we were so heartbreakingly sparing with our tokens of love.

But not so Mary. She was unique among disciples in those days, so harassed by crisis and unforeseen drama. Let us take a closer look at her candid act and the attention it aroused, right there in the banquet hall of the Pharisee.

Our Bible translations say that the party "sat at meat." This is not only an imprecise rendering of the Greek katakeitai, but even a bit of an anachronism. the custom of the day was to lie at table. the position was a reclining and most relaxing one, far more comfortable than ever permitted in our culture. The guests were entertained literally on "a lower level." This explains,

to some extent, how Mary could carry out her plan, down by the floor, at the very time when the feast was proceeding. She did not feel at all the focus of attention as she knelt beside Jesus. She simply set about her quiet work without any immediate apprehension or fear of being discovered. Luke continues his story; "[She] stood at His feet behind Him weeping, and began to wash His feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment" (Luke 7:38).

Did Mary really expect the ceremony to pass unnoticed? If so, this seems just another proof of her childlike simplicity. In the exuberance of her feelings, she obviously did not realize that before long, the intensive fragrance of the nardus oil would fill the whole room. Among others there was one who quite soon sensed the perfume with increasing amazement. Simon, the host of the banquet, noticed that something was going on here, some absolutely unexpected supplement to the program he had arranged. Who was this person with the alabaster box? Of course, Simon knew Mary. But to him she was just the dubious Mary of Magdala. He could well understand the attraction she exerted on average men. But Jesus! How could He, a prophet and evangelist, accept the "advances" made to Him by a fallen woman, and in such an improper way? Yes, indeed, how could he - if He was the Messiah? the only plausible explanation - within the limits of simple decency - must be his total lack of intuition. He must be quite ignorant as to what kind of woman this was. Yes, that would have to be the conclusion, the only one in fact, that Simon could think of at the present moment. So far he "generously" refrained from going any further in his temporary hints to account for Jesus' strange behavior.

But there were others as well whose sense of smell had been affected by the scents pervading the room. Judas was one. He had his sermon of condemnation ready at a moment's notice, and he did not hesitate to voice his strong opinion. Here, too, the accusation was directed against Jesus, far more than against Mary. "To what purpose is this waste?" (Matthew 26:8)

The Gospel writer places Judas in the right light in this context: "This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein" (John 12:6).

The other disciples had long permitted themselves to be impressed and deceived by that political leader-personality Judas from Carriot. From the very beginning, they had looked up to Judas with special admiration. He was the only one among them who came from a "better family" and had a degree of bookish learning. His eloquent words, feigning concern for the poor, now struck them as true and appropriate. They actually took delight in the fact that someone— whoever that might be—was getting a sharp reprimand.

Mary felt the striking force of the point contained in Judas's words, and she certainly did not enjoy the relevancy of that content. Her heart was trembling with dread. Now her apprehensions increased enormously, not only regarding the reproach she could expect from her flawless sister Martha - for this certainly was not the first time Martha had reproved her "little sister" for extravagant foolishness - but what really worried her more than anything else was the thought of what Jesus would say. She felt a desire to sink into the earth. Her eyes were already searching for the nearest exit.

But precisely at that moment, overwhelmed as she was by the wish to make herself small to the point of vanishing to slip away from the critical looks and crushing condemnations, she heard the voice of Jesus rising in its masterful virility above the other voices. His words, however, were not directed against her. They were once more turned against her accusers; "Why do you trouble this woman? Leave her alone!"

Jesus had noticed how embarrassed, or even desperate, Mary had become in the face of the relentless criticism and rebuke. He knew full well how grateful she was to have Him pardon her sins, and He knew the pains she had taken to show Him Her thankfulness. How he desired, more than anything else, to comfort Mary in her distress. The critical mumbling in the room died down as the authoritative voice of Jesus rang out: "She hath wrought a good work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always. For in that she poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial" (Matthew 26:10-13).

Love does not analyze its special motives. It is ignorant about its own virtues. Mary did not realize the full meaning of the act her love had dictated. She was naturally vulnerable to the fierce assaults. The one loving the most is always the one most easily hurt. She had remained silent and unprotected against the charges she apprehended coming her way. Like hard stones, they had been aimed at the most tender and defenseless spots of her being.

Mary would have been quite incapable of explaining why she had chosen precisely this moment for anointing Jesus. A wonder-filled life is held in store for the one completely captivated by the great love of God. The Holy Spirit is in command, taking care of all the planning. Mary was inspired as she followed the promptings of the Spirit. And it is not in the nature of spiritual guidance to get lost in the depths of speculation, digging out elaborate reasons for the holy action. No, here we have to do with an invisible Presence. And the presence of the Holy Ghost is as specific and concrete as anything of a personal nature is bound to be. It is a voice of individual uniqueness, conveying its tangible message to the heart of man from moment to moment. It is a divine Person touching a human heart, urging it to spontaneous action. The Spirit finds His ultimate reasons in Himself.

It was Jesus who, post factum, had to explain to Mary the intelligent meaning behind her spontaneous act. Thus He gave her more in return than he Himself had receive. As the alabaster box had been broken, so its contents could fill the house with its delightful fragrance, in the same way His body, as well, was to be broken. but He was equally sure to arise from the grave, and the sweet scent of His life would fill the whole earth with rejoicing: "Walk in love as Christ has also loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour" (Ephesians 5:2).

Jesus now turned to the assembly of guests in the banquet hall and told what actually had happened in the life of Mary Magdalene, making it an illustrious example to the whole world for ages to come: "Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her" (Matthew 26:13).

Jesus was, in vision, penetrating the future. He saw a triumphant victory for the Christian love motif, the ideal of unreserved selflessness. In every place reached by the message of Jesus, the fragrance of Mary's gift of love would permeate the atmosphere. Hearts were to be touched and melted by her example.

Kingdoms would rise and decline. The names and fame of monarchs and conquerors would go into oblivion like footprints in the desert sand. but the memory of that loving gesture by a humble woman would go on living. It would fall to the lot of the broken alabaster box to proclaim the message of God's inconceivable love for a fallen race.

Mary's unselfish attitude formed a distinct contrast to the self-centered introversion taking place in the heart of Judas. What a sharp rebuke Jesus might have given him in front of everybody, as Judas was sowing the evil seeds of dissension and criticism in the hearts of the other



disciples! What a scathing denunciation Christ might have flung out against that malicious assailant. There and then he might have told the real story about what happened to the money in the common purse. It certainly did not find its way into the pockets of the poor. but Jesus disclosed nothing of all this. A mere look from the man of perfect integrity was enough to tear the mask off the hypocrite. Jesus only had to say a word of praise about Mary for Judas to realize how thoroughly he was being put in place. never before had he felt so directly hit by the simple truth in the words of the Master. His hate toward Jesus became a fateful reality inside him. The outgrowth of bitter resentment was in the process of reaching full maturity in the heart of the wayward disciple. From the feast in Simon's home, he went directly to the house of the high priest, where he found the Sanhedrin gathered. He offered to deliver Jesus into their hands.

Egocentricity had run its full course.

But as we are in this story concerned with alterocentricity, the opposite fundamental motif in the battle between good and evil, whom does the Source of eternal wisdom point out as the most striking representative of a conquering Agape? It is Mary, in sharp contrast to an almost burnt-out and tragically luke-warm Simon.

The most hopeless of all, you see, is not necessarily hate. What is it then? The Gospel writer adds the details of the antithesis drama contained in Jesus' dialogue with Rabbi Simon:

Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner. And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And he said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven: for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. {Luke 7:39-47}

Truly, the quality farthest removed from love is not the burning hatred nor the scathing chill. it is simply luke-warmness. It is the Nirvana philosopher's complacent indifference. It is the theorizing pantheist's dull dissolution of every sound tension, a will-deprived people's final wiping out of every God-given distinction between the holy and the common. it is the tragic drift in human live, by which an individual person is "helped" to flow gradually out into that painless and joyless ocean of utter nothingness.

This looks like Simon's case. Still, it is imperative that we should dig deeper and deeper for relevant knowledge about history's most thrilling, but also most misinterpreted, topic: the Christian Agape versus the pagan Eros. That is exactly what I am trying to do in a new encounter with the marvels of Christian realism: The part of the story you were never told about Agape and Eros.

## 7- A Horrifying Eros Case

Rabbi Simon was in a way the archetype of an Eros man. That fellow—I assure you—did not "waste his nerve energy" going to the extravagance of nourishing any deep resentment against either Jesus of Nazareth or anybody else, like Judas did.

On the other hand, Simon was not indifferent in the extravagant way we people of the Western world toward the end of the twentieth century tend to be indifferent. For we happen to be heirs of a culture finding its cherished ideal in the barrenly contemplative spiritualist's blessed land, in which sheer impersonalism seems to be the only trend enjoying top prestige. That type of indifference in terms of a rather death-related apathy (some call it a veritable death urge) could not reasonably claim to be described as Jewish, in any age or in any environment.

Oh, no, Simon's indifference, or rather luke-warmness, was rather that of the pitiless Pharisee, passing by the unfortunate traveler who had fallen into the hand of robbers on the lonely road between Jerusalem and Jericho. Simon's position was neither that of the inveterate bandit nor that of the glorified saint. In a way, we may rubricate him as the common type of human creature this world has known during six thousand years of self-centeredness and sin: a candidate for heaven or for hell, depending on the way he relates himself to the center of his destiny, Jesus Christ.

Now, do we have any reliable source of information justifying the common assumption that Simon remained in the category of that vast majority who had rejected Jesus, the only Redeemer? I am afraid we have not yet even started to analyze the tremendous influence exerted on Simon through the peculiar "writing" produced by the great "Writer in the sand." What was that inveterate sinner's reaction to the talk of Jesus in his behalf?

Shame seized upon him and he realized that he was in the presence of one infinitely superior to himself.

Just how did that infinite superiority reveal itself to Simon the Leper?

What we obviously need is a second look at the tension-charged scene of Jesus and Simon face to face.

Let us be scrupulously accurate and perfectly fair as we direct our attention, once more, toward the case of Simon compared to that of Judas. In what ways were the two alike? In what ways were they different? Why are we tempted to lump the two together into one common garbage can?

As an experiment of thought, I again imagine you and me being literally present at that historic banquet some 2,000 years ago.

From the proud pinnacles of our special "vantage point" as modern men—and, if you please, as modern Christians thoroughly acquainted with the Gospel story—we let our critical eyes scan the room, observing closely every gesture of every person present.

There is Simon, the host. It does not take us long to interpret the expression of that man's face as he watches the "ointment scene." Not only for Mary, but even for Jesus he begins to have feelings of almost contempt. Up until now, Simon had been far from untouched by the great question currently stirring the minds of the crowds surrounding the Wonder-Maker from Nazareth: Could it be that this man was the Superman Messiah they were looking for with such great expectations? At the moment, Simon's answer to that question was on the point of taking

a rather negative form. The man here leaning on his couch could not be more than an ignorant human being? This was visibly Simon's first rash conclusion.

Of course, you and I, invisible modern guests at the Jewish feast of old, we know better than that. We can distinguish—or at least we flatter ourselves that we can—between the true and the false, the good and the evil.

Just at the moment, it so happens that our heartfelt sympathies have concentrated themselves around another human being, namely Mary. So what is left over, in our narrow hearts, for Simon, is not much. They are feelings of quite a different nature. Was not he precisely the man who had come so cruelly close to ruining that poor girl's life for all time? Who could manage to find anything to admire or sympathize with in a man filled to the brim with such a degree of baseness and hypocrisy?

A peculiar sort of "righteous anger" has been kindled in us at the very sight of that person. Is it not high time justice be restored here?

At the moment, in fact, we seem justified in entertaining great hopes for just that kind of restoration. Something promisingly decisive seems on the verge of taking place. For at this moment, that authority-commanding God-Man over there seems about to pronounce some judgment of a most significant nature. His stature is erect. His eyes are resting just on Simon. What will the great Judge of the Universe pass as His trenchant sentence? Jesus—as everybody ought to know by now—is Justice itself, Justice personified. His entire being aches at the very sight of human falsehood and iniquity. So what will Jesus now say to that self-important, self-complacent rabbi?

What if the Omniscient One now finds the moment suitable at last to come straight out, revealing some salient truths about that proud hypocrite in front of Him?

You and I actually seem to be rubbing our hands in jubilant anticipation, very much the same way those revengeful Pharisees did at the moment when they thought they had both the harlot Mary and her merciful Defender in their power.

Almost as though we had been solemnly assigned the delicate task of functioning as the Lord's deputies (some sort of plenipotentiary secretaries at his right hand), and as if that Lord Himself were a rather illiterate type of potentate, depending on you and me to do both His writing and most of His thinking for Him, we seem to have, already, in our fertile minds, that whole speech of His against Simon all made up, and this even before one single word of it has been delivered by Jesus Himself. Here is one edition, chosen at random, from the prolific workshop of our imagination: "Ladies and gentlemen! The moment of the full truth has finally come. You may not have very high thoughts about this woman at my feet. You may even have wondered how she could dare to enter a distinguished rabbi's house. But I know something about which you do not have the remotest idea. I know the man who broke the barriers of innocence in that woman's life and then sent her on her way to Magdala. Would you like to know who he is?"

What a masterful climax you and I have there managed to work ourselves up to in our own prejudiced minds! At this decisive point of the drama, we seem to have a literal vision of the stern Judge, Jesus Christ, suddenly stepping forward. Raising His finger in a spectacular way, He points it right at the one guilty person. He does this with an unexpectedness that stuns the audience. "Simon is the man!"

Now tell me frankly: Was this what really happened? Certainly not. What Simon really deserved just did not take place at all on that memorable evening. Instead, what do we see?

We see that sublime man of mercy, Jesus, the Balm-Bringer, busily occupied, as it were with certain "irrelevant matters," matters of "another world", so to speak. What is He doing "down there"? Well, that enigmatic Writer of "shorthand biographies" is simply once more busy submitting His "secret runes" to a writing pad of His own choosing. Again the manuscript material is some weird type of "gently yielding sand." Or we might perhaps say that it is to a still more reticent material He is confiding his stern, but most touchingly considerate message this time. He is kind of whispering it into an atmosphere swallowing up every bit of sound as soon as it has reached the ears of the man for whom it was specifically intended. The message simply cannot be deciphered by any of those curious listeners to whom it was not addressed and who therefore have no business to hear it and divulge it.

Just leaning quietly and confidently over the rabbi, Jesus pronounces, in that peculiarly serious voice of His (a seriousness made soft and melodious by compassionate sorrow), "Simon, I have somewhat to say to thee."

Well, then, what do we again observe? Was Jesus aching to expose that secret sinner? Did he reveal what is looked upon by people in all gossip communities as worst among all sins? Did He show Simon in all his hideous nakedness right in front of a public assembly? Certainly not.

And yet, truth—truth of a strangely pointed nature—was bound to transpire, by and by.

So far, however, the point we should stress, and hold fast to, is this one: During those drama-filled moments of Christ's little speech, Simon got to know two all-important truths about Jesus of Nazareth: That man was, indeed, exactly the One in front of Whom no putrefying sore of the soul could remain hidden. At the same time, He was also the great Balm-Bringer, the pitying Savior from all sin.

Of course, that divine pity does not at any time imply that sin can remain hidden and unconfessed. On the contrary, a free exposure of man's sins to the full daylight, a light emanating without fail from the majestic physician—that, and nothing short of that—is the first prerequisite for the healing process.

At the same time, we should keep firmly in mind the capital source of comfort and rejoicing: Jesus Christ, the perfect Lamb of God, who was slaughtered in our place, He, and nobody else, has, at any moment, the adequate remedy for the sin-sick soul.

He did have the remedy exactly suitable to the peculiar needs of the hard-hearted, but publicly well-respected, Rabbi Simon. That was a remedy individually different, obviously enough, from the one He had applied in order to bring new comfort and courage to a brokenhearted and publicly despised Mary Magdalene. However, the decisive matter, in his case as well as hers, was this: There was a remedy.

Jesus just spoke it—through the sand or through the air—and the healing was a fact.

## **8-The Critical Instances When Even Jesus Remained Speechless**

If Simon the Leper had been past all remedies, Jesus' attitude toward him would have been an entirely different one. He might have remained dead silent. Nothing could have been more ominous than that silence. We know cases in which Jesus did not have one single word to say.

The near future was to bear particular evidence to instances of that negative kind. You may recall how entirely speechless Jesus remained in front of Herod, the impenitent potentate. And

particularly well known is the case of Christ's strange silence during the latter stage of His confrontation with Pilate. For, unlike Simon, Pilate persisted in rejecting the tender call of divine love. So the Gospel simply states: "Jesus was silent."

Simon finally yielded. His heart was simply overwhelmed by the tenderness and considerate delicacy again manifested by Jesus in the way he rebuked him, in order to save him, not in order to hang him out. Finally Christ had found a man who was not only mightily impressed and thoroughly shaken by his first encounter with the formidable Master of the "sand writing" system, but even filled to overflowing with thankfulness for it. His awareness of the terrible things Jesus could have said, but did not say, made him doubly receptive to the things the Lord did say. During the time that followed, he became one of Christ's closest disciples. He never forgot that greatest token of the Lord's vibrant hope and infinite love for him, even Simon the Leper, the human individual, once well-nigh devoured by the leprosy of sin.

So the fragrance of Mary's ointment, in the last analysis, became the outward means by which God could lead even Rabbi Simon, one of the sickest men Gospel ministry has ever known, onto the blessed road of soundness and salvation.

In Mary's life, there had hardly been any reasonable need for the Savior to write anything—either in the air or in the sand. Her very life had been a scroll crying out its ugly message without any noticeable sense of shame for a long time. Simon's life had been very different. No one in his daily environment would be inclined to claim that he even displayed a behavior of public shamelessness. But his sense of shame had been that of the born hypocrite and the spiritual coward. And what could be more hopeless than that, where the real aim of divine intervention is to transform a person for his entry into the kingdom of heaven?

And now, what about you and me? Is our reaction to the tender call from the voice of Jesus similar to that of Mary or that of Simon, or maybe that of Judas?

One thing is certain: There would be no hope for any one of us had it not been for the exquisite delicacy flooding in upon our lives and hopefully conquering our hearts at the moment when we have our decisive encounter with the great "Writer in the Sand."