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COMMUNITY

The Gospel of Mary Magdalene: The Loss of Pages and the Affects on Modern Women

By Linda Sutter January 22, 2026

Among the most provocative early Christian texts ever recovered is the Gospel of Mary—a fragmentary manuscript that presents Mary Magdalene not as a marginal follower, but as a primary witness, teacher, and spiritual authority.

Yet from the moment it entered modern scholarship, the Gospel of Mary arrived damaged. Entire sections were already missing. The loss was not merely textual. It was theological, historical, and—most profoundly—gendered.

What was lost with those pages has echoed for nearly two thousand years.

The Gospel of Mary survives primarily in a Coptic manuscript known as Papyrus Berolinensis 8502, discovered in Egypt in 1896 and published in 1955. When scholars first examined it, they found the opening pages missing and additional pages lost from the middle of the text. These pages have never been recovered.

This is not a minor gap. The missing sections likely contained the narrative framework explaining why Mary speaks with such authority later in the text—and why the male disciples respond with resistance.

All four canonical Gospels affirm Mary Magdalene was the first witness to the resurrection and the first person instructed by Jesus to deliver the resurrection message. Despite this, the male disciples initially dismissed her testimony.

This alone establishes Mary as the “apostle to the apostles.”

Despite its fragmentary state, the surviving portions of the Gospel of Mary depict Mary as a leader and teacher. Peter challenges her authority, questioning whether Jesus would reveal teachings to a woman. Another disciple, Levi, defends her and rebukes Peter.

This conflict reveals that Mary’s authority was contested—not imagined.

Scholars including Karen L. King, Esther A. de Boer, and Elaine Pagels agree the missing pages likely included a post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to Mary, private instruction, and explicit authorization of her role.

As church authority became institutionalized and male-dominated, women’s leadership was minimized. Mary Magdalene was recast from apostolic witness to repentant sinner—a transformation with lasting

consequences for women in Christianity.

Texts survive when they are copied. Texts are copied when they are valued. The disappearance of material affirming women’s authority functioned as a quiet but enduring erasure.

We may never recover the missing pages of the Gospel of Mary, but we can recover what they represented: the legitimacy of women’s spiritual authority and testimony.

Mary Magdalene’s voice was never weak. History simply did not preserve it fairly.

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