

# Mary Magdalene: Separating facts from fiction

Continued from page 8B  
der elitism contrasts with the basic spiritual equality in biblical Judaism and Christianity.

Chilton sees "active deception" in current propaganda that markets "a Gnosticism that never existed."

But Chilton also criticizes the treatment of women in the New Testament and early church. He sees Matthew, Mark and Luke as "the best available sources" on Mary because they were "nearest in time and ethos" to her, but

alleges that these Gospels conceal Mary's centrality.

There's good reason to regard Mary as important. But Chilton stretches things with broad speculations to spin the Gospel passages into a 160-page biography.

To Chilton, Mary was "the most influential woman in Rabbi Jesus' movement." He theorizes that she contributed exorcism stories and other materials that found their way into the Gospels, which is possible but could never be proven. He also por-

trays her as the exorcist-in-chief and spiritual guru for Jesus' flock.

Mary's only biblical appearance before Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection is in Luke 8. There we learn she was someone "from whom seven demons had gone out" and that she provided financial support for Jesus' retinue.

The passage doesn't indicate whether Mary's affliction was physical, mental, moral or some combination of these, writes Canon S.S. Smalley of England's Coventry Cathe-

dral. Oddly, Luke doesn't state that Jesus cast out the demons, though this is specified in the optional "long ending" of Mark's Gospel.

Like Chilton, Pope Gregory went beyond the biblical evidence in A.D. 594, saying Mary was the unnamed female "sinner" in the dramatic story of Luke 7:37-50.

There a penitent woman anoints Jesus' feet and washes them with her hair and tears. Her sins aren't specified but many supposed she was a prostitute.

Mary's key biblical activity is as a witness to Jesus' crucifixion and burial and his empty tomb on Easter morning (her male colleagues doubted that miracle at first).

Chilton disagrees with the Gospels' account that Jesus was resurrected in a physical body, though in a glorified form different from simple resuscitation. Playing Mary off against the Gospels, Chilton thinks she felt a merely spiritual sense of Jesus' ongoing presence.

On that, Chilton basically

sides with Jewish historian Alan Segal's "Life After Death," over against the primary Christian treatment, "The Resurrection of the Son of God" by Chilton's fellow Anglican N.T. Wright.

Writing about that book, Anne Rice, vampire novelist and Christian returnee, says in her new "Christ the Lord" that Wright "answers solidly the question that has haunted me all my life."

## Believers flock to see Calif. Virgin Mary statue crying tears of blood

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

SACRAMENTO—Carrying rosary beads and cameras, the faithful have been coming in a steady stream to a church on the outskirts of Sacramento for a glimpse of what some are calling a miracle: A statue of the Virgin Mary they say has begun crying a substance that looks like blood.

It was first noticed more than a week ago, when a priest at the Vietnamese Catholic Martyrs Church spotted a stain on the statue's face and wiped it away.

Before Mass on Nov. 20, people again noticed a reddish substance near the eyes of the white concrete statue outside the small church, said Ky Truong, 56, a parishioner.

Since then, Truong said he has been at the church day and night, so emotional he can't even work. He believes the tears are a sign.

"There's a big event in the future—earthquake, flood, a disease," Truong said. "We're very sad."

On Saturday, tables in front of the fenced-in statue were jammed with potted plants,

bouquets of roses and candles. Some people prayed silently, while others sang hymns and hugged their children. An elderly woman in a wheelchair wept near the front of the crowd.

A red trail could be seen from the side of the statue's left eye to about halfway down the robe of concrete.

"I think that it's incredible. It's a miracle. Why is she doing it? Is it something bothering her?" asked Maria Vasquez, 35, who drove with her parents and three children from Stockton, about 50

miles south of Sacramento.

Thousands of such incidents are reported around the world each year, though many turn out to be hoaxes or natural phenomena.

The Diocese of Sacramento has so far not commented on the statue, and the two priests affiliated with the church did not return a telephone message Saturday.

The Rev. James Murphy, deacon of the diocese's mother church, the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, said church leaders are always skeptical at first.

"For people individually seeing things through the eyes of faith, something like this can be meaningful. As for whether it is supernatural or a miracle, normally these incidences are not. Miracles are possible, of course," Murphy said. "The bishop is just waiting and seeing what happens. They will be moving very slowly."

But seeing the statue in person left no doubt for Martin Operario, 60, who drove about 100 miles from Hayward. He took photos to show to family

and friends.

"I don't know how to express what I'm feeling," Operario said. "Since religion is the mother of believing, then I believe."

Nuns Anna Bui and Rosa Hoang, members of the Salesian Sisters of San Francisco, also made the trek Saturday. Whether the weeping statue is declared a miracle or not, they said, it is already doing good by awakening people to the faith and reminding them to pray.

## Miles College president Sloan dies at 62

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — Miles College president the Rev. Albert J. Sloan, who brought the historically black institution back from the brink of closing, died Friday night at a Birmingham hospital. He was 62.

Sloan, a Methodist minister, had surgery in October and died in the coronary unit at

Brookwood Medical Center, Miles spokesman Ricky Lee said.

The family did not release the cause of his death or the reason for his hospitalization.

Sloan was the 12th president in the school's 100-year history but the first to be chosen from its ranks. He came to Miles in 1971 and earned a law degree.

He became interim president in 1989 and later president as Miles came very close that year to closing amid a financial and management crisis.

Under his leadership, the college in Fairfield stabilized enrollment, now about 1,700, improved finances and

strengthened its academic programs.

The campus has grown from 32 to 52 acres.

Sloan was a minister in the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. Miles is affiliated with the CME church.

Former Birmingham Mayor  
Please see SLOAN/6B

**BIBLE LESSON**  
**The gospel everlasting**  
Continued from page 8B  
20:11, Psalm 146:6). Christians gladly worship him.  
God's enemies, however, prefer to worship "the beast" of Revelation 13. They stubbornly resist the truth, even though they must be aware of the certainty of the judgment of God for their evil deeds.

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