



BOSTON COLLEGE
School of Theology and Ministry
CONTINUING EDUCATION

Transcript of: "Run, Sister, Run: The Figure of Mary Magdalene in the Negro Spiritual"

**Presented on July 23, 2021 by
M. Shawn Copeland**

Meghan Lovett:

Good afternoon and welcome. My name is Megan Lovett and I serve the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry as Director of Continuing Education. Thanks to each of you for joining us today for our 12th annual Mary of Magdala celebration. Since 2009, the School of Theology and Ministry has hosted an annual celebration on or near the feast day of St Mary Magdala on July 22. Inspired by the role of Mary Magdalene being the first to proclaim the news of Christ's resurrection, this event includes a liturgical celebration as well as a lecture by a distinguished scholar on various topics highlighting the legacy of women in the Church. The celebration first came about through the recommendation of Rita Houlihan. We are grateful to Ms. Houlihan for providing the financial support for this event, which honors all women in the Church. She has also generously gifted several of these beautiful Mary Magdalene Proclaims plaques to today's speaker and our CE team. She's with us virtually today and I would like to take this moment to recognize her for her inspiration and tremendous support. Rita, thank you. These plaques are also available for purchase, and we will include a link in the chat for those that are interested.

As part of the mission of the School of Theology and Ministry, the Continuing Education Program offers an array of enrichment opportunities to foster Christian faith and promote lifelong learning. We do this by offering presentations, such as this one, as well as online courses, videos, podcasts and other resources for personal enrichment and professional development. Our summer courses are underway. Our final two summer courses begin on August 4. These two courses are the Gospel of John, and our new course, Saint Mary of Magdala. There are a few spots left in these courses, so if you're interested, there's still time to enroll. Please visit our website at bc.edu/crossroads for more information. We will also include a link in the chat.

Thanks to our speaker for granting us permission to record today's webinar. As soon as the recording of today's presentation is available for viewing, likely within a month, we will notify all registered participants of the availability of the recording. At the end of the presentation, there'll be an opportunity for question and answer, please feel free to enter your question into the Q&A tab at the bottom of your screen at any time during the presentation, we will try to answer as many questions as possible. Finally, we are also able to offer live closed captioning for today's webinar, you will notice the closed captioning button on the bottom of your screen to enable or disable the feature. You may also move the text to different areas of your screen if you wish. Many thanks to Julia and Amanda, graduate students here at the STM, for assisting with the closed captioning today. I now invite father Thomas Stegman, Dean of the School of Theology and Ministry, to introduce our speaker.

Fr. Thomas Stegman, S.J.:

Thank you, Meghan, good afternoon to everyone and a warm welcome to today's presentation "Run Sister Run: The Figure of Mary Magdalene in the Negro Spiritual." It's my great pleasure to introduce our distinguished speaker, Dr. M. Shawn Copeland is Professor Emerita of systematic theology in the theology department here at Boston College. She's an internationally recognized scholar and award-winning writer. Professor Copeland received her Ph.D. in systematic theology from Boston College, with a dissertation on the notion of the human good in the thought of the Jesuit theologian and philosopher, Bernard Lonergan. Before returning to Boston College in 2003 as a faculty member, she taught at St. Norbert College, at Yale Divinity School, and at Marquette University, which is where I had the pleasure to first meet Shawn, years ago. In addition, she served for 12 years as an adjunct faculty member of the Institute for Black Catholic studies at Xavier University in New Orleans. Dr. Copeland lectures frequently on college and university campuses on topics related to theological anthropology, political theology, social suffering, gender and race. At the same time, she's widely recognized as one of the most important influences in North America, and drawing attention to issues surrounding African American Catholics. Dr. Copeland, is the author and/or editor of six books, including *Knowing Christ Crucified: The Witness of African American Religious Experience*, which was published three years ago. And *Enfleshing Freedom: Body Race and Being* published in 2010. She's written over 130 articles, book chapters, and essays on spirituality, theological anthropology, political theology, social suffering, gender and race. During this past academic year, Professor Copeland served as distinguished visiting professor in the Alonzo L. McDonald Family Chair on the Life and Teachings of Jesus and Their Impact on Culture at Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta, and just let you know I'm sporting the colors. We are very delighted to have Professor Copeland with us today at the 12th annual Mary Magdalene celebration.

She's a great friend of the school and we're in for a delightful presentation, welcome welcome welcome.

Prof. Shawn Copeland:

Thank you very much, Dean Stegman. And thank you for your kind invitation and for your friendship. My thanks also to Megan Lovett, director of the continuing education area here at the School of Theology and Ministry at Boston College. Miss Lovett followed through with me over the past 13 or 15 months, the bumpy unprecedented time. I'm grateful also to Kara O'Sullivan, Assistant Director of Continuing Education for her helpful comments and observations during our dress rehearsals. And I'm very grateful to Barbara Bizura and James Burraston for technical assistance that they have generously provided and helping me with the PowerPoint. Any bloopers will be mine. Finally, let me not hesitate to thank Rita Houlihan, whose generosity has made these various annual Mary Magdalene lectures possible. And finally, I want to give a word of thanks to Melinda Donovan, former Director of Continuing Education who invited me, at least three years ago, to think about Mary Magdalene, from an African American religious and cultural perspective. And finally, thanks to all of you who have joined us this afternoon.

The image of Mary Magdalene running to bring news from heaven prompts this reflection on her presence in the Negro or African American Spiritual. We shall proceed *in four stages*: *First*, a summary of the historical and religio-cultural contexts within which the spirituals were forged, *then*, consider how, in spite of being forbidden by law and custom to attain literacy, the enslaved people encountered the Christian Bible and re framed it as an 'oral text.' *Third*, we discuss how the enslaved people came to make the spirituals the preeminent window into their religious and aesthetic consciousness, experiences, and virtuosity. *And, finally*, we focus on Mary Magdalene, listen to a few spirituals that sing of her, and engage her presence in one of Titus Kaphar's paintings from the series 'Disrupted Histories.'

So the historical and religio-cultural setting of the Negro spiritual. To borrow a phrase from John Lovell, the

foremost scholar of the spirituals, the Negro or African American spiritual "was hammered out" on the anvil of chattel slavery. Having been sold or kidnapped or betrayed and force-marched to the Atlantic coast, various peoples of the African continent found themselves chained in dark and foul dungeons, then herded onto sailing ships and shackled below deck-bound for another world. Once out to sea, children, youth, women, and men endured filth, handling, severe beatings, torture, sexual assault, and immeasurable psychic trauma. Statistics suggest that 15 to 30 percent of the captives died in the Middle Passage. "From Boston in New England to Montevideo in the Viceroyalty of La Plata," writes Rachel Elizabeth Harding, the Africans found themselves scattered throughout the Americas "in gold-mining towns in central Brazil; on sugar cane plantations in Jamaica and Cuba; in the coffee-producing hills of Venezuela; on cotton and indigo estates in the southern regions of the USA; and in homes, streets, rivers, fields and even small factories everywhere in between, Africans and their descendants, in generations of bondage, encountered and helped create the New World." Cut off from the category 'human,' deprived of personal liberty, denied political and legal rights, the enslaved people endured continual threat of psychological and bodily violation. The various forms of enslavement that they confronted aimed to control, possess, and dominate, and just as often sought to reduce incarnate spirit to mortgageable property, merchandise, fungible objects. Thus, the enslaved peoples had to wrestle with the tension between their commodified reduction and their own sense of who they actually were. To negotiate this tension, they re-configured their religio-cultural worldviews- asserting their humanity in an inhuman situation. If, as Charles H. Long a historian of religions explains, if religion is "the capacity of human consciousness to apprehend [and to signify] ultimate meaning and ultimate value symbolically," then religion is entwined in the structure of human consciousness and human beings possess a natural and innate tending toward transcendence, toward *the* Transcendent, toward God. For the peoples of the continent of Africa-whether Ashanti, BaKongo, Bini, Dahomean, Pante, Fulani, Igbo, Mende, Wolof, Yoruba, and others African Traditional or Indigenous Religions were distinctive and particular, yet these religions coalesce as innate tending toward transcendence. Thus, among these peoples, religion permeated every domain of human life, and the universe radiated and mediated powers and forces of the sacred-the supreme Deity, lesser divinities, and spirits. These peoples set no formal limits or rigid distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the spiritual and material.

The *whole* person and the *whole of a person's daily living* were suffused with religious significance. African Traditional or Indigenous Religions neither proclaim nor exegete scriptures, neither require nor profess dogmas that demand assent and obedience. Rather, religion, this tending toward transcendence, is inscribed on peoples' hearts and minds through oral histories, stories, poetry, song, ritual, dance, drumming, ceremonial practices, and religiously endowed persons. Thus, survivors of the Middle Passage did not meet the new world bereft of religion and tradition, history and culture, virtue and morality. Insofar as the enslaved peoples re-remembered, re-collected, fused, and improvised fragments of traditional practices and rituals, customs and mores, over time they developed what I would call 'root paradigms' (here I'm following Victor Turner, an anthropologist), but 'root paradigms' cognitive and moral orientations, rites and rituals, aesthetic sensibilities and cultural mores. These were synthesized to ground (collective and individual) religious consciousness that differed necessarily from their indigenous antecedents. These 'root paradigms' form the first stratum of a worldview that encounters and critically re envisions Christian preaching and practice in the traumatizing experience of chattel slavery.

The Bible, as 'oral text.' Prior to the First Great Awakening (roughly 1730-1755) and the evangelizing missions of the Baptists and Methodists, the enslaved people showed interest in Christianity. Because it was forbidden to enslave Christians, slaveholders initially were reluctant to baptize the enslaved Africans; but some slaveholders proposed that Baptism could shape the enslaved people to docility, to an acceptance of their fate as divinely ordained. To this end, the Bible was used to legitimate and to sacralize perpetual bondage.

The ambiguity of slaveholders toward the religious lives of their 'human property' is well documented. Slaveholders attempted to control the enslaved people's every gesture of personal or interpersonal or cultural

independence, and many even monitored the people during prayer and worship. On some plantations, the enslaved people attended white churches, sitting or standing in designated areas; while on other plantations, they were permitted to hold unsupervised slave meetings that were sometimes led by an enslaved preacher. In other situations, the people withdrew to woods, gullies, and thickets (called brush arbors or 'hush arbors') to pray and sing. Alice Sewell told her WPA (Works Project Administration) interviewer that many people in her area "used to slip off in de woods on Sunday evening way down in de swamps to sing and pray to our own liking." In such tentative, but electric privacy, the enslaved peoples created spirituals, reconfigured African customs and spiritual practices of shouting, moaning, and dance; experienced spirit possession, and, not infrequently, prepared for escape and strategized rebellion.

Not surprisingly, the enslaved people turned an unfavorable eye on Christianity as practiced by slaveholders. As well as their agents, and collaborators. Again, slave narratives preserve the following account given by a formerly enslaved man, "I often heard select portions of the Scriptures read. On Sunday we always had one sermon prepared expressly for the colored people. So great was the similarity of texts that they are always fresh in memory: "Servants, be obedient to your masters, not with eye-service, or men pleasers. He that knoweth his master's will and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes"; and verses of this type. One very kind-hearted clergyman was very popular with the colored people. But after he had preached a sermon from the Bible that it was the will of Heaven from all eternity that we should be slaves, and our masters be our owners, many of us left considering, like the doubting disciple of old, "This is a hard saying, who can bear it."

The enslaved people were prohibited *de jure* and *de facto* from learning to read *and/or* to write. Most people who dared and were discovered reading or writing were whipped and sometimes mutilated by having a finger cut off. But, the people persisted, often with the help of an enslaved person who surreptitiously had learned to read or with the assistance of a free black person or a white person willing to defy legislation and custom. With or without such help, the people took confidence in their own ingenuity and mnemonic skill. They listened intently during public readings of the Bible and sermons; some among them memorized chapters or portions of the Bible. These spoken fragments and passages became material for their meditation, reflection, sermonizing, and song. In this way, the enslaved people developed a tradition of African American interpretation.

Hebrew Bible scholar Renita Weems argues that "since slave communities were illiterate, they were, therefore, without allegiance to any official text, any official translation, or interpretation; hence once they heard biblical passages read and interpreted to them, they in turn were free to remember and repeat in accordance with their own interests and tastes. For those raised within an aural culture retelling the Bible became one hermeneutical strategy, and resistance to the Bible, or portions of it, would become another." The enslaved people created what womanist theologian Delores Williams calls an "oral text," a *life-affirming* canon. The composition of this 'oral text' was a communal process. From among biblical texts preached in sermons or passages read aloud at white family prayers, members of the enslaved community apprehended, evaluated, judged, and selected *life-affirming* texts. These passages or stories or sayings were memorized, repeated, reshaped, and purged of racist inferences. The resulting "oral text" was judged to be the *true* word of God in the Bible. Truly, African American Christian faith came by hearing, critical listening with the ear, the mind, and the heart. Indeed, biblical revelation provided the enslaved people with material for the singular mystical and political mediation of their condition—the spiritual.

The poet and literary critic James Weldon Johnson believed that many spirituals were the work of highly gifted individuals, whom, in a celebrated poem, he called "black and unknown bards." On the other hand, novelist, folklorist, and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston maintained that the spirituals are "Negro religious songs, sung by a group, and a group bent on expression of feelings and not on sound effects." In his magisterial study of the spirituals, Lovell traces 375 years of the existence of the Negro or African American Spiritual, reckoning that the enslaved people probably composed roughly 6,000 songs including variants, although he refers to or cites directly

more than 500. So we only ever hear a slim portion of spirituals, a slim portion. When asked about their method of composing their religious songs, enslaved men and women often replied: "Thee Lord just put them in our mouth. The Lord puts every word we say in our mouth." One formerly enslaved woman from Kentucky insisted that the spirituals were formed from the material of traditional African tunes and familiar songs. Here is her description of the process by which a spiritual was made: "We older folks would make them up on the spur of the moment, after we wrestled with the Spirit and come through. They called them spirituals because the Holy Spirit revealed them to us. Some folks say that Master Jesus taught them to us, but I have seen them start in [prayer] meetings. We would all be in the praise house on Sunday and the white preacher would explain the word and read where Ezekiel says, "Dry bones going to live again." And, honey, the Lord would come shining through those pages and revive this old woman's heart. I would jump up then and there and shout and sing and clap and the others would catch the words and they all take up the words and keep adding to it and then it would be a spiritual.

A spiritual is a sung or moaned utterance or chant of an enslaved African American in response to or about a given religious or ordinary or social experience, that held communal and/or universal significance. In and through song, one woman's or man's experience of sorrow, shout of jubilation became that of a people. But without a doubt, the spirituals are gifts of the Spirit. In creation and performance, these songs are marked by flexibility, spontaneity, and improvisation. A pattern of call-response allowed for the rhythmic weaving or manipulation of time, text, and pitch; while, the response or repetitive chorus provided a recognizable and stable foundation for the extemporized lines of the soloist or leader. The vocabulary of the spirituals is intensely poetic and expressive, decorative, that's Zora Neale Hurston's word "decorative", and poignant, and characterized by vivid simile, personifications, and creative and effective juxtaposition of images and metaphor. The spirituals may 'sound' simple, but they are *not* simplistic; they possess what African American Catholic liturgist and priest Clarence Joseph Rivers called "magnitude". Spirituals provide a window on the religious, social, aesthetic, and psychological worldview of a people. At the same time, historian Vincent Harding encourages us: "the spirituals are available to all persons who are prepared to open themselves to the unsettling, healing power that inhabits these marvelous songs of life. These songs were created out of deeply meaningful, archetypally human experiences, relevant not only to the specific circumstances of slavery but also to women and men struggling with issues of justice, freedom and spiritual wholeness in all times and places."

Singing Mary Magdalene. On Lovell's account, the enslaved poets and singers drew song-pictures of twenty-four people found in the Hebrew Bible, three of whom are women – Eve, Pharaoh's daughter, and Delilah. Not counting Jesus, who is the heartbeat of the spirituals, fourteen people are included from the New Testament-four of whom are women-Miriam of Nazareth or Mary, the mother of Jesus; the sisters from Bethany, Mary and Martha; and Mary Magdalene.

Mary Magdalene appears thirteen times in the New Testament and chiefly in spirituals that celebrate the resurrection. These songs honor Mary as the 'first witness' to the resurrection, the one whom Jesus sends to announce his vindication to his other disciples and to direct them to meet him in Galilee. The makers of the spirituals invest Mary with qualities or attributes important to them in their condition. We may find some of those qualities or attributes in four resurrection spirituals: "The Angel Roll the Stone Away," "He Arose," "Mary Rolled the Stone Away," and "Run, Mary, Run."

So, "*The Angel Roll the Stone Away:*"

[Music]

In this spiritual, the enslaved poets assume that Mary has been in heaven, literally and metaphorically. "Sister Mary" comes running from heaven with good news that the angel has rolled the stone away. Interpreting the song

metaphorically, Lauri Ramey proposes two readings of this verse: that Mary may have *felt* as if she "were in a heavenly place" when she learned that Jesus had risen. Alternatively, Mary "*actually might have gone* to heaven, either in the body, 'or out of the body,' or in a dream state.' Both these readings find support in biblical narratives and in the religious experiences of the enslaved people. Biblical examples include the dream in which Jacob climbs a ladder, higher and higher to heaven (Gen 28:12); or Paul's confession of being "caught up to the third heaven, whether in the body or out of the body" (2 Cor 12:2).

So, these readings are supported in biblical narratives and in the religious experiences of the enslaved people. We can find similar experiences of being caught up in conversion narratives related by emancipated people who say, quite factually, that "God struck me dead with his power" or that at God's command their souls have traveled to heaven or to hell and back again. Indeed, "dream consciousness was believed by the enslaved community to be a metaphysical gift from God, that had placed the one experiencing conversion outside of the temporal self for the purpose of contemplation.

This spiritual evokes the Johannine narrative of the Resurrection. Mary comes to the garden alone in the fading darkness without any materials for anointing the body of Jesus. She sees the empty tomb, then runs to Peter and the Beloved disciple. Mary speaks to the men, but the men do not speak to her. Peter and the Beloved disciple run to the tomb; they want to see for themselves. Not finding Jesus, they go away. Mary remains: She stands weeping in the dawning light, when she encounters the risen Jesus and instinctively reaches out to touch him. Johannine scholar Allen Callahan makes a very interesting point, arguing that "the correct rendering of John 20:17 is not 'Don't touch me' but 'Stop touching me.' In other words, Mary already is holding onto Jesus, now weeping tears of shock and joy. Jesus says, 'stop touching me' because he has a mission for Mary. He sends her to the terrified disciples who are hiding behind locked doors in a room in Jerusalem. All too often, like Mary, enslaved women found themselves standing in tears weeping at the sale of a child or spouse or parent; weeping at the sight of a 'slave coffle' passing by; weeping at the torture or murder of a loved one by an overseer. And all too often, like Mary, enslaved women found themselves standing in front of locked doors, locked minds and hearts, silenced voices. And, like Mary, they persisted in their efforts to break through opposition, to speak up and to speak out, to act, to fight.

Our next spiritual: "*He Arose*"

[Music]

This spiritual tells the resurrection story in a quite straightforward manner, relying on accounts from the Synoptic Gospels, particularly those of Mark and Matthew. It reports miraculous action, "Down came an angel and rolled the stone away." Just then, Mary enters the scene weeping, seeking Jesus. Rather than repeat the line "O Mary came a-weeping her Savior for to see," the enslaved poet introduces another idea: "The Lord had gone to Galilee." Here, the spiritual concurs with the Synoptics on the "new" spatial location of the body of the risen Jesus (Matt 28:10, 16; Mark 16:7; Luke 24:6): Galilee. In the geography of the spirituals, Galilee most often refers to the "home" country of Jesus, his disciples, his followers, and believers. The line "The Lord had gone to Galilee" may well suggest a space or place of new life and freedom, a refuge from the "necropower" or death-dealing power of the plantation. Perhaps this line is a subtle warning or a signal for escape? The enslaved singer stands hopeful of freedom, of release from bondage. A formerly enslaved woman, Ellen Butler stated that the people sang and prayed for freedom. Alice Sewell agreed. She declared that the enslaved people prayed "to God that if we don't live to see freedom, please let our children live to see a better day and be free." "The Gullah-speaking people of the Sea Islands that extend along the coast of South Carolina and Georgia exemplify and retain African traditions of creativity in shaping, preserving, and transmitting their religio-cultural life. Their Moving Hall Singers, led by Ms. Janie Hunter, sing "Mary Rolled the Stone Away" not in concertized manner like The Fisk Jubilee Singers, who just performed 'He

Rose,' but in a style evocative of the original singing in which the leader 'lines out' the words to a song of hymn.

If you feel like clapping in your home or with your friends on this, please just go for it.

[Music]

In Mark's gospel, Mary Magdalene along with three companions bring along embalming paraphernalia to wash and treat the body of Jesus. As they walk, the women wonder aloud, 'Who will roll away the stone for us?' Peering through the murky dawn, the women see that the stone has been rolled away (Mark 16:1-4). The spiritual credits Mary Magdalene with rolling away the stone; indeed, before the angel can arrive, Mary has taken care of business. Recall, Jesus' words: "Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you" (Mark 11:23). Mary moves that very large stone through loving faith; she believes in Jesus and she loves him. Mary's ardent and powerful love rolled the grave stone away. Enslaved women, at great physical and psychic cost, pitted themselves against threats and obstacles for the sake of their children. An emancipated woman, Fannie Moore told her interviewer that on the plantation where she was held, the overseer "hated my mother," because her mother would fight with him whenever he beat Fannie or her siblings. Like Mary, enslaved women moved obstacles, pushed aside stones of every sort that physically or mentally sought to hinder their objectives. These women did not wait for someone else to come along, but acted!

Turning from the spirituals to a painting by the African American artist Titus Kaphar. This painting is part of a series, "Disrupted Histories." Art critic Priscilla Frank observes that Kaphar "conjures a space somewhere between here and gone, past and present, traditional and contemporary. "Looking at the painting, we recognize it, even as it intentionally trips us up. Here Kaphar practices what he calls "amending:" He has amended Bartolome Esteban Murillo's painting of the crucifixion. Visual memory nudges us to fill in the identities of the figures: the crucified Jewish rabbi Jesus of Nazareth, his mother Miriam, his dear friends John and Mary Magdalene. The painting *has* been amended: The facial features of those at the foot of the cross are erased, hollowed out, washed in cloudy blue. The only distinctly featured face is black and androgynous; this figure looks directly at us, peers through the body of Jesus.

Kaphar rewriting, amending the picture allows us to see the continuing history of the enslaved people and their descendants. For that history seeps into the present, into the future present that is our dreadful now. Once again, we "are lynching the Son of God and holding him in contempt" (*Hebrews 6:6*). Can we see *ourselves* in the figures at the foot of *this* lynching tree? Can we grasp the meaning of our silence, our indifference, our complicity in oppression? Even if we are among those who watch and witness, what are we to do? How are we to stand up, speak up, speak out? Kaphar's "aim is to reveal something of what has been lost and to investigate the power of a rewritten history." His aim corresponds to that of the spirituals: to reveal what and who have been lost, to sing the power of a rewritten history, to create new narratives.

The spirituals challenge all humankind to openness, self-transcendence, and fidelity to Divine love; to eradication of injustice; to sowing seeds of the possibility of the Reign of God. The spirituals are a reminder that freedom and flourishing is the intention of the Divine for each creature, each human person. These songs teach us that Christian living is inconsistent with powerlessness, dehumanization, hate, and deprivation. The spirituals we've heard today sing Mary Magdalene, whose love could not be quenched, could not be swept away. Mary Magdalene shows us that love is stronger than death; that love can roll gravestones away and that the flames of love are the fiercest of all fires-moving between earth and heaven (*Song of Solomon 8:7*), blazing a path to transformation, to freedom and flourishing.

Thank you very much for listening.

Meghan Lovett:

We're going to transition to question and answer now and before we dive in, there was a question about purchasing Dr. Copeland's books in the Q and A. And so, we are going to send a follow up email and we'll include some links if you're interested in purchasing and I wanted to give you the opportunity Dr. Copeland if you wanted to plug any particular books on this topic or any particular musicians, for our audience.

Prof. Shawn Copeland:

Well, we're always happy to sell books. All academics are. I appreciate Dean Stegman mentioning, "*Knowing Christ Crucified*", which has a section on the spirituals, and I appreciate his mentioning "*Enfleshing Freedom*." Most recently, Laurie Cassidy, and I have co-edited a book entitled *Desire, Darkness, and Hope: Theology in a Time of Impasse*, engaging the thoughts of Constance FitzGerald, the Carmelite sister in Baltimore, Maryland. And we think that this collection of essays, both Sister Fitzgerald and of seven other different- seven other theologians would be of great interest to people interested in social justice and spirituality. Thank you very much for that opportunity.

Meghan Lovett:

Yes, thank you, Dr. Copeland. Another participant just added, you know, a list of the authors would be helpful. So, thank you, that was a great list. I'm seeing a lot of people expressing their thanks for your presentation and the inspirational insights that you have brought to us today. One of the questions, because spirituals paint pictures of Mary Magdalene and separately of Martha and Mary of Bethany, is it accurate to say that enslaved persons did not accept the conflation of Mary Magdalene, the sinner from the city in Luke 7, and Mary of Bethany were those two separate spiritual figures.

Prof. Shawn Copeland:

It's very difficult to know what you're asking. They often conflate characters and events, the spirituals often do that, they are rewriting a narrative that meets their condition. And we come through critical historical scholarship to appreciate the distinctions between Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene. But there's still a lot of fuzziness, and this is without diminishing Mary Magdalene, and her importance. But what's also true I think is that there's also this unnamed woman who shows up in the Gospel of Luke, who anoints Jesus's feet, she shows up in other gospels as well. We don't know who these people are. But Mary Magdalene, obviously had means. The women that Luke names in those verses early on in his gospel he names the women who are following Jesus, and she's included, and they are providing for his ministry, they're funding his ministry. And she obviously had some means. So, the other thing about sin and sinning. There are some sins that, I guess, people are really interested in and some that people are not, and I think Jesus is not to turn Jesus into plastic Jesus made over in our image and likeness, because there are many challenging passages in the New Testament. I've come to bring fire, you know, on the earth. This kind of challenge to us. So, the insight people- remember that they've got a slim text. Lovell will say that the Bible of the spirituals is not the Bible of the Theologian, the Bible of the ordinary Christian. It's a thin Bible because they're looking for what affirms them, they're looking for what affirms them in God's connection with them. I tell students frequently if you're so distressed about God, if you think that God is sending you suffering and pain, then get another God. And the point for these people. They did get another God; they already had their own gods. But, and I don't believe the gods didn't make the travel across the ocean, but they really met this other God that was very powerful, that had them in bondage. Could they convert this guy to their cause? They succeeded. They

succeeded. All you have to do is listen to go down Moses, and you know they succeeded. That's a very roundabout answer to your question but-

Meghan Lovett:

Thank you, Dr. Copeland. I think we have time for one more. This participant would love to learn more about the imagery and possible reality of Mary being in heaven and on earth. Since Jesus and Mother Mary are the only other people to bodily assumed to have- into heaven, it's even more powerful to imagine Mary Magdalene, participating in the journey to heaven and earth and in an embodied way.

Prof. Shawn Copeland:

This is a part of trying to understand this, in terms of dream consciousness.

I'm not I'm not a Freudian at all, neither were the enslaved people, but they had a lot of the people making the spirituals had a lot of nous, a lot of mind, a lot of intelligence about how the human psyche worked. No one's projecting Mary Magdalene to be bodily in heaven. I certainly am not in this presentation. But the spiritual says she came running from heaven. "Had she been there?" is the question, and they're assuming she had. She was very much alive, she came running there to bring on the good news. So it becomes, yes, imagery. It becomes the juxtaposition that's creative of what we know to be factual and what people can imagine. If you do Hollywood movies you know that we human beings can imagine a lot. These people imagined a great deal and they did so with a desire to experience transcendence and to be free- and to be free.

Meghan Lovett:

Well, thank you Dr. Copeland. We've reached the end of our time together today. Thank you so much for your presentation. I want to share the thanks and praise from the Q and A as well. People, I think, were really moved by your presentation today, so thank you.

Prof. Shawn Copeland:

Thank you all very much for listening I deeply appreciate it, yes.

Meghan Lovett:

Thank you to our audience members for joining us today. This concludes our webinar for today and we hope that you'll join us for our fall events take care

[Music]