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*NOLI ME TANGERE* IN  
INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE  
TEXTUAL, ICONOGRAPHIC AND  
CONTEMPORARY INTERPRETATIONS

EDITED BY

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## BETWEEN RECOGNITION AND TESTIMONY

### JOHANNINE *RELECTURE* OF THE FIRST EASTER WITNESS AND PATRISTIC READINGS

More than the other resurrection accounts, the Johannine Easter narrative highlights the role of Mary Magdalene as the first witness of the risen Jesus<sup>1</sup>. Once Mary has recognized him (John 20,16), she is commissioned by him to announce his message (v. 17), which she carries out immediately (v. 18). The commission in John 20,17, though, is preceded by a command of Jesus presenting “one of the enduring challenges of Johannine interpretation”<sup>2</sup>. The *Noli me tangere* motif, often regarded as a *crux interpretum*, seems to imply that, between the recognition of Jesus and the proclamation of the Resurrected One, a further step is required.

The aim of this paper is to offer some aspects from various points of view as a contribution to the illumination of the verse. The starting point of the exegesis of John 20,17 are linguistic observations (I) and a structural analysis of the verse (II). The following theological interpretation examines John 20,17 within the framework of the gospel as a whole (III). An intertextual study focuses on the Johannine love imagery in the light of Cant 3,1-4 and Hellenistic romance novels (IV). A second main part is dedicated to the patristic exegesis of John 20,17 (V). The overview shows that the Fathers’ symbolic-allegorical and typological interpretations often read theological concerns foreign to the text world into the verse. Moreover, gender stereotypes are used to a great extent. Especially the moralistic tendencies of the Latin Fathers’ interpretations contribute to the reception history of the Magdalene as the great sinner.

1. See the detailed study in A. TASCHL-ERBER, *Maria von Magdala – erste Apostolin? Joh 20,1-18: Tradition und Relecture* (Herders Biblische Studien, 51), Freiburg, Herder, 2007.

2. R.G. MACCINI, *Her Testimony Is True: Women as Witnesses according to John* (JSNT.S, 125), Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 1996, p. 213.

## I. LINGUISTIC OBSERVATIONS ON μή μου ἅπτου

In searching for possible meanings of the *Noli me tangere*<sup>3</sup>, the semantic variety of the verb ἅπτομαι has to be considered first (1) as well as the verbal aspect of the present imperative ἅπτου (2).

1. *Semantics*

As far as the middle form ἅπτομαι (constructed with the *genetivus partitivus*) is concerned, the Greek-English lexicon of Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott mentions first of all the meanings “*fasten oneself to, grasp ...*, metaph. *take hold of, cleave to*”<sup>4</sup>. So the old-established translation “to touch”<sup>5</sup> does not render the basic meaning of the verb, as the occurrences in Homeric and classical Greek texts show (though, “touch” is pointed out further below among other meanings<sup>6</sup> for metaphorical contexts). Accordingly, the verb here could be translated as “to fasten onto someone, to cling to”<sup>7</sup>, maybe also “to hold on to”<sup>8</sup>, which is not the same as “to hold”<sup>9</sup> (particularly in the sense of holding someone back<sup>10</sup>), since

3. The Vulgate’s translation *noli me tangere* widely influenced the reception history of the Magdalene’s Easter encounter with Jesus. The new Vulgate, though, has: *Iam noli me tenere ...*

4. H.G. LIDDELL – R. SCOTT – H.S. JONES, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford, Clarendon, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. with a revised supplement, 1996, p. 231.

5. Cf. e.g. the *KJV* and the *ASV*: “Touch me not”, or in the German-speaking world the *Luther Bibel* and the *Elberfelder*: “Rühre mich nicht an!”, as well as the *Münchener Neues Testament*: “Berühre mich nicht!” See also E.C. HOSKYNs, *The Fourth Gospel*, London, Faber & Faber, <sup>2</sup>1947, p. 544; R. BULTMANN, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (KEK), Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, <sup>13</sup>1953, p. 532.

6. For example, “engage in, undertake”, “handle”, “lay hands on”, “attack”, “affect”, “perceive, apprehend”, “reach, attain”, “make use of”, “to be in contact” (of bodies and surfaces) etc. In III.5 the meaning “have intercourse with (a woman)” is listed (see e.g. 1 Cor 7,1), which might play a subtle role for some interpretations based upon the gender issue (see also Luke 7,39).

7. Cf., for example, the *NKJV*, the *ESV* and the *NJB*: “Do not cling to Me”, or the *NASB*: “Stop clinging to Me”. R.E. BROWN, *The Gospel according to John: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 2: *John XIII–XXI* (Anchor Bible, 29A), Garden City, NY, Doubleday, 1970, p. 992, also translates “don’t cling to me”. Though he indicates as the literal translation “stop touching me” (as well as, for instance, C.K. BARRETT, *The Gospel according to St John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, London, SPCK, <sup>2</sup>1978, p. 566).

8. Cf. e.g. the *NRSV* and the *NIV*: “Do not hold on to me”, or the *NAB*: “Stop holding on to me”.

9. Cf. e.g. the *RSV*: “Do not hold me”.

10. See, for instance, U. WILCKENS, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (NTD, 4), Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998, pp. 309-310. Apparently implied by W. BAUER, *Das Johannesevangelium* (HNT, 6), Tübingen, Mohr, <sup>3</sup>1933, p. 231: “Jesus hat den Wunsch, von Maria loszukommen, weil es ihn drängt, die Erfüllung dessen zu erleben, was er so oft als Erfolg seines Todes angegeben hatte ...”.

the middle form focuses especially on the involvement of the respective subject in the verb's action<sup>11</sup>.

However, the New Testament dictionary of Walter Bauer, edited by Kurt and Barbara Aland, gives the meanings “anrühren, anfassen, berühren”<sup>12</sup>, i.e. “to touch” (most of the occurrences of the verb are aorist forms, though). Nevertheless, there seem to be semantic overlappings with the verb κρατέω in the meaning “seize, hold fast” (see the interchangeability of the verbs in Mark 1,31 par. Matt 8,15: κρατήσας/ἤψατο τῆς χειρὸς – in each case with the aorist). So the interpretation of John 20,17 (the only evidence of the verb in the Gospel of John) is quite often influenced by the parallel scene in Matt 28,9 (ἐκράτησαν αὐτοῦ τοὺς πόδας). In fact, the full variety of meanings does not come into sight in the New Testament writings; moreover, a semantic shift can be discerned in biblical Greek. The verb appears in specific contexts: It is mainly used for healing contacts (cf. the majority of occurrences in the synoptic gospels; for a similar “charismatic” contact see also the children’s blessing in Mark 10,13 par. Luke 18,15), contacts causing ritual impurity (2 Cor 6,17; Col 2,21)<sup>13</sup>, and sexual contacts (1 Cor 7,1; perhaps also associated in Luke 7,39, if it is not a matter of touch making unclean). As to John 20,17, the transfiguration context in Matt 17,7 (Jesus rather takes hold of – than simply touches – the terrified disciples to encourage them) and the only other instance in the Corpus Iohanneum, 1 John 5,18 (ὁ πονηρὸς does not lay hands on or has no hold over<sup>14</sup> ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ), might be interesting.

## 2. Verbal Aspect

Since the present stem in the Greek verbal system expresses continuous, linear (or iterated) action, this durative (or iterative) *Aktionsart* also has to be taken into account with regard to present imperatives. Accordingly, a prohibition (with the prohibitive particle μή) could be paraphrased as follows:

11. In German rather “(sich) (fest)halten an, sich hängen an” than the common translation with “(etwas oder jemanden) festhalten” (cf. e.g. the *Einheitsübersetzung*). I thank Stefan Hagel (from the Department of Classical Philology at the University of Vienna) for this advice.

12. W. BAUER – K. ALAND – B. ALAND, *Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen Literatur*, Berlin – New York, de Gruyter, 1988, p. 206.

13. Cf. the LXX occurrences where ἄπτομαι translates the Hebrew verb נגג. Used for various forms of contact, it also renders קרב (“to approach”; in the LXX rather “to come into contact”: cf. Ezek 42,14, but also Num 3,10.38; 17,28 and Gen 20,4 [sexual contact]), furthermore קבץ (Job 31,7: differing from the MT, contact with δῶρα; 2 Chr 3,12: contact of surfaces) and נחם (Ezek 41,6).

14. Cf. the *NJB*.

(1) *Do not be acting in this way*<sup>15</sup>. Here it is left open whether the action is already underway or not. The prohibition therefore can mean (a) *continue not being acting in this way*, or (b) *do not keep on acting in this way, stop acting in this way* (if the action has already begun)<sup>16</sup>.

(2) *Be (or keep) not-acting in this way*<sup>17</sup>.

In contrast, the aorist (in this case the prohibitive subjunctive) would rather express: *do not commence* (ingressive aorist) or *accomplish* (constative or maybe effective aorist) *this concrete action in this specific situation*<sup>18</sup>.

Sometimes the present is used for actions just attempted, but not performed completely (conative present): *do not try acting in this way*, or even *do not keep on trying to act in this way*<sup>19</sup>. This seems to imply, however, that an action attempted or intended has to be interrupted or stopped.

As for μή μου ἅπτου, I would suggest the translation *do not be clinging to me*. Instead of presuming Mary of Magdala already holding Jesus or trying to do so (and thus being rebuked by him for her premature faith)<sup>20</sup>, the more correct solution would be to leave this question open<sup>21</sup>.

15. Since the use of tenses in other languages functions differently, a paraphrase such as *sei nicht im Zustand des Ausführens dieser Handlung (weiterhin or nicht mehr)* would better work for the German, for example. – Due to the discussed verse, the main focus is on the durative aspect.

16. Cf. R. KÜHNER – B. GERTH, *Ausführliche Grammatik der griechischen Sprache*. Zweiter Teil: *Satzlehre*, vol. 2, Hannover, Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 41955, pp. 189ff., § 389.6.c; F. BLASS – A. DEBRUNNER – F. REHKOPF, *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 171990, p. 275, § 336.2.c; N. TURNER, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*. Vol. III: *Syntax*, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1963, pp. 75-76 (giving the translation *stop touching me!* for John 20,17).

17. *Sei im Zustand des Nicht-Ausführens dieser Handlung*.

18. However, the question was raised to what extent the New Testament writers had adopted the aspect system, specifically as regards the imperative (cf. BLASS – DEBRUNNER – REHKOPF, *Grammatik* [n. 16], pp. 274-276, § 335-337; TURNER, *Grammar* [n. 16], pp. 74-78).

19. See the translation *do not keep on trying to hold me* by G.R. BEASLEY-MURRAY, *John* (WBC, 36), Waco, TX, Word Books, 1987, p. 365.

20. This is a widespread topos in patristic and modern exegesis. With regard to patristic readings claiming a harsh rebuke of Mary, it has to be mentioned that present imperatives also are “less pressing, less rude, less ruthless, than the aorist” (TURNER, *Grammar* [n. 16], p. 75). And in the case of ἅπτου referring indeed to an already ongoing action, Mary’s act does not need to be categorically wrong; maybe the command means just that it has to be stopped *now* (since a special task is waiting).

21. So also MACCINI, *Testimony* (n. 2), pp. 227-228.

## II. STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF JOHN 20,17

λέγει αὐτῇ Ἰησοῦς·

(a) μή μου ἄπτου,

(b) οὐπω γὰρ ἀναβέβηκα πρὸς τὸν πατέρα·

(a') πορεύου δὲ πρὸς τοὺς ἀδελφούς μου καὶ εἶπέ αὐτοῖς·

(b') ἀναβαίνω πρὸς τὸν πατέρα μου καὶ πατέρα ὑμῶν  
καὶ θεόν μου καὶ θεὸν ὑμῶν.

Since the narrative offers no explicit motivation for Jesus' command μή μου ἄπτου, the question arises how this gap is to be filled<sup>22</sup>. To what kind of contact do Jesus' words refer?

Corresponding elements in John 20,17, such as the imperatives addressed to Mary of Magdala (μή μου ἄπτου – πορεύου δὲ ... καὶ εἶπέ ...: a-a') and the twice used verb ἀναβαίνω, with the addition πρὸς τὸν πατέρα, related to Jesus (b-b'), point to a parallel structure in the speech of the Johannine Jesus (a-b-a'-b'). Thus, different journeys of these two characters can be discerned, as the repeated connection of a verb from the semantic field of going with the prepositional phrase πρὸς followed by an accusative indicating the direction suggests. A preliminary stage (a-b, see the negation particles) is opposed to the respective true destination (a'-b') on which the emphasis is placed<sup>23</sup>.

The category of space is used metaphorically in John 20, referring to deeper dimensions beyond the superficial view, to illustrate the inner recognition process as reflected by the external movements of the characters and to convey Johannine christology<sup>24</sup>. On the story level, Mary's progress to Easter faith and to her apostolic testimony is told: her coming

22. See the secondary addition in v. 16 καὶ προσεδραμεν ἀψασθαι αὐτου. Some scholars interpret στραφεῖσα in this sense; cf. BULTMANN, *Evangelium* (n. 5), p. 532, n. 1; M. EBNER, *Wer liebt mehr? Die liebende Jüngerin und der geliebte Jünger nach Joh 20,1-18*, in *BZ* 42 (1998) 39-55, p. 44. Often ἄπτομαι was harmonized with Matt 28,9; see e.g. WILCKENS, *Evangelium* (n. 10), p. 309; A. WIKENHAUSER, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (RNT, 4), Regensburg, Pustet, <sup>2</sup>1957, p. 339.

23. Accordingly, J. HARTENSTEIN, *Charakterisierung im Dialog: Maria Magdalena, Petrus, Thomas und die Mutter Jesu im Johannesevangelium im Kontext anderer frühchristlicher Darstellungen* (NTOA/SUNT, 64), Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Freiburg, Academic Press, 2007, pp. 145-146, regards the *Noli me tangere* – parallel to the formula μή φοβεῖσθε/ἐκθαμβεῖσθε in Matt 28,5.10; Mark 16,6 – as primarily functional, preparing the following words, without a specific message of its own.

24. See A. TASCHL-ERBER, *Erkenntnisschritte und Glaubenswege in Joh 20,1-18: Die narrative Metaphorik des Raums*, in *Protokolle zur Bibel* 15 (2006) 93-117; B. KOWALSKI, *Der Gang zum leeren Grab (Joh 20,1-18) aus pragmatischer Sicht*, in *Geist und Leben* 73 (2000) 113-128, p. 114; D.A. LEE, *Turning from Death to Life: A Biblical Reflection on Mary Magdalene (John 20:1-18)*, in *The Ecumenical Review* 50 (1998) 112-120, p. 114.

to the tomb (v. 1), stooping to look into it (v. 11) after the interlude concerning Peter and the Beloved Disciple, her double turning (v. 14.16), and finally going to proclaim the Easter kerygma (v. 18). The Johannine play with several levels of understanding might also concern the denied contact. Once again Mary has to turn<sup>25</sup> – now from Jesus to the community of his “brothers and sisters”<sup>26</sup>.

On the level of discourse, on the other hand, the focus is on Jesus’ movements, leading from misunderstandings (Jesus being moved from the tomb) to the insight into his true destination (his way up “to the Father”)<sup>27</sup>. Whereas Mary’s moving takes place on the horizontal level (as all motions on the story level and the level of discourse so far), Jesus’ *anabasis* points to the vertical. So the theological message is conveyed by the mythological<sup>28</sup> space imagery adopted in the Gospel of John that polarizes an upper and a lower sphere. In contrast to the concrete Lukan narratives (Luke 24,50-51; Acts 1,9-11), the ascension of the Johannine Jesus is only reflected on the level of discourse (like the resurrection in all gospels apart from the *Gospel of Peter*), and in fact not as an event that will happen in the future, but as a process that has already started<sup>29</sup>, as the respective verbal forms of ἀναβαίνω show.

The resultative aspect of the perfect ἀναβέβηκα (b) refers to the subject’s (permanent) state resulting from a previous activity. However, the temporal adverb οὐπω signifies that the state of being above with the Father has not been achieved yet: Jesus has not yet reached his destination<sup>30</sup>. Likewise the corresponding present ἀναβαίνω “I am ascending”

25. Cf. R. BIERINGER, *Noli me tangere and the New Testament: An Exegetical Approach*, in B. BAERT – R. BIERINGER – K. DEMASURE – S. VAN DEN EYNDE (eds.), *Noli me tangere. Mary Magdalene: One Person, Many Images* (Documenta Libraria, 32\*), Leuven, Peeters, 2006, 13-27, p. 26, who also underlines: “The command ‘Do not come closer to me’ has nothing to do with any shortcoming in Mary Magdalene (as a disciple or as a woman)”.

26. The terms ἀδελφοί in v. 17 and μαθηταί in v. 18 (in particular, as instead of οἱ δώδεκα) are to be understood as inclusive.

27. The repeated ποῦ in v. 2.13.15 shows the significance of the question *where* Jesus actually is; see also P.S. MINEAR, “*We don’t know where ...*”: John 20:2, in *Interpr 30* (1976) 125-139. Mary adheres to the tomb from which the κύριος (!) has been taken, until she recognizes Jesus.

28. Cf. ORIGEN, *Comm. Jo.* 19,22 (μυστικώτερον καὶ οὐ τοπικῶς; see below in V.2).

29. See also BEASLEY-MURRAY, *John* (n. 19), p. 377, and B. LINDARS, *The Gospel of John* (NCB), London, Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1972, p. 608: “... John is not thinking of an occasion in the near future when ‘the Ascension’ will take place according to the Lucan scheme (Lk. 24.51; Ac. 1.9f.). Jesus is really ascending now. (...) It is John’s way of announcing that the era of the Resurrection has begun”.

30. WILCKENS, *Evangelium* (n. 10), p. 307, translates: “Denn den Weg hinauf zum Vater habe ich noch nicht vollendet”.

(b') hints at a process of ascending that is in progress, but has not been completed. The accomplishment of the Easter events is still waiting.

The causal (or explanatory) particle *γάρ* indicates a connection of the characters' journeys. Sometimes an argument introduced by *γάρ* explains the following idea, so that the particle is used *preceding* the fact explained, like "since" or "as"<sup>31</sup>. As an "anticipatory conjunction" it is translated by Michael McGehee: "Don't cling to me. Since I have not yet ascended to the Father, go to my brothers ..."<sup>32</sup>. Hence the *γάρ*-clause might be considered at least parenthetically<sup>33</sup> so that it does not just motivate the *Noli me tangere*, but is also linked to what follows.

While Jesus' actual destination is with the Father above (and not in the tomb, as the earlier misunderstandings in the story supposed), Mary finds her place in announcing the message of the Risen One to the community of his followers. Her mission constitutes the middle of the verse. The adversative particle *δέ*<sup>34</sup> opposes the first command to the assignment to go and tell the message Jesus entrusts to her – to the disciples, who are here called Jesus' brothers and sisters for the first time in the Gospel of John<sup>35</sup> (corresponding to the phrase *πρὸς τὸν πατέρα μου καὶ πατέρα ἑμῶν*<sup>36</sup>). As in the LXX<sup>37</sup>, the imperative *πορεύου* (respectively *πορεύθητι* or a participle) often serves as a mission formula in the gospels, especially

31. Cf. LIDDELL – SCOTT – JONES, *Lexicon* (n. 4), p. 338, A.I.2; KÜHNER – GERTH, *Grammatik* (n. 16), vol. 2, pp. 332-335, § 545.4-5.

32. M. MCGEHEE, *A Less Theological Reading of John 20:17*, in *JBL* 105 (1986) 299-302, p. 299. He continues: "In other words, Jesus is stating a matter of fact ... and not giving an explanation of why Mary should not cling to him".

33. See also M. ZERWICK, *Biblical Greek: Illustrated by Examples* (Scripta Pontificii Instituti Biblici, 114), Rome, Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1963, 2001, English edition adapted from the fourth Latin edition by Joseph Smith, pp. 159-160; G. VAN BELLE, *Les parenthèses dans l'Évangile de Jean: Aperçu historique et classification: Texte grec de Jean* (Studiorum Novi Testamenti Auxilia, 11), Leuven, University Press – Peeters, 1985, p. 323; F.J. MATERA, *John 20:1-18: Something to Say*, in *Interpr* 43 (1989) 402-406, p. 405. – For a more detailed discussion of varied proposals regarding the syntactic structure of John 20,17, see R. BIERINGER, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (*John 20:17*): Resurrection and Ascension in the Gospel of John, in C.R. KOESTER – R. BIERINGER (eds.), *The Resurrection of Jesus in the Gospel of John* (WUNT, 222), Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2008, 209-235, pp. 209-217.

34. Some manuscripts have the consecutive particle *οὐν* instead (e.g.  $\aleph^2$ , D, L, 050), implying that the commission is a consequence of the preceding sentence. A omits the particle.

35. Without the genitive, the term refers to the disciples in John 21,23 as well, where it reflects the language use of the Johannine community (cf. 1-3 John). As for the synoptic gospels, see Mark 3,33-35 par. Matt 12,48-50; Luke 8,21; Matt 28,10.

36. The parallel pronouns illustrate at the same time equality and difference regarding the childship.

37. See e.g. Exod 4,12; 33,1; Judg 6,14; 1 Sam 23,2; 2 Sam 7,5; 1 Kgs 19,15; Isa 20,2; 22,15; Jer 3,12; 22,1.

in the Easter context<sup>38</sup>. So both characters have to accomplish their respective mission<sup>39</sup>. Consequently, Mary ought not to cling to the visionary experience of the reunion with Jesus as if it were a private revelation, but is commissioned to go and share her insight so that Jesus' way can reach its destination, at least as far as the post-Easter community is concerned<sup>40</sup>. However, as in the reception history the *apostola* is substituted by the *peccatrix*, from patristic times onwards, the interpreters' focus has shifted from the commission of Mary Magdalene to the *Noli me tangere*.

### III. THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION WITHIN THE JOHANNINE FRAMEWORK

One difficulty of the translation "do not touch me" lies in how to explain the command of Jesus to Mary Magdalene in comparison to the apparently contrary invitation to Thomas to probe his wounds in John 20,27<sup>41</sup>. As in regard to the gender issue, the contradiction was in the history of exegesis partly resolved by claiming that a man (especially one of the Twelve) was permitted to do what a woman (particularly one with a sinful past as was claimed in the later reception history) was not. Against such an interpretation, at his time obviously widespread, Augustine had already protested, calling it absurd<sup>42</sup>.

38. Cf. F. HAUCK – S. SCHULZ, *πορεύομαι κτλ.*, in *TWNT* 6 (1959) 566-579, col. 571, 574. See also Mark 16,15; Matt 28,7.19; Acts 9,11.15, and *ὑπάγετε* in Mark 16,7; Matt 28,10.

39. This could be a response to M.R. D'ANGELO, *A Critical Note: John 20:17 and Apocalypse of Moses 31*, in *JTS* 41 (1990) 529-536, p. 531, who comments upon the translation "do not cling to me" critically from the gender perspective: "Twenty-century (sic) translators and commentators avoid the words 'do not touch me', in part from the desire to exclude the implication that Mary's touch is erotic or polluting. But the reading 'Do not cling' by no means avoids problematic cultural constructions of femininity; rather it appeals to and reinforces another societal definition of women: women's love is dependent and holds men back from their true call".

40. The paraphrasing of D.A. CARSON, *The Gospel according to John*, Leicester, Inter-Varsity; Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1991, p. 644, seems to lay too much stress on Mary's gender: "... I am not yet in the ascended state ..., so you do not have to hang on to me as if I were about to disappear permanently. This is a time for joy and sharing the good news, not for clutching me as if I were some jealously guarded private dream-come-true".

41. BROWN, *John XIII–XXI* (n. 7), p. 1011, underlines that "the commentators ... created the contrast", while "the evangelist intended no comparison".

42. *Quis autem tam sit absurdus, ut dicat eum a discipulis quidem antequam ad Patrem ascendisset, noluisse se tangi, a mulieribus autem noluisse, nisi cum ascendisset ad Patrem?* (*Tract. Ev. Jo.* 121.3; CCSL 36, 666.18-21.) See also the sharp rejection in *Sermo* 245.2: *Absurda est ista cogitatio, et perversa sententia* (PL 38, 1152), furthermore *Tract. ep. Jo.* 3.2: *Quibus primo voluit manifestari, ab his se timuit contractari?* (SC 75, 188.) In *Sermo* 244.2 he comments: *Si feminam horreret, non nasceretur ex femina* (PL 38, 1149).

Some scholars surmise that Jesus' ascent to the Father has taken place in the meantime<sup>43</sup> and apply the prohibition to touch him (only) to an interim period between resurrection and ascension<sup>44</sup>. This also implies a kind of "untouchable" intermediate state of Jesus as risen from the dead, but not yet ascended<sup>45</sup>. As a consequence, the protophany to Mary of Magdala is often mistaken as an "inferior-grade appearance"<sup>46</sup>. Referring to *Apoc. Mos.* 31, where Adam instructs Eve that no one ought to touch him (μηδεῖς μου ἄψηται) when he is dead but not yet buried<sup>47</sup>, Mary Rose d'Angelo holds "that the command and warning of John 20,17 enters the realms of purity and danger because the appearance takes place in some sort of intermediary stage"<sup>48</sup>.

However, inferring from the οὐπω a kind of intermediate state on the part of Jesus turns out to be an attempt to objectify what cannot be objectified<sup>49</sup>. Sandra M. Schneiders underlines: "It is virtually impossible,

43. Cf. WIKENHAUSER, *Evangelium* (n. 22), p. 340; L. SCHENKE, *Johannes: Kommentar* (Kommentare zu den Evangelien), Düsseldorf, Patmos, 1998, pp. 367-370.

44. Cf. HOSKYNs, *Gospel* (n. 5), pp. 542-543 (regarding the "touching" after the ascension as different, though); R.H. LIGHTFOOT, *St. John's Gospel: A Commentary*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1956, p. 331. But see already J.H. BERNARD, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John* (ICC), vol. 2, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1928, pp. 669-670: "We can hardly suppose that Jn. means us to believe that in the interval between v. 17 and v. 27 the conditions of the Risen Life of Jesus had so changed that what was unsuitable on the first occasion was suitable on the second". Similarly B. WEISS, *Das Johannes-Evangelium* (KEK), Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1902, p. 522.

45. Cf. e.g. J. SCHNEIDER, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (THNT, Sonderband), Berlin, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1976, p. 321; U. SCHNELLE, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (THNT, 4), Leipzig, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1998, p. 303; U. BUSSE, *Das Johannes-evangelium: Bildlichkeit, Diskurs und Ritual: Mit einer Bibliographie über den Zeitraum 1986-1998* (BETL, 162), Leuven, University Press, 2002, p. 255, n. 725.

46. So the critique by BROWN, *John XIII-XXI* (n. 7), p. 1014.

47. ὅταν δὲ ἀποθάνω, καταλείπετέ με, καὶ μηδεῖς μου ἄψηται ἕως οὗ ὁ ἄγγελος κυρίου λαλήσει τι περὶ ἐμοῦ· οὐ γὰρ ἐπιλήσεται μου ὁ θεός, ἀλλὰ ζητήσῃ τὸ ἴδιον σκεῦος ὃ ἐπλασεν. ἀνάστα μᾶλλον εὐξάει τῷ θεῷ ἕως οὗ ἀποδώ τὸ πνεῦμά μου εἰς τὰς χεῖρας τοῦ δεδωκότος αὐτό ... (quoted from K. v. TISCHENDORF, *Apocalypses apocryphae Mosis, Esdrae, Pauli, Iohannis, item Mariae dormitio, additis Evangeliorum et Actuum apocryphorum supplementis*, Hildesheim, Olms, 2001; second reprint of the edition Leipzig, Mendelssohn, 1866, p. 17).

48. D'ANGELO, *Note* (n. 39), p. 532; "a danger not only to Mary or Eve but also to Jesus or Adam in his strange state, or perhaps to the holy and awesome process each undergoes" (*ibid.*, pp. 534-535). She also refers to ORIGEN, esp. *Comm. Jo.* 6.37 (for the idea of purification); *Dial.* 8 (for Jesus' intermediary stage; texts quoted below in V.2). H.W. ATTRIDGE, "Don't Be Touching Me": *Recent Feminist Scholarship on Mary Magdalene*, in A.-J. LEVINE (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to John: Volume II* (Feminist Companion to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings, 5), London, Sheffield Academic Press, 2003, 140-166, pp. 163-166, joins her position (after overviewing scholars' interpretations of the *Noli me tangere*); also C. CONWAY, *Gender Matters in John*, *ibid.*, 79-103, pp. 97-98.

49. Cf. K. WENGST, *Das Johannesevangelium*. Vol. 2: *Kapitel 11-21* (TKNT, 4/2), Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 2001, p. 286.

theologically, to understand Jesus in this scene as being somewhere in between (whether ontologically, spatially, or temporally) his resurrection and his ascension. The Jesus Mary encounters in the garden is clearly the glorified Jesus<sup>50</sup>.

The Johannine Easter narrative is to be viewed in the horizon of the late New Testament writings which establish an implicit differentiation of corresponding aspects up to a distinction of different stages (see also, for instance, Eph 1,20; 1 Pet 1,21). In contrast to the Lukan scheme, Jesus' death, resurrection, ascension, and glorification are not considered as chronologically separated events in Johannine christology. Instead, both the verbal forms of ἀναβαίνω<sup>51</sup> refer to an ongoing process<sup>52</sup> that has begun with the exaltation – Jesus being lifted up onto the cross (see John 3,14; 8,28; 12,32) –, but has not yet been completed. So Jesus is risen and exalted, but the full realization of his ἔργον including the fulfilment of the promises of the Last Discourses (for instance, the mission of the paraclete) is still to be achieved.

Two early Christian concepts are overlaid in the narrative, the resurrection kerygma<sup>53</sup> on the one hand and the exaltation/*anabasis*<sup>54</sup> terminology

50. S.M. SCHNEIDERS, *John 20:11-18: The Encounter of the Easter Jesus with Mary Magdalene – A Transformative Feminist Reading*, in F.F. SEGOVIA (ed.), “What Is John?": *Readers and Readings of the Fourth Gospel* (SBL Symposium Series, 3), Atlanta, GA, Scholars, 1996, 155-168, p. 165. See also R. SCHNACKENBURG, *Das Johannesevangelium*. Vol. 3: *Kommentar zu Kap. 13–21* (HTKNT, 4/3), Freiburg, Herder, 1992, pp. 376-377. – Applying the “not yet” instead to Mary, BULTMANN, *Evangelium* (n. 5), p. 533, regards the verse as a critique of the tangible demonstrations of the resurrection in the traditional appearance stories; cf. E. HAENCHEN, *Das Johannesevangelium: Ein Kommentar*, ed. U. BUSSE, Tübingen, Mohr, 1980, p. 571: “Entmythisierung der Auferstehungsvorstellung”.

51. See besides John 3,13; 6,62 also Deut 30,12; Bar 3,29; Prov 30,4; Ps 107,26; 4 Ezra 4,8; Acts 2,34; Rom 10,6; Eph 4,8-10.

52. Cf. LIGHTFOOT, *Gospel* (n. 44), pp. 331-332, 335; BROWN, *John XIII–XXI* (n. 7), pp. 1013-1014; SCHNACKENBURG, *Johannesevangelium* (n. 50), p. 377; BEASLEY-MURRAY, *John* (n. 19), p. 377.

53. It has to be noted that apart from John 2,22 and 21,14 (ἡγέρθη/ἔγερθη εἰς ἐκ νεκρῶν; see also 20,9: ὅτι δεῖ αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀναστῆναι) the theological resurrection formula is transferred to Jesus raising Lazarus (cf. 12,19.17: ἡγέρην ἐκ νεκρῶν).

54. BROWN, *John XIII–XXI* (n. 7), p. 1013, notes: “‘Ascension’ is merely the use of spatial language to describe exaltation and glorification”. According to EBNER, *Jüngerin* (n. 22), p. 51, n. 48, again two concepts can be differentiated: “Das eine (Gesandtenchristologie) denkt vom Botenverkehr her (herab- und hinaufsteigen), das andere (‘Erhöhung’) nimmt eine urchristliche Sprachregelung auf (vgl. Phil 2,9), verknüpft sie aber unmittelbar mit dem Vorgang der Kreuzigung ... Während das eine Modell auf den ganzen Weg Jesu schaut, ist das andere auf einen Punkt zugespielt. Werden die beiden Modelle historisierend übereinandergeblendet, ergibt sich vordergründig die Schwierigkeit, daß der am Kreuz ‘Erhöhte’ eigentlich nicht mehr ‘aufzusteigen’ braucht”. – The ἀνάβασις through cosmic space is particularly characteristic of “cosmic” christologies with a dualistic worldview that present Jesus triumphing over the cosmic powers.

on the other hand (with the focus laid on the ascension paradigm). The scenic adaptation fits the christological kerygma into a narrative form, conveying the encounter with the risen Jesus within the dimensions of time and space<sup>55</sup>. However, as Jesus has not returned to his old life, but has been resurrected to a life beyond death, not being subject to the contingency of historical existence any longer<sup>56</sup>, the spatial and temporal categories are to be understood mythologically and metaphorically, referring to a transcendent process that is not further expounded or described<sup>57</sup>.

Accordingly, Jesus' command to let him go and not to cling to the former relationship, refers to his new status, eluding all attempts to take hold of him<sup>58</sup>, as also the previous narrative motifs show. The futile search for the missing corpse, the empty tomb in which he has just left the sign of the carefully rolled up burial cloths<sup>59</sup>, and the gradual recognition process all point to the discontinuation of the earthly limited relationship<sup>60</sup>, as well as to the necessity of realizing a new mode of contact.

Instead, Mary is explicitly commissioned by the risen Jesus to convey his soteriological message: Since "the hour" of his ascent to the Father is now<sup>61</sup>, a new relationship with him and through him to God is established for the disciples who are now called his brothers and sisters (correlating to the anticipatory τέκνα θεοῦ of John 1,12; see also 11,52). As Jesus ascends to his Father and completes his work, his Father and God becomes

55. WILCKENS, *Evangelium* (n. 10), p. 309, points out: "An der *Geschehenswirklichkeit* der Auferstehung des Gekreuzigten aber ist auch dem Joh.evangelisten selbst ganz und gar gelegen, und darum auch an ihrer *Erzählbarkeit*".

56. Cf. J. ZUMSTEIN, *Kreative Erinnerung: Relecture und Auslegung im Johannes-evangelium*, Zürich, Pano-Verlag, 1999, p. 182.

57. Cf. SCHNACKENBURG, *Johannesevangelium* (n. 50), p. 378.

58. See also LINDARS, *Gospel* (n. 29), p. 607: "The desire to hold Jesus must be restrained, because it is an attempt to recapture the conditions of the incarnate life in place of the universal and abiding relationship which is the object of his mission". M.W.G. STIBBE, *John* (Readings: A New Biblical Commentary), Sheffield, JSOT, 1993, p. 204, underlines the elusiveness of the risen Jesus and sees in the command "a statement which again seems to reinforce the picture of a Jesus who will not be grasped in any final sense".

59. As an allusion to Exod 34,33-35, SCHNEIDERS, *Encounter* (n. 50), p. 158, interprets the σουδάριον (John 20,7) furthermore as "the face cloth of the New Moses definitively rolled up and laid aside"; cf. also S.M. SCHNEIDERS, *The Face Veil: A Johannine Sign (John 20: 1-10)*, in *BTB* 13 (1983) 94-97, p. 96, and S.M. SCHNEIDERS, *Touching the Risen Jesus: Mary Magdalene and Thomas the Twin in John 20*, in KOESTER – BIERINGER (eds.), *Resurrection* (n. 33), 153-176, p. 164.

60. Even though insisting on the meaning "to touch", SCHNEIDERS, *Touching* (n. 59), pp. 171-172, comes to a similar conclusion: "The point is that physical 'touching' – which is an apt metonymy for the physically mediated historical experience of two people relating 'in the flesh,' that is, as mortal human beings – has come to an end".

61. Cf. SCHNACKENBURG, *Johannesevangelium* (n. 50), p. 377.

their Father and God. While the addition of καὶ πατέρα ὑμῶν<sup>62</sup> to the Johannine expression ὁ πατήρ μου refers to the imagery of the family of God, the phrase καὶ πρὸς τὸν θεόν μου καὶ θεὸν ὑμῶν is covenantal<sup>63</sup> (cf. Exod 6,7; Lev 26,12; Jer 31,33; Ezek 36,28; Ruth 1,16), proclaiming the imminence of the new covenant as *familia Dei*.

Since ἀναβαίνω corresponds to καταβαίνω (cf. 3,13; 6,62; see also Eph 4,9-10), the ascent of the Johannine Jesus is to be understood as his return to where he came from (cf. 8,14; 13,3; 16,28). In this re-ascent, “his own” are implied, so the final fulfilment of the promises of the Last Discourses is their permanent union with Jesus and also the Father: ἴνα ὅπου εἰμι ἐγὼ καὶ ὑμεῖς ἦτε (14,3; cf. 14,20.23; 17,24; 12,26.32). Jesus’ enduring presence is realized by the gift of the Spirit that can come only when he has ascended to the Father (16,7; see also 14,16-17.26; 15,26; 16,13-14; furthermore the anticipatory narrator’s comment in 7,39 and the narrative implementation in 20,22).

As Jesus’ brothers and sisters, his followers are called to continue his work. Before departing, Jesus gives his disciples the commandment to love one another (13,34-35; 15,9-17); whoever keeps his commandments, loves Jesus and is loved by him and the Father, who will make their dwelling with him/her (cf. 14,21.23). Thus, the post-Easter community as the family of God constitutes the place where Jesus’ living presence can be experienced<sup>64</sup>.

So the Johannine Easter narrative reflects the impact of Jesus’ exaltation on the community of his followers. Presenting Jesus already on the cross as the Exalted One, the focus therefore is on the constitution of the post-Easter community, where Jesus remains present.

Hence, the recognition of the risen Jesus is followed by a commission: Mary of Magdala assumes an important function which makes her unique status clear, since Jesus sends her as the first witness of his new presence<sup>65</sup>. Whereas Jesus has to go to the Father, she has to go to his brothers and sisters and to convey his message in order to make the promises of the

62. The Johannine Jesus has avoided speaking of “your” or “our” Father so far. The occurrence in 8,42 (εἰ ὁ θεὸς πατήρ ὑμῶν ἦν) is an “unreal” indicative (*irrealis*) in a conditional clause. See also the reserve in 8,54: ... ἔστιν ὁ πατήρ μου ὁ δοξάζων με, ὃν ὑμεῖς λέγετε ὅτι θεὸς ἡμῶν ἐστιν.

63. Cf. BROWN, *John XIII–XXI* (n. 7), p. 1017; D.A. LEE, *Partnership in Easter Faith: The Role of Mary Magdalene and Thomas in John 20*, in *JSNT* 58 (1995) 37-49, p. 45; SCHNEIDERS, *Encounter* (n. 50), pp. 166-167; S. VAN TILBORG, *Imaginative Love in John* (Biblical Interpretation Series, 2), Leiden, Brill, 1993, p. 206.

64. See also WENGST, *Johannesevangelium* (n. 49), p. 288.

65. Cf. H. THYEN, *Das Johannesevangelium* (HNT, 6), Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2005, p. 763.

Last Discourses come true. As Dorothy A. Lee points out, her commission “is the pre-condition for the giving of the Spirit; in proclaiming the message she prepares the way for the risen Lord to manifest his presence”<sup>66</sup>.

The experience of the new presence of the Exalted One requires letting the earthly Jesus go, in the sense of losing him, giving up the former relationship in order to win him back in a new way<sup>67</sup>. Since there is no physical contact any more, the mode of contact has to be changed. As Sandra M. Schneiders suggests, “what Jesus is really doing is redirecting Mary’s desire for union with himself from his physical or earthly body (which in any case no longer exists because it is the glorified Lord who stands before her in an appearance which is temporary) to the new locus of his presence in the world, that is, the community of his brothers and sisters, the disciples”<sup>68</sup>.

But Mary of Magdala also serves as a representative figure for the post-Easter community and as a role model for the implied readers. Her search for the Lord corresponds to Jesus’ prediction in 13,33 (ζητήσετέ με)<sup>69</sup> on the level of a narrative dramatization. Her paradigmatic Easter experience (see 14,18ff.; 16,16ff.) is presented as the first post-Easter commission, correlating to the call narratives of John 1<sup>70</sup>. So, as she has to overcome her fixation on Jesus’ corpse for which she vainly searched (see the triple identification with κύριος in 20,2.13.15), the post-Easter community has to learn<sup>71</sup> not to cling to the fleshly Jesus, for the task is not to keep the memory of a dead one, but to proclaim the living presence of the risen Jesus. The communicative structures of the narrative invite the readers to participate in Mary’s recognition process, so that they can identify with her finding Jesus after his departing anew, in order to be

66. LEE, *Partnership* (n. 63), p. 48.

67. Cf. ZUMSTEIN, *Erinnerung* (n. 56), p. 190.

68. SCHNEIDERS, *Encounter* (n. 50), pp. 164-165. She points to the “emphatic placement of the ‘me’ at the beginning of the command and closest to the negative” (*ibid.*, p. 164), opposing therefore μή μου ἕπτου – πορεύου δὲ πρὸς τοὺς ἀδελφούς μου καὶ εἰπὲ αὐτοῖς ... But such an emphasis would have been better conveyed by the accentuated pronoun ἐμοῦ. – In SCHNEIDERS, *Touching* (n. 59), pp. 170-176, she refers to the ecclesial community as the sacramental body of Christ mediating the “bodily but nonphysical and definitive presence of Jesus in the world” (*ibid.*, p. 170).

69. Unlike 7,34 without the addition καὶ οὐχ εὐρήσετε με.

70. See S. RUSCHMANN, *Maria von Magdala im Johannesevangelium: Jüngerin – Zeugin – Lebensbotin* (NTAbh, 40), Münster, Aschendorff, 2002, pp. 121-164; TASCHLERBER, *Maria von Magdala* (n. 1), pp. 301-309.

71. I am aware that my interpretation would be classified by ATTRIDGE, *Don’t Be Touching Me* (n. 48), as another example of “the pattern of ‘dramatic psychagogy’” (*ibid.*, p. 151). Nevertheless, a didactic aim of the text is in line with the purpose of the whole gospel (cf. 20,31).

able to give testimony of the Living One. While Mary of Magdala represents the ideal Johannine disciple and thus Johannine Christianity on the narrative level of the multidimensional text, on the historical level, though, it has to be noted that the Johannine reception of the first witness of the risen Jesus presupposes a traditional basis for its creative *relecture*<sup>72</sup>.

#### IV. INTERTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE LOVE IMAGERY

As has been pointed out, the Johannine Easter narrative correlates to the Last Discourses reflecting on Jesus' departing and returning. What is theologically expounded and commented upon in anticipation (cf. 14,29), is accomplished in John 20 in a narrative form. So the traditions which are taken up in the Easter narrative are to be read in the light of the proleptic commentary in 14,18ff.<sup>73</sup>, for instance:

Οὐκ ἀφήσω ὑμᾶς ὀρφανούς,  
 ἔρχομαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς.  
 ἔτι μικρὸν  
 καὶ ὁ κόσμος με οὐκέτι θεωρεῖ,  
 ὑμεῖς δὲ θεωρεῖτέ με<sup>74</sup>,  
 ὅτι ἐγὼ ζῶ  
 καὶ ὑμεῖς ζήσετε.  
 ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ γνώσεσθε ὑμεῖς  
 ὅτι ἐγὼ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ μου  
 καὶ ὑμεῖς ἐν ἐμοὶ  
 κἀγὼ ἐν ὑμῖν.  
 ὁ ἔχων τὰς ἐντολάς μου καὶ τηρῶν αὐτάς

72. RUSCHMANN, *Maria von Magdala* (n. 70), p. 248, underlines: "Nur als historische Figur, die als Zeugin der Auferstehung Jesu traditionell verbürgt und von der Gemeinde anerkannt ist, kann Joh sie zum Symbol für Osterzeugenschaft schlechthin erheben". For a detailed historical-critical investigation including redaction-critical issues, see TASCHL-ERBER, *Maria von Magdala* (n. 1), pp. 197-271; for a concise profile of the Magdalene on a historical basis, furthermore, A. TASCHL-ERBER, *Mary of Magdala – First Disciple?*, in M. PERRONI – M. NAVARRO PUERTO (eds.), *Gospels: Narrative and History*, English edition by A.-J. LEVINE (The Bible and Women, 2.1), Atlanta, GA, Society of Biblical Literature, 2015, 431-454 (Spanish edition published in Estella, Verbo Divino, 2011; German edition in Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 2011; Italian edition in Trapani, Il Pozzo di Giacobbe, 2012).

73. See e.g. M. THEOBALD, *Der johanneische Osterglaube und die Grenzen seiner narrativen Vermittlung (Joh 20)*, in R. HOPPE – U. BUSSE (eds.), *Von Jesus zum Christus: Christologische Studien: Festgabe für Paul Hoffmann zum 65. Geburtstag* (BZNW, 93), Berlin, de Gruyter, 1998, 93-123, pp. 93-94, 99; ZUMSTEIN, *Erinnerung* (n. 56), p. 185; SCHNEIDERS, *Face Veil* (n. 59), p. 97. A detailed analysis of the references specifically to 14,18-24 is offered by RUSCHMANN, *Maria von Magdala* (n. 70), pp. 165-209.

74. See also the *relecture* in John 16,16ff.: Μικρὸν καὶ οὐκέτι θεωρεῖτέ με, καὶ πάντων μικρὸν καὶ ὄψεσθε με ...

ἐκεῖνός ἐστιν ὁ ἀγαπῶν με·  
 ὁ δὲ ἀγαπῶν με ἀγαπηθήσεται ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρός μου,  
 κἀγὼ ἀγαπήσω αὐτὸν  
 καὶ ἐμφανίσω αὐτῷ ἑμαυτόν. (...)  
 ... ἐάν τις ἀγαπᾷ με  
 τὸν λόγον μου τηρήσει,  
 καὶ ὁ πατήρ μου ἀγαπήσει αὐτὸν  
 καὶ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐλευσόμεθα  
 καὶ μονὴν παρ' αὐτῷ ποιησόμεθα.

The apocalyptic “day”<sup>75</sup> of seeing Jesus because he lives (ὁμοῖς δὲ θεωρεῖτέ με, ὅτι ἐγὼ ζῶ) and grants participating life (καὶ ὑμεῖς ζήσετε) in permanent association with him has now come. The disciples are realizing that they are implied in the mutual indwelling of Jesus and his Father (γνώσεσθε ὑμεῖς ὅτι ἐγὼ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ μου καὶ ὑμεῖς ἐν ἐμοὶ κἀγὼ ἐν ὑμῖν, cf. 14,2-3), who is also their Father now (20,17).

Representing the ideal post-Easter disciple, Mary of Magdala acts as a prototype for the community that has been promised by the departing Jesus to see him return. Her Easter experience functions as a paradigm: As she has to turn (cf. στρέφομαι in 20,14.16) from grief (cf. 16,16; 20,11.13.15) to joy (cf. 16,16)<sup>76</sup>, from death to life, from κλαίειν to ἀγγέλλειν, the post-Easter community has to realize Jesus’ new presence.

In 14,21.23 the focus shifts from the disciples addressed on the story level to the readers. Whoever loves Jesus (ὁ ἀγαπῶν με / ἐάν τις ἀγαπᾷ με)<sup>77</sup> will experience his loving post-Easter presence. Loving Jesus, who therefore reveals himself (ἐμφανίσω ... ἑμαυτόν) to her, Mary thus represents the community of believers.

Since, according to John 14,21-23, the Easter encounter with Jesus is a result of mutual love (see also the triple question to Peter in John 21), Mary’s Easter experience serves as a model of recognition by love. Inasmuch as faith, insight, and love characterize the ideal disciple in the

75. ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ refers neither to the eschatological “last day”, nor to the “third day” of early Christian tradition, but to the Johannine “day” of Easter that begins with Jesus’ death (cf. THEOBALD, *Osterglaube* [n. 73], pp. 96-97); ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ (14,20; 16,23) correlates to τῇ δὲ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων in 20,1 and οὔσης οὖν ὀψίας τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ τῇ μιᾷ σαββάτων in 20,19.

76. On the explicit story level realized in 20,20.

77. Loving Jesus is linked with keeping his commands and words (see also 14,15; 15,10 and Deut 5,10; 7,9; 10,12-13; 11,1.13.22; 19,9; 30,16). On this, THEOBALD, *Osterglaube* (n. 73), pp. 98-99: “In diesen nämlich, die der Heilige Geist, der Paraklet, nachsterlich lehren bzw. erinnern wird (V.26), begegnet Jesus selbst den Glaubenden, zeigt sich ihnen als der sie Liebende, worin sich, da es ja die Worte dessen sind, der Jesus gesandt hat, gleichzeitig auch seine, des Vaters Liebe offenbart (V.23). (...) Jesu Wiederkunft ... ereignet sich in seinem Wort; wer es als das Wort der Liebe ergreift und festhält, in dem nimmt Jesus Wohnung”.

Gospel of John, Mary's love therefore is not to be viewed as a matter of her gender, but she rather constitutes a counterpart of the Beloved Disciple.

While patristic readings focus on Mary's love, some apocrypha highlight her privileged status as the (most) beloved disciple (cf. *Gos. Mary*, BG 18,14-15/PRy1 463 v. 7-8; *Gos. Phil.* 63,30-64,9), and thus as guarantor of the respective tradition, as well as of women's apostleship/leadership (competing with the male disciples, particularly Peter)<sup>78</sup>. Especially the *Gospel of Mary* attracts attention since the revelation which Jesus gives her privately incorporates a vision of the soul's ascent to heaven, apparently unfolding the message entrusted to her in John 20,17.

In the light of Cant 3,1-4, an intertextual analysis of the love imagery discloses symbolic overtones in the multilayered Johannine narrative.

- (1) Ἐπὶ κοίτην μου ἐν νυξίν  
 ἐζήτησα ὃν ἠγάπησεν ἡ ψυχὴ μου·  
 ἐζήτησα αὐτὸν καὶ οὐχ εὔρον αὐτόν,  
 ἐκάλεσα αὐτόν, καὶ οὐχ ὑπήκουσέν μου.  
 (2) ἀναστήσομαι δὴ καὶ κυκλώσω ἐν τῇ πόλει  
 ἐν ταῖς ἀγοραῖς καὶ ἐν ταῖς πλατείαις  
 καὶ ζητήσω ὃν ἠγάπησεν ἡ ψυχὴ μου·  
 ἐζήτησα αὐτὸν καὶ οὐχ εὔρον αὐτόν.  
 (3) εὔροσάν με οἱ τηροῦντες οἱ κυκλοῦντες ἐν τῇ πόλει  
 Μὴ ὃν ἠγάπησεν ἡ ψυχὴ μου εἶδετε;  
 (4) ὡς μικρὸν ὅτε παρήλθον ἀπ' αὐτῶν,  
 ἕως οὗ εὔρον ὃν ἠγάπησεν ἡ ψυχὴ μου·  
 ἐκράτησα αὐτόν καὶ οὐκ ἀφήσω αὐτόν  
 ἕως οὗ εἰσήγαγον αὐτόν εἰς οἶκον μητρός μου ...<sup>79</sup>.

Like the lover in the Song of Songs, who searches<sup>80</sup> for her beloved at night (ἐν νυξίν; cf. John 20,1 σκοτίας ἔτι οὔσης), Mary of Magdala

78. For a detailed investigation of the Magdalene's apocryphal portrait and references, see TASCHL-ERBER, *Maria von Magdala* (n. 1), pp. 479-588; furthermore e.g. A.G. BROCK, *Mary Magdalene, The First Apostle: The Struggle for Authority* (HTS, 51), Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2003; E.A. DE BOER, *The Gospel of Mary: Beyond a Gnostic and a Biblical Mary Magdalene* (JSNT.S, 260), London, T&T Clark, 2004; J. HARTENSTEIN, *Die zweite Lehre: Erscheinungen des Auferstandenen als Rahmenerzählungen frühchristlicher Dialoge* (TU, 146), Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 2000; A. MARJANEN, *The Woman Jesus Loved: Mary Magdalene in the Nag Hammadi Library and Related Documents* (NHS, 40), Leiden, Brill, 1996; E. MOHRI, *Maria Magdalena: Frauenbilder in Evangelientexten des 1. bis 3. Jahrhunderts* (MTSt, 63), Marburg, Elwert, 2000; S. PETERSEN, "Zerstört die Werke der Weiblichkeit!": *Maria Magdalena, Salome und andere Jüngerinnen Jesu in christlich-gnostischen Schriften* (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies, 48), Leiden, Brill, 1999; J. SCHABERG, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene: Legends, Apocrypha, and the Christian Testament*, New York, Continuum, 2002, pp. 121-203.

79. LXX edition by A. RAHLFS.

80. Cf. also Cant 1,7; 5,6; 6,1.

cannot find Jesus at first. As in Cant 3,3 the guards, so in John 20,13 the angels do not answer the question as to the whereabouts of the beloved (indeed, Mary's strange dialogue with them does not really comply with the genre of an angelophany). Both female characters find the searched-for shortly after turning away from them (cf. Cant 3,4; John 20,14). However, the Johannine narrative inserts the motif of not recognizing Jesus at once like a *ritardando*<sup>81</sup> and negates an immediate contact in contrast to Cant 3,4 (... ἐκράτησα αὐτὸν καὶ οὐκ ἀφήσω αὐτόν).

There are even more corresponding motifs. As to παρακύπτω (frequently “peeping after a lover”<sup>82</sup>), for example, the roles are interchanged in Cant 2,9/John 20,11 (see also 20,5). The garden motif may allude to Cant 4,12-16; 5,1; 6,2.11; 8,13; furthermore, see Cant 7,1; 8,6.

In the case of the Song of Songs, even a strict definition of intertextuality focusing on obvious links or direct references seems to work, even though not on the level of explicit quotations here, but more subtle allusions and echoes<sup>83</sup>. As a *relecture* of the Song of Songs' allegorical interpretation as a love relationship of JHWH and Israel<sup>84</sup>, Mary symbolizes the Johannine community searching for the beloved and represents “the spouse of the New Covenant mediated by Jesus in his glorification”<sup>85</sup>. Patristic exegesis continues the spiritual-allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs by applying the typology of the bride to the church. Searching for the beloved, Mary Magdalene serves as a type for the *ecclesia* (whereas particularly in medieval mysticism she also typifies the mystic's soul that is female-connoted).

81. Cf. EBNER, *Jüngerin* (n. 22), p. 43.

82. LIDDELL – SCOTT – JONES, *Lexicon* (n. 4), p. 1315. Cf. EBNER, *Jüngerin* (n. 22), p. 42.

83. Cf. the scene at the well in John 4 / Gen 24 or 29 – S. VAN DEN EYNDE, *Love, Strong as Death? An Inter- and Intratextual Perspective on John 20,1-18*, in G. VAN BELLE (ed.), *The Death of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (BETL, 200), Leuven, University Press – Peeters, 2007, 901-912, p. 910, questions “the compulsory nature of such a reading on the level of the historical origin of the Gospel text”. But why should the intertextual links not have been obvious for first century readers when they are evident for later exegetes? After all, the basic frame of reference was the Hebrew Bibel, or the LXX respectively (rather than the synoptic gospels). – For the application of a “wide concept of intertextuality” see S. VAN DEN EYNDE, *Do not Hold on to Me: A Plea for an Intertextual Interpretation of Mary Magdalene*, in BAERT et al. (eds.), *Noli me tangere* (n. 25), 1-12.

84. Y. ZAKOVITCH, *Das Hohelied* (HTKAT), Freiburg, Herder, 2004, pp. 95-97, assumes a quite early allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs (“bereits vor der endgültigen Fixierung des Textes”; *ibid.*, p. 96) and considers John 3,29 already as New Testament evidence (cf. *ibid.*, p. 101).

85. SCHNEIDERS, *Encounter* (n. 50), p. 168.

In the approximately contemporaneous Hellenistic romance literature, the final recognition and reunion of loving couples after a long span of separation and searching for each other constitutes a common pattern<sup>86</sup>, for example in the popular<sup>87</sup> novel of CHARITON OF APHRODISIAS from about the time of Jesus' birth, called *Kallirhoë* after the female main character. Kallirhoë, who has been separated from her lover Chaireas immediately after the wedding, falls into his hands as loot after a long odyssey of both. While he is speaking to her, she recognizes the voice of her spouse, whom she has presumed dead:

ἔτι λέγοντος ἡ Καλλιρόη γνωρίσασα τὴν φωνὴν ἀπεκαλύψατο καὶ ἀμφοτέροι συνεβόησαν “Χαιρέα”, “Καλλιρόη”. περιχυθέντες δὲ ἀλλήλοις, λιποψυχήσαντες ἔπεσον<sup>88</sup>.

After the mutual calling by name (cf. John 20,16) they embrace and sink fainting to the floor. Chaireas' companion, though, advises caution and interrupts the embracing.

A further scene reminiscent of John 20 can be found previously in *Kallirhoë* 3.1-3: When Chaireas comes early in the morning to the tomb of his (seemingly dead) spouse, who has been displaced by grave robbers, he finds the stones removed and the access open, so he is startled and confused<sup>89</sup>. As the news spreads, all Syracusians run to the tomb<sup>90</sup>. At first, nobody dares to enter until someone officially appointed reports that not even the corpse is lying in the tomb<sup>91</sup>. Then (τότ' οὖν)<sup>92</sup> Chaireas himself enters the tomb, but cannot find anything. He infers that Kallirhoë has been enraptured to the gods, yet vows to search for her.

86. The genre was especially in vogue in the first two centuries AD; cf. N. HOLZBERG, *Der antike Roman* (Artemis Einführungen, 25), München, Artemis, 1986, pp. 7-8, 33.

87. A recommendation by the satirist PERSIUS (34-62 AD) shows the fact that Chariton's romance became a classic and almost synonymous for easy literature: *his mane edictum, post prandia Calliroen do* (Sat. 1.134); cf. G.P. GOOLD (ed.), *Chariton: Callirhoe* (LCL, 481), Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1995, pp. 4-5; EBNER, *Jüngerin* (n. 22), pp. 43-44, n. 20.

88. CHARITON, *Kallirhoë* 8.8; quoted from GOOLD, *Chariton* (n. 87), p. 364.

89. ... Χαιρέας δὲ φυλάξας αὐτὸ τὸ περίορθρον ἤκεν ἐπὶ τὸν τάφον ... παραγενόμενος δὲ εἶρε τοὺς λίθους κεκινημένους καὶ φανεράν τὴν εἴσοδον. ὁ μὲν οὖν ἰδὼν ἐξεπλάγη καὶ ὑπὸ δεινῆς ἀπορίας κατείχετο τοῦ γεγονότος χάριν ... (quoted from GOOLD, *Chariton* [n. 87], p. 144).

90. πάντες οὖν συντρέχον ἐπὶ τὸν τάφον (CHARITON, *Kallirhoë* 3.2; quoted from *ibid.*). Cf. John 20,3.

91. ἄπιστον ἐδόκει τὸ μηδὲ τὴν νεκρὰν κεῖσθαι (CHARITON, *Kallirhoë* 3.3; quoted from *ibid.*). Cf. John 20,5-7.

92. *Ibid.* Cf. John 20,8. So the Beloved Disciple may be compared to Chaireas; in contrast, though, he transcends the aporia in view of the empty tomb to faithful insight.

Chariton found an imitator in Xenophon of Ephesos<sup>93</sup>, whose *Ephesiaka*, telling the story of Abrokomes and Anthia, are dated about 125 AD<sup>94</sup>. When Abrokomes hears that his beloved is in Rhodos as well, he runs through the city, calling her name, until he finds her at the temple of Isis. A similar scene takes place:

ὥς δὲ εἶδον ἀλλήλους, εὐθὺς ἀνεγνώρισαν ... καὶ περιλαβόντες ἀλλήλους εἰς γῆν κατηνέχθησαν ... (5.13.3)<sup>95</sup>.

So in the light of the intertextuality with Hellenistic romance literature, Mary's "symbolic role as the bride of the messianic groom"<sup>96</sup> is revealed once more. In contrast to the love-novels of late antiquity, the reunion in John 20 does not perpetuate the physical contact<sup>97</sup>. With her experience of the beloved's present absence and absent presence mirroring the discontinuation of the former relationship, Mary represents the believing community, to whom she shows the way to a new enduring relationship with Jesus.

Since the multilayered text operates on several levels, hints for symbolic-allegorical readings can thus be detected already in the Johannine narrative (cf. also the motifs of the darkness, the keeper of the garden and Mary's double turning, all pointing to a metaphorical understanding beyond the superficial level). However, allegorical interpretations of patristic exegesis often go a step further.

## V. PATRISTIC READINGS<sup>98</sup>

The Easter accounts of the gospels presenting women as the recipients of the first commission to announce the resurrection seem to have constituted

93. Even though the name may be a pseudonym (cf. HOLZBERG, *Roman* [n. 86], pp. 43ff., 62), the novel's connection to Ephesos seems noteworthy. Aphrodisias is about 90 km east of Ephesos (cf. EBNER, *Jüngerin* [n. 22], p. 43, n. 20).

94. Cf. GOOLD, *Chariton* (n. 87), p. 2. HOLZBERG, *Roman* (n. 86), pp. 13, 62, indicates the end of the first century as *terminus post quem*.

95. Quoted from A.D. PAPANIKOLAOU (ed.), *Xenophontis Ephesii Ephesiacorum libri V de amoribus Anthiae et Abrocomae* (Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana), Leipzig, Teubner, 1973, p. 69.

96. A. FEHRIBACH, *The "Birthing" Bridegroom: The Portrayal of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, in LEVINE (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to John: Volume II* (n. 48), 104-129, p. 117.

97. As in the Hellenistic romances the first embrace is sometimes interrupted as well, VAN TILBORG, *Love* (n. 63), p. 206, comments on the Johannine scene: "the physical contact between Jesus and Mary Magdalene comes to an end but the contact itself is not broken".

98. Since a comprehensive treatment goes beyond the scope of this study, I will concentrate on the most significant passages. See also R. NÜRNBERG, *Apostolae Apostolorum: Die Frauen am Grab als erste Zeuginnen der Auferstehung in der Väterexegese*, in G. SCHÖLLGEN – C. SCHOLTEN (eds.), *Stimuli: Exegese und ihre Hermeneutik in Antike*

a problem for patristic exegetes because this portrayal stood in contradiction to the dominant gender constructions and power structures of church and society – especially since such an example of female apostleship could lead to concrete claims of women in the respective communities. Thus, several strategies were developed, even though the protophany of the risen Jesus to Mary of Magdala was not challenged, in order to integrate this tradition – in a patriarchal setting rather subversive – into the established ecclesiastical order where women were forbidden to teach<sup>99</sup>.

On the one hand, the configuration of the Magdalene with the female character of the Song of Songs searching for her beloved by night (Cant 3,1-4) presents Mary of Magdala as type and model of the *ecclesia*<sup>100</sup> to whom her apostolic mission now is ascribed. On the other hand, she serves as an antitype to Eve, who is seen as responsible for sin and death (see already Sir 25,24), symbolizing thus the New Eve in the new garden of Eden, now bringing the message of life instead of death and so repairing the fault of the first woman. A similar androcentric exegesis of the Genesis stories appears in the New Testament letters when the subordination of women is the target (see especially 1 Tim 2,11-15). Furthermore, Mary's way to Easter faith, which is described in John 20,1-18 as a gradual process encompassing several steps from misunderstanding to final recognition, is often denigrated by means of pejorative gender-related prejudices.

*und Christentum: Festschrift für Ernst Dassmann* (JAC.E, 23), Münster, Aschendorff, 1996, 228-242, and M. MARIN, *La Maddalena e il Risorto: Egesesi patristica di Gv 20 (1-2.11-18)*, in C. RICCI – M. MARIN (eds.), *L'apostola: Maria Maddalena inascoltata verità* (Tyche, 2), Bari, Palomar, 2006, 49-80 (both without particular focus on John 20,17). A helpful survey as regards the Latin Fathers' interpretations of the *Noli me tangere* is provided by A. DUPONT – W. DE PRIL, *Marie-Madeleine et Jean 20,17 dans la littérature patristique latine*, in *Augustinianum* 56 (2006) 159-182 (see below, pp. 111-122). See furthermore A. TASCHL-ERBER, "Eva wird Apostel!" *Rezeptionslinien des Osterapostolats Marias von Magdala in der lateinischen Patristik*, in I. FISCHER – C. HEIL (eds.), *Geschlechterverhältnisse und Macht: Lebensformen in der Zeit des frühen Christentums* (Exegese in unserer Zeit, 21), Münster, LIT, 2010, 161-196. R. ATWOOD, *Mary Magdalene in the New Testament Gospels and Early Tradition* (EHS.T, 457), Bern, Lang, 1993, pp. 147-185, in the light of the so-called "Magdalene question" examines if and to what extent the patristic writings point to an identification of the Magdalene with Mary of Bethany and the sinner of Luke 7. Regarding this issue, see already U. HOLZMEISTER, *Die Magdalenenfrage in der kirchlichen Überlieferung*, in *ZKT* 46 (1922) 402-422, 556-584.

99. See 1 Cor 14,34-35; 1 Tim 2,11-12 or TERTULLIAN, *Virg.* 9.1: *Non permittitur mulieri in ecclesia loqui, sed nec docere, nec tinguere, nec offerre, nec ullius uirilis muneris, nedum sacerdotalis officii sortem sibi uindicare* (CCSL 2, 1218.4–1219.1).

100. See, for instance, ASTERIUS THE SOPHIST, *In Ps. 5 Hom. 1* 18: ... ὅτε καὶ ἡ Μαρία, εἰς τύπον τῆς ἐκκλησίας ὀρθρίσασα, ὡς ἐπὶ θάλαμον τὸν τάφον ἐπιζητεῖ τὸν νύμφιον (quoted from M. RICHARD [ed.], *Asterii Sophistae Commentariorum in Psalmos Quae Supersunt: Accedunt Aliquot Homiliae Anonymae* [Symbolae Osloenses, 16], Oslo, Brøgger, 1961, p. 54).

These topoi can to some extent already be found in Hippolytus' *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, which adopts the rabbinic allegorical interpretation<sup>101</sup>. Commenting upon Cant 3,1-4, Hippolytus refers to John 20 (as well as the synoptics' resurrection accounts) and Gen 3 as intertexts, superimposing the female character (= the synagogue) searching for her beloved and Mary (besides Martha)<sup>102</sup> at the tomb:

O blessed voice! O blessed women revealed by an earlier type! Because of this, she cries out and says, 'I sought by night him whom my soul loves.' See this fulfilled in [Martha and] Mary. With them, the synagogue was diligently seeking the dead Christ whom it did not expect to see alive<sup>103</sup>.

In Hippolytus' reading, the *Noli me tangere* motif is harmonized with Matt 28,9 and Cant 3,4: "O blessed woman who clings to the feet of him who is about to fly off into the air!"<sup>104</sup>. In this context, the figure of Eve is introduced, who often represents "the woman" in patristic texts<sup>105</sup>:

101. For a more detailed study, see A. TASCHL-ERBER, *Intertextuelle Lektüre und typologische Interfigurationen im Hohelied-Kommentar des Hippolyt*, forthcoming in A. SIQUANS (ed.), *Biblische Frauen in patristischer Rezeption – Biblical Women in Patristic Reception*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

102. The configuration of Mary, who is not characterized by the denomination of her provenance (or familial relationships), with Martha suggests an early evidence of the (con)fusion of the Magdalene with Martha's "sister" (cf. Luke 10,38-42; John 11,1-45; 12,1-8). However, the variants in the manuscripts might also point to later text revisions because of the very identification in later times. See also the textual variants regarding the names of the women in *EpApost* 9-11. AMBROSE, who depends on Hippolytus, has in *Isaac* 5.42: ... *veniamus ad illam Mariam, veniamus ad Magdalenam* (CSEL 32/1, 666.18-19); cf. the two Marys in Matt 28. J.A. CERRATO, *Hippolytus between East and West: The Commentaries and the Provenance of the Corpus* (OTM), Oxford, OUP, 2002, pp. 196-200, assumes a deliberate substitution of the Magdalene because of her prominence in Gnostic circles.

103. Quoted from B. McCONVERY, *Hippolytus' Commentary on the Song of Songs and John 20: Intertextual Reading in Early Christianity*, in *IrTQ* 71 (2006) 211-222, p. 217. A critical edition of the (only complete) Georgian version of the originally Greek writing, based upon two medieval manuscripts, is provided (with Latin translation) by G. GARITTE (ed.), *Traité d'Hippolyte sur David et Goliath, sur le Cantique des cantiques et sur l'Antéchrist: Version géorgienne* (CSCO, 263-264), Louvain, Secrétariat du CSCO, 1965. G.N. BONWETSCH (ed.), *Hippolyt's Kommentar zum Hohelied auf Grund von N. Marrs Ausgabe des grusinischen Textes* (TU, 23 N.F. 8/2c), Leipzig, Hinrichs, 1902, presented, in German translation, a synoptic edition of the Georgian version (based upon Marr's Russian translation of the 10<sup>th</sup> century manuscript) besides Ancient Slavonic (from the 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup> century) and Armenian fragments. For a French translation of the relevant passage, see V. SAXER, *Marie Madeleine dans le Commentaire d'Hippolyte sur le Cantique des Cantiques*, in *RBen* 107 (1991) 219-239, pp. 221-227 (based upon the Georgian text, with references to the Armenian tradition in the notes).

104. Quoted from McCONVERY, *Hippolytus' Commentary* (n. 103), p. 218.

105. See e.g. TERTULLIAN, *Cult. fem.* 1.1.1: ... *et Euam te esse nescis?* (CCSL 1, 343.14).

“We will not permit you to fly away. Ascend to the Father and offer a new victim, Eve, no longer wandering but clinging with her hands to the tree of life. Behold, I have clung to his knees, not like a cord that can be broken, but I have clung to the feet of Christ. Do not cast me to the earth lest I wander, snatch me up into heaven”. O blessed women who did not wish to be separated from Christ. (...) Receive my soul, let it be united with the Spirit, become strengthened, perfected ... Let this body of mine be joined with the heavenly body<sup>106</sup>.

So the original order of creation is reconstituted<sup>107</sup>: “Receive Eve, no longer like a woman groaning in childbirth, because her pains, groans and sorrows are ended”<sup>108</sup>. The apostolic testimony of the Easter witnesses is regarded as a compensation of the first woman’s disobedience:

After this, let the synagogue cry out and confess through these women. They show us a good testimony who were made apostles to the apostles, sent by Christ. (...) So that the apostles might not doubt that these women were sent by the angels, Jesus himself comes to meet the apostles so that the women might be truly recognised as apostles of Christ and make good the failure of ancient Eve by their obedience. (...) O new consolations! Eve has become an apostle<sup>109</sup>.

In the end, the synagogue is substituted by the *ecclesia*, though.

106. Quoted from McCONVERY, *Hippolytus’ Commentary* (n. 103), p. 218. Obvious echoes appear in AMBROSE, *Isaac* 5.43, where the allegory is applied to the soul that is called to hold Jesus: *tange ergo et fide tene et constringe fideliter pedes eius, ut uirtus de eo exeat et sanet animam tuam. etsi dicat: noli me tangere, tu tene ... semel dixit: noli me tangere, quando resurrexit, aut forte illi dixit quae putabat furto esse sublatum ... denique in alio libro habes quia tenentibus pedes et adorantibus dixit: nolite timere. tene ergo et tu, anima, sicut tenebat et Maria, et dic: tenui eum et non dimittam, ceu dicebant ambae: tenemus te. uade ad patrem, sed non relinquans Euam, ne iterum labatur. tecum eam ducito, iam non errantem, sed arborem uitae tenentem. rape tuis pedibus inhaerentem, ut tecum ascendat. noli me dimittere, ne iterum serpens uenena sua fundat ...* (CSEL 32/1, 667.11–668.4).

107. See also HILARIUS, in *Matt.* 33.9 (*ordo in contrarium causae principalis est redditus*; SC 258, 260.16-17).

108. Quoted from McCONVERY, *Hippolytus’ Commentary* (n. 103), p. 219.

109. Quoted from *ibid.* G.N. BONWETSCH (ed.), *Hippolytus Werke*. Erster Band: *Exegetische und homiletische Schriften* (GCS, 1), Leipzig, Hinrichs, 1897, p. 354, has here (translation from the Ancient Slavonic version): “Aber damit sie nicht von einem Engel gesandt, keinen Glauben hätten (‘fänden’?), begegnet Christus selbst sendend, damit auch Frauen Christi Apostel werden ...” – Later on, it is told explicitly that the male disciples do not believe them (because of Eve), so that Christ has to convince them: “But so that they should not be thought to be deceived but speaking the truth, Christ [himself] was revealed to them at that time and said ‘Peace be with you’ (cf. John 20,19), as though to say ‘It is I who appeared to these women and wished to send them to you as apostles’” (quoted from McCONVERY, *Hippolytus’ Commentary* [n. 103], p. 219). The motif of disbelief countered by Christ’s commission to the women evokes Luke 24,11; Mark 16,11 and *EpApost* 10–11.

Focusing on the *Noli me tangere*, two strands of interpretations may be differentiated in the patristic exegesis of John 20,17. Roughly speaking, in the West moralistic interpretations on a “historical” level seem to predominate, whereas the Greek Fathers rather lean toward allegorical explanations<sup>110</sup>.

### 1. Moralistic Interpretations of the *Noli me tangere*

While Hippolytus underlines the apostleship of the female Easter witnesses, AMBROSE draws other conclusions. His commentary on Luke attests a moralistic interpretation of John 20,17 that considers a lack of faith on the side of Mary of Magdala<sup>111</sup> as eliciting Jesus’ prohibition<sup>112</sup>:

*Merito nimirum prohibetur tangere dominum; non enim corporali tactu Christum, sed fide tangimus. Nondum enim inquit ascendi ad Patrem meum, hoc est nondum tibi ascendi, quae uiuentem cum mortuis quaeris ...*<sup>113</sup>.

Since Mary searches for the living among the dead (cf. Luke 24,5), Jesus has not yet ascended for her whose faith is inadequate. So she is not worthy to touch him. This is a quite common topos in the patristic exegesis of the Latin Fathers (see also Jerome<sup>114</sup>, Maximus of Turin<sup>115</sup>, Paulinus of Nola<sup>116</sup>, Peter Chrysologus<sup>117</sup>, but Eusebius of Caesarea<sup>118</sup> as well). Ambrose infers a strict distinction of gender competencies from this interpretation of the *Noli me tangere*:

110. Similarly A. JENSEN, *Maria von Magdala – Traditionen der frühen Christenheit*, in D. BADER (ed.), *Maria Magdalena – Zu einem Bild der Frau in der christlichen Verkündigung* (Schriftenreihe der Katholischen Akademie der Erzdiözese Freiburg), München, Schnell & Steiner, 1990, 33-50, p. 39.

111. However, he distinguishes two Magdalenes on the basis of the differences between the Matthean and the Johannine account.

112. The Easter accounts of the gospels, on the other hand, notice unbelief and doubt on the side of the male disciples, especially the Eleven (cf. Matt 28,17; Luke 24,11.25.38.41; John 20,25.27; Mark 16,11.13-14).

113. *Exp. Luc.* 10.155 (CCSL 14, 390.1467-1470).

114. Cf. *Epist.* 39.6 (*‘non mereris tangere ...’*; CSEL 54, 307.9); *Epist.* 59.4 (*recte audit ... ‘non mereris ...’*; CSEL 54, 545.5-6); *Epist.* 120.5 (*‘... tangere non mereris ... meo tactu indigna es’*; CSEL 55, 486.11-13); *Comm. Matt.* 4.28.9 (*merito audit*; SC 259, 312.63).

115. Cf. *Sermo* 39a.3 (*tangere non meretur*; CCSL 23, 158.74).

116. Cf. *Epist.* 50.16 (*audire meruit ... indigna enim iudicabatur ...*; CSEL 29, 418.18-19).

117. Cf. *Sermo* 76 (*merito audit ...*; PL 52, 416a).

118. ... θνητὰ γὰρ ἔτι φρονοῦσα, οὐχ οἶα τε ἦν τῆς αὐτοῦ θεότητος θίγειν· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἄξιον ἦν τὴν ἔτι κλαίουσαν, καὶ κάτω περὶ τὰ μνήματα καὶ τάφους οἶα νεκρὸν ζητοῦσαν αὐτὸν, ταπεινά τε καὶ ἀνθρώπινα περὶ αὐτοῦ δοξάζουσας, τῆς ἐπαφῆς αὐτοῦ κοινωνεῖν· διὸ τὴν αἰτίαν ἀπήλεγχεν, μὴ γὰρ ἀνεληλυθῆναι οὐπω φησὶν, ὅσον τὸ ἐπ’ αὐτὴν, πρὸς τὸν Πατέρα, ἐπεὶ μὴ τοῦτ’ ἐπίστευσεν γεγενονέναι, νεκρὸν δὲ πού κείσθαι αὐτὸν ᾗετο ... (*Quaestiones ad Marinum* 3.2; PG 22, 949c).

... et ideo ad fortiores mittitur, quorum credere discat exemplo, ut illi resurrectionem praedicent<sup>119</sup>.

Mary should learn to believe from the *fortiores*, the men according to Ambrose's logic (cf. 1 Tim 2,11), to whom the task of preaching the resurrection is assigned. This is followed by the Eve motif:

*Sicut enim in principio mulier auctor culpa uero fuit, uir exsecutor erroris, ita nunc quae mortem prior gustauerat resurrectionem prior uidit culpa ordine remedio prior. Et ne perpetui reatus apud uiros obprobrium sustineret, quae culpam uiro transfuderat, transfudit et gratiam ueterisque lapsus compensat aerumnam resurrectionis indicio. Per os mulieris mors ante processerat, per os mulieris uita reparatur<sup>120</sup>.*

Compared to Ambrose, who regards the resurrection testimony of “the woman” as a remedy and compensation for the guilt of the first woman, John Chrysostom offers a subtly differentiated explanation for the Easter privilege of women, focusing not on the question of guilt, but on the encouragement of the so far disadvantaged and on the healing of the suffering<sup>121</sup>. Nonetheless, there are many clichés occurring in his psychologizing and historicizing exegesis of John 20,1-18. Chrysostom several times points out Mary's gender-specific loving affection, sympathy<sup>122</sup> and zeal as well as her inability to grasp Jesus' resurrection immediately, unlike the male disciples needing further evidence and gradual instruction<sup>123</sup>. Accordingly, in v. 17, Jesus has to teach her that she ought not to regard him in

119. CCSL 14, 390.1470-1472.

120. *Exp. Luc.* 10.156 (CCSL 14, 390.1472-1479). See also *Spir.* 3.11.74. Similarly AUGUSTINE, *Sermo* 232.2: *Per feminam mors, per feminam uita* (SC 116, 262.41-42).

121. Cf. *Hom. Matt.* 89: Σκόπει πῶς καὶ αὐτὸς διὰ τούτων τοὺς μαθητὰς εὐαγγελίζεται, ὁ πολλάκις εἶπον, τὸ μάλιστα γένος ἀτιμωθὲν εἰς τιμὴν ἄγων καὶ εἰς χρηστὰς ἐλπίδας, καὶ τὸ πεπονηκὸς ἰώμενος (PG 58, 784) and *Hom. 1 Cor.* [!] 38: Ἐπειδὴ τὸ γένος ἠλάττωται τοῦτο, διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἐν τῇ γεννήσει καὶ ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει πρώτη αὐτῇ αἰσθάνεται τῆς χάριτος (PG 61, 327). – But see also CYRILL, *in Jo.* 12: Θεραπεύεται τὸ νενοσηκὸς μάλιστα γένος, φημί δὴ τὸ θηλειῶν, διὰ τῆς τοῦ Σωτῆρος ἡμῶν φιλανθρωπίας, ἀνακεφαλαιουμένου τρόπον τινὰ τὴν τῶν καθ' ἡμᾶς ἀρρώσθημάτων ἀρχὴν, καὶ μετατιθέντος τοῖς δευτέροις ἐπὶ τὸ ἄμεινον (PG 74, 701c).

122. So in *Hom. Jo.* 86 excusing Peter: Περιπαθὲς πῶς τὸ γυναικεῖον γένος, καὶ πρὸς οἶκτον ἐπιβρέπεστερον. Τοῦτο δὲ εἶπον, ἵνα μὴ θαυμάσης τί δήποτε Μαρία μὲν πικρῶς ἐθρήνηι τῷ τάφῳ, Πέτρος δὲ οὐδὲν τοιοῦτον ἔπαθεν (PG 59, 467).

123. Thus the angelophany to her alone, for instance, is explained on the one hand as a reward for her great zeal (τῆς πολλῆς ταύτης σπουδῆς μίσθον), but, on the other hand, Chrysostom refers to a gender-specific lack of intelligence: Ἐπειδὴ γὰρ οὐκ ἦν ὑψηλὴ τῆς γυναικὸς ἡ διάνοια, ὡς ἀπὸ τῶν σουδαρίων ὑποδέξασθαι τὴν ἀνάστασιν, γίνεται τι πλεον, καὶ ἀγγέλους θεωρεῖ καθημένους ... (*Hom. Jo.* 86; PG 59, 467).

the same way as before, since she does not realize his greatness<sup>124</sup>. Yet, the tone is different.

Let us come back to Ambrose. Subsequently to the Eve typology, he again insists on solely the men's commission to preach the gospel (in contrast to the *resurrectionis indicium* above, he speaks of an *euangelizandi officium*), now by means of discrediting gender stereotypes:

*Sed quia constantia ad praedicandum inferior, sexus ad exsequendum infirmior, uiris euangelizandi mandatur officium*<sup>125</sup>.

When he later turns back to the *Noli me tangere*, he refers to the next gender-related prejudice of women lacking intelligence<sup>126</sup> and to the borrowed authority of Paul (1 Cor 14,34-35; 1 Tim 2,12) to forbid women to preach and to teach:

*Quid est igitur: noli me tangere? Noli manum adhibere maioribus, sed uade ad fratres meos, hoc est ad perfectiores – quicumque enim fecerit uoluntatem patris mei qui in caelis est ipse meus et frater et soror<sup>127</sup> et mater est –, quia resurrectio non facile nisi a perfectioribus capi potest, fundatioribus huius fidei praerogatiua seruat, mulieribus autem docere in ecclesia non permitto; domi viros suos interrogent. Ad eos ergo mittitur qui domestici sunt et accepit praescripta mandata*<sup>128</sup>.

In *Virginit.* 4.23, the *perfectiores* are identified with the priests, who are to be asked for the right interpretation of Jesus' dictum in John 20,17<sup>129</sup>.

In a quite similar way, PETER CHRYSOLOGUS rejects the idea of female apostleship in his series of Easter homilies. His apologetic rhetoric shows even more misogynist tendencies when he tries to excuse the male disciples and disparages the women's commitment. Aside from detailed applications of the Eve motif and gender stereotypes, he also uses the *ecclesia* typology to reinforce the established gender roles. Accordingly, in *Sermo* 76

124. Δοκεῖ μοι βούλεσθαι αὐτὴν ἔτι συνεῖναι αὐτῷ, ὥσπερ τότε, καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς χαρᾶς μηδὲν ἐννοῆσαι μέγα, εἰ καὶ πολλῶ βελτίων ἐγγέγονει κατὰ σάρκα. Ταύτης γοῦν ἀπάγων αὐτὴν τῆς ἐννοίας, καὶ τοῦ μετὰ πολλῆς αὐτῷ ἀδείας διαλέγεσθαι (οὐδὲ γὰρ τοῖς μαθηταῖς φαίνεται λοιπὸν ἐπιχωριάζων ὁμοίως), ἀνάγει αὐτῆς τὴν διάνοιαν, ὥστε αἰδεσιμώτερον αὐτῷ προσέχειν (*Hom. Jo.* 86; PG 59, 469).

125. *Exp. Luc.* 10.157 (CCSL 14, 390.1479-1481).

126. See also the gender bias in *Exp. Luc.* 10.161: *Quae non credit mulier est et adhuc corporei sexus appellatione signatur; nam quae credit occurrit in virum perfectum ...* (CCSL 14, 392.1525-1527). Similarly *Virginit.* 4.17.

127. In contrast to Ambrose, Matt 12,50 includes the sister(s) explicitly.

128. *Exp. Luc.* 10.165 (CCSL 14, 393.1565-1573).

129. *Vade ad electos et ad observantissimos sacerdotes ... Certe a perfectioribus quaere, dicent tibi quae distinctio sit inter Patrem meum et Patrem vestrum* (PL 16, 285c).

on the Matthean account, he reinterprets the commission of the women by transferring it to the church:

*Angelus hic non feminas, sed Ecclesiam duabus in feminis mittit ...*<sup>130</sup>.

By means of this typological interpretation, he also resolves the contradiction between the scene in Matt 28,9 and the *Noli me tangere*: Whereas the Matthean Marys symbolizing the perfectly believing church can take hold of Jesus' feet, the Johannine Mary of Magdala as a woman is attached to the flesh and rightly hears Jesus' rebuke. The physical contact (*tactus carnis*) is opposed against the touching by faith (*fidei tactus*)<sup>131</sup>. On the other hand, in *Sermo* 82 on Mark 16, he applies the very same typology to John 20 when he explains the discrepancy of the women's silence in Mark 16,8 compared to Mary's announcement in John 20,18, referring also to Paul:

*Quia mulieribus audire, non loqui datum est; discere datum est, non docere, dicente Apostolo: Mulieres in Ecclesia taceant (I Cor. XIV). Denique eadem Maria postea et vadit, et nuntiat, sed jam non feminam, sed Ecclesiam gestans, ut ibi sicut femina taceat, hic ut Ecclesia enuntiet et loquatur*<sup>132</sup>.

While Mary of Magdala is seen as a typical woman as far as John 20,17 is concerned, in announcing the Risen One in John 20,18 she represents the church.

## 2. Christological and Ecclesiological Interpretations of the *Noli me tangere*

Focusing now on allegorical and typological interpretations of John 20,17, let us turn to the Eastern tradition first. An interpretation of the *Noli me tangere* influenced by Hellenistic philosophy can be found in ORIGEN'S *Dialogue with Heraclides*, where it is embedded in the christological-soteriological discussion. Based on the anthropological distinction of body, soul and spirit, Origen states that Jesus had to take on all these constituents of humanity to actually redeem the human being as a whole. While Jesus' death causes a separation of his body lying in the tomb, his soul descending *ad inferos*, and his spirit committed to the Father (cf. Luke 23,49), they are reunified after his resurrection. Referring to the evidence of the scripture Origen cites John 20,17:

Ἐβούλετο γὰρ τὸν ἀπτόμενον αὐτοῦ ὀλοτελοῦς ἄψασθαι, ἵνα ἀψάμενος ὀλοτελοῦς ὠφελῆθῃ ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος τὸ σῶμα, ἀπὸ τῆς ψυχῆς

130. PL 52, 415a.

131. PL 52, 416a.

132. PL 52, 432b.

τὴν ψυχὴν, τὸ πνεῦμα ἀπὸ τοῦ πνεύματος. (...) ... ἀναβαίνει πρὸς τὸν Πατέρα. Ἔνεκα τίνος; τὴν παρακαταθήκην ἀπολαβεῖν<sup>133</sup>.

When Jesus has once again received the “deposit” entrusted to the Father, he can be touched in his entirety.

In his *Commentary on John*, the most interesting exegesis of John 20,17 occurs in 10,35ff. in the context of the interpretation of the temple logion John 2,19. Superimposing the ecclesiological dimension on the christological perspective, Origen points out that the temple raised in three days refers not only to Jesus’ body, but as well to the church as the body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 12,27; Eph 2,20-21). While the ἔγερσις takes place directly after destruction, the completion occurs on the third day, thereby implying a process taking three days:

... τελειοῦται δὲ αὐτοῦ ἡ ἔγερσις ἐν ὄλαις ταῖς τρισὶν ἡμέραις. διὰ τοῦτο καὶ γέγονεν ἀνάστασις καὶ ἔσται ἀνάστασις ...<sup>134</sup>.

This means on Jesus’ part that his resurrection (ἀνάστασις) takes place immediately after his death (cf. Luke 23,43) on the one hand and is completed with his going to the Father on the other hand:

ἀναστάσεως γὰρ ἦν καὶ τὸ ἐν τῇ πρώτῃ ἡμέρᾳ γενέσθαι ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ, ἀναστάσεως δὲ ὅτε φαινόμενός φησι· Μὴ μου ἄπτου, οὐπω γὰρ ἀναβέβηκα πρὸς τὸν πατέρα· τὸ δὲ τέλειον τῆς ἀναστάσεως ἦν, ὅτε γίνεται πρὸς τὸν πατέρα<sup>135</sup>.

Referring to 1 Cor 15,22-24, Origen implies the resurrection of the whole body of Christ. Being crucified, buried and raised with Jesus through baptism (cf. Rom 6,4-6), the completion happens on the eschatological third day (διὰ τοῦτο καὶ γέγονεν ἀνάστασις καὶ ἔσται ἀνάστασις), as the τέλος is the ἀποκατάστασις πάντων.

In 6,55, commenting on John 1,29, the focus differs insofar as Jesus’ prohibition is motivated by a need of purification (in the context there are also references to the imagery of the lamb of Rev):

ἀνελὼν δὲ διὰ τοῦ πάθους τοὺς πολέμιους ὁ ἐν πολέμῳ δυνατὸς καὶ κραταιὸς κύριος καθαρσίου δεόμενος τοῦ ἀπὸ μόνου τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτῷ δοθῆναι ἐπὶ τοῖς ἀνδραγαθήμασιν δυναμένου, κωλύει αὐτοῦ ἄψασθαι τὴν Μαρίαν ...<sup>136</sup>.

133. *Dial.* 8 (SC 67, 72).

134. *Comm. Jo.* 10.37 (21/243 resp.; the numberings differ); E. PREUSCHEN (ed.), *Origenes Werke*. Vierter Band: *Der Johanneskommentar* (GCS), Leipzig, Hinrichs, 1903, p. 211.

135. *Comm. Jo.* 10.37 (21/245); PREUSCHEN, *Origenes* (n. 134), p. 212.

136. *Comm. Jo.* 6.55 (37/287); PREUSCHEN, *Origenes* (n. 134), p. 164. See also *Comm. Jo.* 6.57 (37/291): Ἄλλ’ ἐπεὶ, ὡς προείπομεν, τὰ κατὰ τῶν ἀντικειμένων

According to different needs, Origen makes different points. Comparing the Samaritan woman with the Magdalene in *Comm. Jo.* 13.30, he points out that both women do not have the same status as male apostles<sup>137</sup>, for the one is not thanked for her proclamation of the Messiah (cf. John 4,28-42) and the other is not permitted to touch the risen Jesus, in contrast to Thomas:

Ἐνθάδε μὲν δὴ τοῖς Σαμαρείταις γυνὴ εὐαγγελίζεται τὸν χριστόν, ἐπὶ τέλει δὲ τῶν εὐγγελίων καὶ τὴν ἀνάστασιν τοῦ σωτῆρος τοῖς ἀποστόλοις ἢ πρὸ πάντων αὐτὸν θεασαμένη γυνὴ διηγείται. ἀλλ' οὔτε ὡς τὸ τέλειον τῆς πίστεως εὐαγγελισαμένη εὐχαριστεῖται ὑπὸ τῶν Σαμαρειτῶν ... ἐκεῖνη τε τὴν ἀπαρχὴν τῆς ἀφῆς τοῦ χριστοῦ οὐ πιστεύεται λέγοντος αὐτῆ· «Μὴ μου ἄπτου» ...<sup>138</sup>.

In *Comm. Jo.* 19.22 Origen speaks about the ascent of Jesus' soul, which ought to be understood rather mystically than in a local sense:

ἄμα δὲ ὄρα εἰ μὴ μυστικώτερον καὶ οὐ τοπικῶς περὶ τῆς Ἰησοῦ ψυχῆς ἀκούσει τὸ· «Ἀναβὰς ὑπεράνω πάντων τῶν οὐρανῶν»· ἡ γὰρ νοητὴ ἀνάβασις ἐκεῖνης τῆς ψυχῆς ὑπερπεπήδηκεν καὶ πάντας τοὺς οὐρανοὺς καί, ὡς ἔστιν εἰπεῖν, ἦδη ἔφθασεν πρὸς αὐτὸν τὸν θεόν<sup>139</sup>.

Among writers from the East, EPHRAEM SYRUS also has to be mentioned, who offers a series of explanations for the *Noli me tangere* in *Comm. Diatess.* At first, he gives christological reasons: (1) “because this body was [like] a first flowering fruit from Scheol, which our Lord, as priest, was preserving carefully from contact with any [human] hand ...”, (2) “in order to show that this body was [already] glorified and magnified”. Different to Jesus' earthly life, “when he was made Lord, fear of him was over everyone like [the fear of] God”<sup>140</sup>. After that, a sacramental interpretation is given, insofar as “his friends have power to touch him through another means”, “in eating his body sacramentally”<sup>141</sup>. The other explanations concern Mary, whom Ephraem, though, (con)fuses with Jesus'

ἀνδραγαθήματα πεποιηκῶς εἰδοῦ τοῦ πλύναι «ἐν οἴνῳ τὴν στολὴν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐν αἵματι σταφυλῆς τὴν περιβολὴν αὐτοῦ», ἀνῆει πρὸς τὸν γεωργὸν τῆς ἀληθινῆς ἀμπέλου πατέρα, ἵν' ἐκεῖ ἀποπλυνάμενος μετὰ τὸ ἀναβῆναι εἰς ὕψος, αἰχμαλωτεύσας τὴν αἰχμαλωσίαν, καταβῆ φέρων τὰ ποικίλα χαρίσματα ... (PREUSCHEN, *Origenes*, p. 165).

137. Cf. D'ANGELO, *Note* (n. 39), p. 534.

138. *Comm. Jo.* 13.30 (29/179-180); PREUSCHEN, *Origenes* (n. 134), p. 254.

139. *Comm. Jo.* 19.22 (5/145); PREUSCHEN, *Origenes* (n. 134), p. 323.

140. All quotations from C. MCCARTHY, *Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron: An English Translation of Chester Beatty Syriac MS 709 with Introduction and Notes* (JSS Supplement, 2), Oxford, OUP, 1993, p. 329.

141. *Ibid.*, p. 330.

mother: (a) because she had not received the sacrament of his body and blood, (b) on account of Eve, (c) for Mary's doubts, (d) perhaps "because he had confided her to John in his place"<sup>142</sup>.

Similarly to John Chrysostom, CYRILL OF ALEXANDRIA stresses Mary Magdalene's love<sup>143</sup> and faith several times in his exegesis of John 20 (*in Jo.* 12; PG 74, 681-702) while using at the same time pejorative gender stereotypes. Whereas the disciples took flight and hid for good reasons, not because of cowardice, but wisely waiting for the right time to speak openly, Mary stays at the tomb (cf. John 20,11) due to her love and shows on the one hand more courage; on the other hand, her emotion is regarded as gender-specific<sup>144</sup>. In contrast to the disciples, who firmly believe on the basis of the scripture's evidence, Mary needs the instruction of the angels, for she neither knows the scripture nor understands the mystery of the resurrection in another way<sup>145</sup>. As she does not recognize Jesus at first (v. 14), Cyrill refers to the generally slow comprehension of women:

Βραδεῖα μὲν πως εἰς σύνεσιν ἢ γυνή, μᾶλλον δὲ σύμπαν τὸ θηλειῶν γένος<sup>146</sup>.

Explaining the cryptical<sup>147</sup> *Noli me tangere*, though, he adopts a typological perspective. While Jesus mixed also with sinners (cf. Luke 5,31-32 par. Matt 9,12-13; Mark 2,17) *before* his resurrection<sup>148</sup>, afterwards

142. *Ibid.*, p. 331.

143. So she also receives the award of her faith and love (καὶ τῆς οὕτως ἐντόνου πίστεως καὶ ἀγάπης διπλοῦν ἀπένευμε τὸν μίσθον; PG 74, 697a), for instance, and is mentioned solely by John: Εἰκὸς γὰρ ὅτι μόνης ἐπεμνήσθη τῆς Μαριὰμ τῆς Μαγδαληνῆς Ἰωάννης, ἅτε δὴ καὶ θερμότερον ἐχούσης τὸ κίνημα πρὸς ἀγάπην ... (PG 74, 697d).

144. Οἱ μὲν οὖν σοφώτατοι μαθηταὶ κατεκρύπτοντο χρησίμως, καθάπερ ἔφην ἀρτίως. Ἡ δὲ γε φιλόχριστος Μαριὰμ, ἅτε δὴ καὶ παντὸς ἐλευθέρου δειματοῦ, ... προσεδρεύει μὲν ἰταμώτερον, τὸ δὲ ταῖς θηλείαις αἰεὶ πως προσπεφυκὸς ὑπομένει πάθος· ἀνομῶζει γὰρ ἀπληστότερον, καὶ ἀκορέστως τῶν ἰδίων ὀμμάτων ἀποθλίβει τὸ δάκρυον ... (PG 74, 687/688a).

145. Τοῖς μὲν οὖν ἁγίοις μαθηταῖς αὐτῆ τῶν πραγμάτων ἡ ἔκβασις τῆ παρὰ ταῖς θείαις Γραφαῖς ἐλπίδι συμβαίνουσα πρὸς πληροφορίαν ἐξήρσεκε, καὶ πίστιν ἐνετίθει τὴν οὐδαμόθεν ἀμφιβολον. Πεπιστευκότες γὰρ ἀνεχώρουν ταῖς ἁγίαις Γραφαῖς, καὶ ἦν πως ἔτι περιττὸν τοῖς οὕτω βεβαίαν ἔχουσι τὴν πίστιν καὶ τὸ διὰ τῆς τῶν ἁγίων ἀγγέλων ἐκδιδάσκεσθαι φωνῆς· ἀναγκαιότατον δὲ τὸ χρῆμα τῆ γυναικί, τὴν ἱεράν τε καὶ θεῖαν οὐκ ἐπισταμένην Γραφήν, οὔτε μὴν καθ' ἕτερόν τινα τρόπον τὸ βαθὺ τῆς ἀναστάσεως εἰδυῖα μυστήριον (PG 74, 689/690a).

146. PG 74, 689b. See also later: Δυσμαθέστεραι γὰρ πως αἱ γυναικῶν εἰσι φρένες, καὶ ἀμελετήτως ἔχουσι πρὸς τὸ δύνασθαι ῥαδίως καὶ τοῖς οὐ σφόδρα δυσκόλοις προσβαλεῖν, καὶ πολλῶν γε πλείον τοῖς ὑπὲρ λόγον θαύμασιν (PG 74, 691/692c).

147. Οὐκ εὐκάτοπος τοῖς πολλοῖς ἢ τοῦ λόγου δύναμις, κέκρυπται γὰρ ἐν αὐτῶ μυστήριον ... (PG 74, 692d).

148. In this context Cyrill mentions Jesus' encounter with the sinner of Luke 7.

humanity, being impure by nature<sup>149</sup>, is prevented from touching him. The circumcision of the heart by the Spirit through baptism is required:

Δεῖ τοιγαροῦν οὐκ ἀπεριτιμήτους ἔτι, τοῦτ' ἔστιν, ἀκαθάρτους τυγχάνοντας τοῦ ἁγίου σώματος ἄπτεισθαι, καθαρούς δὲ μᾶλλον ἀποδεδειγμένους διὰ τῆς ἐν Πνεύματι νοουμένης περιτομῆς. Περιτομὴ γὰρ καρδίας ἐν Πνεύματι, κατὰ τὴν τοῦ Παύλου φωνήν. Ἄλλ' οὐκ ἂν ἐν ἡμῖν ἢ ἐν Πνεύματι γένοιτο περιτομή, μὴ ἐνοικισθέντος ἡμῖν τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος, δία τε τῆς πίστεως, καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου βαπτίσματος<sup>150</sup>.

To send the Spirit, the risen Christ has to go to the Father (cf. John 16,7):

Εἰ γὰρ καὶ ἐγήγερτο Χριστὸς ἐκ νεκρῶν, ἀλλ' οὐπω τὸ Πνεῦμα δέδοτο τῇ ἀνθρωπότητι παρὰ Πατρὸς δι' αὐτοῦ. Ἀνελθὼν γὰρ πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν καὶ Πατέρα, κατέπεμψεν ἡμῖν αὐτὸ ...<sup>151</sup>.

Since Mary has not received the Spirit yet, she hears Jesus' command:

... ὡς οὐπω τὸ Πνεῦμα λαβοῦσαν ἀπείργει τὴν Μαριάμ, λέγων, «Μὴ μου ἄπτου, οὐπω γὰρ ἀναβέβηκα πρὸς τὸν Πατέρα», τοῦτ' ἔστιν, οὐπω τὸ ἅγιον Πνεῦμα κατέπεμψα πρὸς ὑμᾶς<sup>152</sup>.

Jesus having not yet gone to the Father means that he has not sent the Spirit yet. In a further step, the image is transferred to the catechumens, who are excluded from the Lord's Table as they have not yet received the Spirit through baptism:

Ἐντεῦθεν ταῖς Ἐκκλησίαις ὁ τύπος. Τοιγάρτοι καὶ τῆς ἱερᾶς τραπέζης ἐξείργομεν καὶ τοὺς ἐγνωκότας μὲν αὐτοῦ τὴν θεότητα, καὶ ὁμολογήσαντας ἤδη τὴν πίστιν, τοῦτ' ἔστι, τοὺς ἔτι κατηχουμένους, μὴ μὴν καὶ τὸ ἅγιον Πνεῦμα πλουτήσαντας· τοῖς γὰρ οὐπω βεβαπτισμένοις οὐκ ἐνοικεῖ. Ἐπὶ δὲ τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος ἀποδειχθεῖεν μέτοχοι, τότε καὶ ἄπτεισθαι τοῦ Σωτήρος ἡμῶν Χριστοῦ τὸ κωλύον οὐδέν<sup>153</sup>.

The ambivalent portrait of Mary Magdalene is completed when Cyrill, commenting on John 20,18, unfolds the Eve motif. Commissioned to give the first testimony (τῶν μεγάλων ἀγαθῶν κελεύει γενέσθαι πρωτάγγελον), Mary Magdalene should release the whole female race from the guilt, after it had been condemned for the first woman's sake<sup>154</sup>.

149. Ἀκάθαρτος δὲ κατὰ τε τὴν οἰκείαν φύσιν ἢ ἀνθρωπότητος νοοῖτο ἂν εἰκότως. Τί γὰρ ἢ ἀνθρώπου φύσις, ὡς πρὸς τὴν ἐνοῦσαν τῷ Θεῷ καθαρότητα; (PG 74, 696b.)

150. PG 74, 696b.

151. PG 74, 696c.

152. PG 74, 696c.

153. PG 74, 695/696c-d.

154. ... ἴν' ὥσπερ ἢ πρώτη καὶ πασῶν ἀρχαιοτάτη γυνὴ ταῖς τοῦ διαβόλου φωναῖς ὑποργήσασα κατεκρίθη, καὶ δι' ἐκείνης σύμπαν τὸ θηλειῶν γένος, οὕτω

However, there are also some Latin scholars standing out from the mainstream exegesis. In the face of widely-used misogynist stereotypes regarding the *Noli me tangere*<sup>155</sup>, AUGUSTINE, for example, prefers allegorical explanations:

*Restat ergo ut aliquod in his uerbis lateat sacramentum ... Aut ergo sic dictum est ..., ut in illa femina figuraretur ecclesia de gentibus, quae in Christum non credit, nisi cum ascendisset ad Patrem; aut sic in se credi uoluit Iesus, hoc est, sic se spiritaliter tangi, quod ipse et Pater unum sint. Eius quippe intimis sensibus quodammodo ascendit ad Patrem, qui sic in eo profecerit ut Patri agnoscat aequalem ...*<sup>156</sup>.

On the one hand, he presents Mary of Magdala as a type for the church from the pagans (*ecclesia de gentibus*); in *Serm.* 243.2<sup>157</sup>; 245.2.4<sup>158</sup> she typifies the *ecclesia* without further differentiation. Compared to the predominant individualistic-moralistic interpretation in the West, this collective-typological perspective seems quite remarkable. On the other hand, the christological discussion highlighting the Son's consubstantiality<sup>159</sup> with the Father against arianism<sup>160</sup> leaves its mark on the exegesis of John 20,17 insofar as Augustine relates the touching to the true faith in Christ<sup>161</sup>. But even though Mary of Magdala acts as prototype for the believers<sup>162</sup>, gender-related clichés are connected to her<sup>163</sup>.

καὶ αὐτὴ τοῖς τοῦ Σωτῆρος ἡμῶν ὑπηρετήσασα λόγοις, καὶ τὰ εἰς ζωὴν ἀναφέροντα τὴν αἰώνιον ἀπαγγείλασα. σὺμπαν τῆς αἰτίας τὸ θηλειῶν ἀπαλλάξῃ γένος (PG 74, 697b). See also PG 74, 692a-b.701c.

155. As to his rejections, see above.

156. *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 121.3; CCSL 36, 666.28-37.

157. *Uidet ergo ista Maria, cui dixit Dominus, Noli me tangere; nondum enim ascendi ad Patrem meum, Ecclesiae gestare personam, quae tunc in Christum credit, cum ascendisset ad Patrem* (PL 38, 1144).

158. *Ecclesia ergo, cuius figuram Maria gerebat, audiat quod audivit Maria* (PL 38, 1153).

159. So Augustine underlines the difference in being children of God: *Non ait: Patrem nostrum; aliter ergo meum, aliter uestrum; natura meum, gratia uestrum. (...) Neque hic dixit: Deum nostrum: ergo et hic aliter meum, aliter uestrum; Deum meum sub quo et ego homo sum, Deum uestrum inter quos et ipsum mediator sum* (*Tract. Ev. Jo.* 121.3; CCSL 36, 666.48–667.53).

160. See e.g. *Sermo* 244.4.

161. Cf. *Sermo* 243.2: *... ille tactus fidem significat. Tangit Christum, qui credit in Christum* (PL 38, 1144). Similarly *Serm.* 244.3-4; 245.2-4; 246.4.

162. See *Sermo* 245.2: *Prorsus quod audivit Maria, audiat Ecclesia. Hoc omnes audiant, omnes intelligant, omnes faciant* (PL 38, 1152).

163. *Quomodo enim non carnaliter adhuc in eum credebat, quem sicut hominem flebat?* (*Tract. Ev. Jo.* 121.3; CCSL 36, 666.43-44). See D'ANGELO, *Note* (n. 39), p. 531: "... there is a real continuity between antique definitions of woman and this characterization of Mary's faith". – In the beginning of the same tract, Augustine comments on John 20,10-11 that "the weaker sex" (*infirmior sexus*) was detained at the tomb by stronger affection (*Tract. Ev. Jo.* 121.1). For a detailed interpretation of the tract see G. LAWLESS,

LEO THE GREAT's interpretation differs from the mainstream of Latin patristics as well. Representing the church (*personam Ecclesiae gerens*; PL 54, 399a), Mary of Magdala is prohibited from touching Jesus because she ought not to approach him in a "fleshly" manner, being reserved for the more sublime. After Jesus' ascension to the Father, contact will be more perfect and truer, so that she will apprehend without touching and believe without sensory perception:

*... nolo ut ad me corporaliter venias, nec ut me sensu carnis agnoscas; ad sublimiora te differo, majora tibi praeparo. Cum ad Patrem meum ascendero, tunc me perfectius veriusque palpabis, apprehensura quod non tangis, et creditura quod non cernis*<sup>164</sup>.

FULGENTIUS OF RUSPE initially seems to take up the prevalent explanation for the *Noli me tangere*:

*quia Maria Magdalene nondum Patri aequalem credebat, quem uelut extinctum feminea pietate plangebat*<sup>165</sup>.

Afterwards, though, he turns to a typological view, referring to the  $\sigma\omega\mu\alpha$  Χριστοῦ-ecclesiology:

*quod est autem corpus Christi, nisi Ecclesia Christi? Vnde intellegitur quia, donec aliquis Filium Dei secundum diuinam substantiam aequalem non credit Patri, membris Christi per tactum fidei non potest copulari ...*<sup>166</sup>.

Without orthodox belief, the body of Christ must not be touched, i.e. there is no contact with the church.

### 3. *On the Way to the Reception History of the magna peccatrix poenitens*

On the basis of an individualistic-historical misunderstanding, the theological gender symbolism of the Eve typology contributed to the well-known image of the Magdalene as the great sinner, who represents the collective sinfulness of "the woman" (each woman participates in Eve's guilt), now on a concrete individual level. So, beneath other factors, the moralistic interpretations of the *Noli me tangere* applying the Eve motif might have played a notable role for the later reception history of

"*Infirmior sexus ... fortior affectus*": Agostino, *Trattato sul Vangelo di Giovanni 121, 1-3 su Maria Maddalena*, in L. PADOVESE (ed.), *Atti del IX Simposio di Efeso su S. Giovanni Apostolo*, Rome, Istituto Francese di Spiritualità, Pontificio Ateneo Antoniano, 2003, 149-159.

164. *Sermo* 74.4; PL 54, 399a.

165. *Ad Trasamundum* 2.13.4; CCSL 91, 137.694-696.

166. *Ad Trasamundum* 2.13.7; CCSL 91, 138.730-734.

the Magdalene in the Western tradition, as can be shown from JEROME, *Epist.* 59.4:

*Maria Magdalene ipsa est, a qua septem daemonia expulerat, ut, ubi abundauerat peccatum, superabundaret gratia; quae, quia dominum hortulanum putabat et quasi cum homine loquebatur et quaerebat uiuentem cum mortuis, recte audit: noli me tangere, et est sensus: 'non mereris meis haerere uestigiis nec adorare quasi dominum et eius tenere pedes, quem non aestimas surrexisse. tibi enim necdum ascendi ad patrem meum'*<sup>167</sup>.

That the quotation of Rom 5,20 refers here to the identification of the Magdalene with the anonymous sinner of Luke 7 is very uncertain since Ambrose in *Spir.* 3.11.74 quotes the same verse in the context of the Eve typology:

*Adoravit enim Christum et Maria, et ideo praenuntia resurrectionis ad apostolos destinatur, solvens haereditarium nexum et feminei generis immane delictum. Hoc enim operatus est in mysterio dominus, ut 'ubi superabundauerat peccatum, superabundaret et gratia'. Meritoque ad viros femina destinatur, ut quae culpam viro prima nuntiaverat, prima domini gratiam nuntiaret*<sup>168</sup>.

However, commenting on the sinner of Luke 7 in *Exp. Luc.* 6.35, he refers to Rom 5,20 as well. So these cross-references and moreover Jerome's linking of Mary's demons with sin might have had a strong impact on the reception history<sup>169</sup>.

Explicit identification, though, is displayed by the Magdalene homilies of GREGORY THE GREAT, for instance in the very beginning of *Hom.* 25 on John 20,11-18:

*Maria Magdalene, quae fuerat in ciuitate peccatrix, amando ueritatem, lauat lacrimis maculas criminis ...*<sup>170</sup>.

Nevertheless, Gregory's exegesis of John 20 does not lack some positive traits in the Magdalene's characterization when he underlines the love<sup>171</sup>

167. CSEL 54, 545.1-8. Elsewhere, however, Jerome highlights the protophany to Mary Magdalene: see *Epist.* 127.5 (... *Mariamque proprie Magdalenen, quae ob sedulitatem et ardorem fidei 'turritae' nomen accepit et prima ante apostolos Christum uidere meruit resurgentem ...*; CSEL 56/1, 149.21-23), or in *Soph. prol.*: *Mihi tantum ... in fine prologi dixisse sufficiat, Dominum resurgentem primum apparuisse mulieribus, et apostolorum illas fuisse apostolae, ut erubescerent viri non quaerere, quem iam fragilior sexus invenerat* (CCSL 76A, 655.24-28).

168. CSEL 79, 181.40-46.

169. See already HOLZMEISTER, *Magdalenenfrage* (n. 98), pp. 581-582.

170. CCSL 141, 205.1-2. See also *Hom.* 33 on Luke 7,36-50 and his letter to Gregoria.

171. *Qua in re pensandum est huius mulieris mentem quanta uis amoris accenderit, quae a monumento Domini, etiam discipulis recedentibus, non recedebat* (*Hom.* 25.1; CCSL 141, 205.10-12).

and perseverance<sup>172</sup> of Mary, who has not left the tomb like the male disciples and thus as the only one has seen the risen Jesus. In view of the numerous moralistic commentaries on the Johannine narrative, this seems quite noteworthy. As Augustine, Gregory refuses a gender-specific interpretation of John 20,17<sup>173</sup> and turns to the christological paradigm. Yet, John 20,18 is commented on with the Eve motif.

By virtue of Gregory's authority, his reception of the Magdalene became widely accepted in the Latin world, whereas the Eastern Church tradition held on to the different biblical characters and honours Mary of Magdala as the *ἰσαπόστολος*.

## VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS

As a multidimensional text, the Johannine narrative discloses several levels of possible meanings and allows for a multifaceted set of readings. Like many patristic writers, I assumed a collective-typological perspective to show one aspect of the Johannine *relecture* of the first Easter witness. The departing point in following some strands of patristic exegesis was constituted by the question of whether any textual signals suggesting a typological-allegorical understanding could be detected.

On the other hand, the patristic readings show the contextual dynamics of the interpretation process that are valid for modern readings as well. Different interests lead to different interpretations – especially as regards the gender issue (and in particular, insofar the question of female apostleship arises). Reinterpretations can thus enrich the understanding of the text, but the concerns and interests influencing the readings have to be displayed and to be critically challenged.

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172. *Vnde contigit ut eum sola tunc uideret, quae remansit ut quaereret, quia nimirum uirtus boni operis perseuerantia est ...* (Hom. 25.1; CCSL 141, 205.15-16).

173. *... non quia post resurrectionem Dominus tactum renuit feminarum ...* (CCSL 141, 210.162-168).