

Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: The Gospel of Mary: Mondays September 8th and 15th
(Lead and Host proposals nearer the time)

September 8th: Pages 7, 8, 9 and 10: You can see from these fragments that this version of the Good News is less about a different perspective on the facts than about a different way of thinking. This particular translator/commentator sees similarities with Buddhist thinking...and Franciscan thinking. You might find some of the text just un-necessarily complicated. My work with people with learning disabilities left me convinced that “The essentials” are accessible to all. If you want to philosophise, that’s fine; but sometimes philosophy clouds rather than clarifying reality!

Page 7: Our funeral language and Lent ashes language is “Dust thou art and to dust thou shalt return”. Which is sort of physical truth; and I couldn’t quite understand the lady who said she wanted to be buried not cremated – so that she would be recognisable in the next life. Nor the families who are against organ donation because they want the corpse to stay whole! However, I do think we have to temper our notion of physical resurrection. Does the promise of neither being hungry nor thirsty mean three meals a day and visits to the toilet, or not needing food or drink? I think for current purposes sin is real with real consequences.... and real struggles to do good rather than bad.

Page 8: It is over-simplistic, but Mother Theresa gets my vote, for saying that detaching yourself from things and people is not as worthwhile as trying to make good things and people. Feed the hungry, etc, etc. I respect those who can find peace in the midst of suffering. I respect more those who try to relieve suffering.

Page 9: This seems to me to be Mary doing, and doing magnificently, Peter’s job. (Time for a female Archbishop of Canterbury?)

Maybe we can get ourselves in a rather pointless tangle over mind/spirit/soul/body. I have sympathy with the “This is a damp cloth; clean the windows” – man hungry/feed man – approach. (Though of course think why man hungry in the first place?) Prayer is mind, body and spirit. Someone may ask “Did Jesus love Mary Magdalene more than Mary of Nazareth or Mary of Bethany; and the Bible does tend to mix up Magdalene and Bethany.

September 15th: Page 15: Talking to yourself is best done in private...unless you have a very good friend or a counsellor. Maybe think of the soul as the real me. Don’t get hooked on the impermanence thing! Yes, a lot of things are impermanent; but, to take a blunt example: don’t give up eating and drinking, because you will be going to the toilet in due course. Don’t neglect the garden because it is seasonal. Don’t avoid helping someone because you may never see them again.

Page 16: All about getting a grip on yourself? Parents sometimes have to respond to the child who says “I’ve just got to..” with “No you haven’t!” As the translator says, not all coping strategies are long term useful. They can be long-term damaging: e.g. comfort foods, or shutting your eyes to some of your many problems... or some of your many opportunities.

Page 17: What did happen to Peter’s wife? Was Andrew married? How do we get mutual respect between different people?

Pages 18 and 19: Interesting that Matthew is tabled as the one speaking up for Mary. Carefully and fully read, the Bible ((especially Paul) is more balanced in describing the role of women than we sometimes give it credit for. Some of Paul's closest colleagues were women. I recommend the Sister Fidelma books on how things were in the 7th Century of the Christian era,