

Series #24: Women of the Early Church  
Session #4 – The Gospel of Mary & the Epistles of Mary of Cassobola  
Tuesday, May 11, 2021

**The Gospel of Mary**

In this gnostic gospel, Mary Magdalene appears as a disciple, singled out by Jesus for special teachings. In this excerpt, the other disciples are discouraged and grieving Jesus' death. Mary stands up and attempts to comfort them, reminding them that Jesus' presence remains with them. Peter asks her to tell them the words of Jesus which she remembers. To his surprise, she does not reminisce about past conversations with Jesus, but claims that Jesus spoke to her that very day in a vision.

But they were grieved. They wept greatly, saying, "How shall we go to the gentiles and preach the gospel of the kingdom of the Son of Man? If they did not spare him, how will they spare us?" Then Mary stood up, greeted them all, and said to her brethren, "Do not weep and do not grieve nor be irresolute, for His grace will be entirely with you and will protect you. But rather let us praise His greatness, for He has prepared us and made us into men." When Mary said this, she turned their hearts to the Good, and they began to discuss the words of the [Saviour].

Peter said to Mary, "Sister, we know that the Saviour loved you more than the rest of women. Tell us the words of the Saviour which you remember - which you know (but) we do not, nor have we heard them." Mary answered and said, "What is hidden from you I will proclaim to you." And she began to speak to them these words: "I," she said, "I saw the Lord in a vision and I said to him, 'Lord, I saw you today in a vision.' He answered and said to me, 'Blessed are you that you did not waver at the sight of me. For where the mind is, there is the treasure.' I said to him, 'Lord, how does he who sees the vision see it through the soul or through the spirit?' The Saviour answered and said, 'He does not see through the soul nor through the spirit, but the mind which [is] between the two - that is [what] sees the vision...'

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/maps/primary/mary.html>

## **Two Epistles involving Mary of Cassobola, attributed to Ignatius of Antioch**

Two epistles erroneously attributed to Ignatius, probably written in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century by an unknown author given the name Pseudo-Ignatius, preserve an appeal from Mary of Cassobelaë that three members of the clergy, Maris, Eulogius and Sobelus, be appointed to serve in her community so that it might not be devoid of those fit to preside over the Word of God. She begs Ignatius to not deny her request simply because the three are young and two of them newly ordained.

<https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/women-in-the-early-church>

### **Epistle from Mary of Cassobola**

#### A. Salutation

- Maria, a proselyte of Jesus Christ, to Ignatius Theophorus, most blessed bishop of the apostolic Church which is at Antioch, beloved in God the Father, and Jesus: Happiness and safety. We all beg for thee joy and health in Him.

#### B. Body of the Epistle

- **Chapter I** – Since Christ has, to our wonder, been made known among us to be the Son of the living God, and to have become man in these last times by means of the Virgin Mary, of the seed of David and Abraham, according to the announcements previously made regarding Him and through Him by the company of the prophets, we therefore beseech and entreat that, by thy wisdom, Maris our friend, bishop of our native Neapolis, which is near Zarbus, and Eulogius, and Sobelus the presbyter, be sent to us, that we be not destitute of such as preside over the divine word as Moses also says, “Let the Lord God look out a man who shall guide this people, and the congregation of the Lord shall not be as sheep which have no shepherd.”
- **Chapter II** – But as to those whom we have named being young men, do not, thou blessed one, have any apprehension. For I would have you know that they are wise about the flesh, and are insensible to its passions, they themselves glowing with all the glory of a hoary head through their own intrinsic merits, and though but recently called as young men to the priesthood. Now, call thou into exercise thy thoughts through the Spirit that God has given to thee by Christ, and thou wilt remember that Samuel, while yet a little child, was called a seer, and was reckoned in the company of the prophets, that he reprovèd the aged Eli for transgression, since he had honoured his infatuated sons above God the author of all things, and had allowed them to go unpunished, when they turned the office of the priesthood into ridicule, and acted violently towards thy people.
- **Chapter III** – Moreover, the wise Daniel, while he was a young man, passed judgment on certain vigorous old man, showing them that they

were abandoned wretches, and not [worthy to be reckoned] elders, and that, though Jews by extraction, they were Canaanites in practice. And Jeremiah, when on account of his youth he declined the office of a prophet entrusted to him by God, was addressed in these words: “Say not, I am a youth; for thou shalt go to all those to whom I send thee, and thou shalt speak according to all that I command thee; because I am with thee.” And the wise Solomon, when only in the twelfth year of his age, had wisdom to decide the important question concerning the children of the two women, when it was unknown to whom these respectively belonged; so that the whole people were astonished at such wisdom in a child, and venerated him as being not a mere youth, but a full-grown man. And he solved the hard questions of the queen of the Ethiopians, which had profit in them as the streams of the Nile [have fertility], in such a manner that that woman, though herself so wise, was beyond measure astonished.

- **Chapter IV** – Josiah also, beloved of God, when as yet he could scarcely speak articulately, convicts those who were possessed of a wicked spirit as being false in their speech, and deceivers of the people. He also reveals the deceit of the demons, and openly exposes those that are no gods; yea, while yet an infant he slays their priests, and overturns their altars, and defiles the place where sacrifices were offered with dead bodies, and throws down the temples, and cuts down the groves, and breaks in pieces the pillars, and breaks open the tombs of the ungodly, that not a relic of the wicked might any longer exist. To such an extent did he display zeal in the cause of godliness, and prove himself a punisher of the ungodly, while he as yet faltered in speech like a child. David, too, who was at once a prophet and a king, and the root of our Saviour according to the flesh, while yet a youth is anointed by Samuel to be king. For he himself says in a certain place, “I was small among my brethren, and the youngest in the house of my father.”

### C. Conclusion

- **Chapter V** – But time would fail me if I should endeavour to enumerate all those that pleased God in their youth, having been entrusted by God with either the prophetic, the priestly, or the kingly office. And those which have been mentioned may suffice, by way of bringing the subject to thy remembrance. But I entreat thee not to reckon me presumptuous or ostentatious [in writing as I have done]. For I have set forth these statements, not as instructing thee, but simply as suggesting the matter to the remembrance of my father in God. For I know my own place, and do not compare myself with such as you.
- **Closing** – I salute thy holy clergy, and thy Christ-loving people who are ruled under thy care as their pastor. All the faithful with us salute thee. Pray, blessed shepherd, that I may be in health as respects God.

[https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Epistle\\_from\\_Mary\\_of\\_Cassobola](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Epistle_from_Mary_of_Cassobola)

## **Epistle to Mary of Cassobola**

### A. Salutation

- Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus, to her who has obtained mercy through the grace of the most high God the Father, and Jesus Christ the Lord, who died for us, to Mary, my daughter, most faithful, worthy of God, and bearing Christ [in her heart], wishes abundance of happiness in God.

### B. Body

- **Chapter I** – Sight indeed is better than writing, inasmuch as, being one of the company of the senses, it not only, by communicating proofs of friendship, honours him who receives them, but also, by those which it in turn receives, enriches the desire for better things. But the second harbour of refuge, as the phrase runs, is the practice of writing, which we have received, as a convenient haven, by thy faith, from so great a distance, seeing that by means of a letter we have learned the excellence that is in thee. For the souls of the good, O thou wisest of women! resemble fountains of the purest water; for they allure by their beauty passers-by to drink of them, even though these should not be thirsty. And thy intelligence invites us, as by a word of command, to participate in those divine draughts which gush forth so abundantly in thy soul.
- **Chapter II** – But I, O thou blessed woman, not being now so much my own master as in the power of others, am driven along by the varying wills of many adversaries, being in one sense in exile, in another in prison, and in a third in bonds. But I pay no regard to these things. Yea, by the injuries inflicted on me through them, I acquire all the more the character of a disciple, that I may attain to Jesus Christ. May I enjoy the torments which are prepared for me, seeing that “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy [to be compared] with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”
- **Chapter III** – I have gladly acted as requested in thy letter, having no doubt respecting those persons whom thou didst prove to be men of worth. For I am sure that thou barest testimony to them in the exercise of a godly judgment, and not through the influence of carnal favour. And thy numerous quotations of Scripture passages exceedingly delighted me, which, when I had read, I had no longer a single doubtful thought respecting the matter. For I did not hold that those things were simply to be glanced over by my eyes, of which I had received from thee such an incontrovertible demonstration. May I be in place of thy soul, because thou lovest Jesus, the Son of the living God. Wherefore also He Himself says to thee, “I love them that love Me; and those that seek Me shall find peace.”
- **Chapter IV** – Now it occurs to me to mention, that the report is true which I heard of thee whilst thou wast at Rome with the blessed father

Linus, whom the deservedly-blessed Clement, a hearer of Peter and Paul, has now succeeded. And by this time thou hast added a hundred-fold to thy reputation; and may thou, O woman! still further increase it. I greatly desired to come unto you, that I might have rest with you; but “the way of man is not in himself.” For the military guard [under which I am kept] hinders my purpose, and does not permit me to go further. Nor indeed, in the state I am now in, can I either do or suffer anything. Wherefore deeming the practice of writing the second resource of friends for their mutual encouragement, I salute thy sacred soul, beseeching of thee to add still further to thy vigour. For our present labour is but little, while the reward which is expected is great.

C. Conclusion

- **Chapter V** – Avoid those that deny the passion of Christ, and His birth according to the flesh: and there are many at present who suffer under this disease. But it would be absurd to admonish thee on other points, seeing that thou art perfect in every good work and word, and able also to exhort others in Christ.
- **Final Salutations** – Salute all that are like-minded with thyself, and who hold fast to their salvation in Christ. The presbyters and deacons, and above all the holy Hero, salute thee. Cassian my host salutes thee, as well as my sister, his wife, and their very dear children. May the Lord sanctify thee for evermore in the enjoyment both of bodily and spiritual health, and may I see thee in Christ obtaining the crown!

[https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Epistle\\_to\\_Mary\\_of\\_Cassobola](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Epistle_to_Mary_of_Cassobola)