

RETURNING MARY MAGDALENE TO THE GOSPEL PAGES

by

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To my family:

Malcolm, Melanie, Wiechard, Damian, Tamryn and Kayla

and in memory of:

Michael Wilhelm (31.05.2011 – 05.09.2011)


PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

I, **May-Muriel Miller**

declare that, except for where acknowledgements have been duly made for the materials and quotations used, this research work entitled:

Returning Mary Magdalene to the Gospel Pages

submitted to the University of KwaZulu-Natal for the award of the degree of Master of Theology in Human Science (Catholic Theology) in the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics, has been wholly and originally undertaken by me under the supervision of Professors Paul Decock and Sue Rakoczy for the aforementioned purpose.



SIGNED



DATE

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CHAPTER 1

The introduction

Mary Magdalene has for centuries been confused with Mary of Bethany and the woman who was a sinner in the city. This confusion, from as early as the beginning of the Middle Ages, led to the three biblical women being fused into one entity, the resultant figure becoming known as Mary Magdalene.

The fact that the composite Mary Magdalene is widely known throughout the Western Church as a reformed prostitute and not as well recognized as a disciple of, and the first missionary of, the risen Lord Jesus Christ, inspires me to explore a portrait of Magdalene more in keeping with how she is presented in the gospels. I shall thus undertake, through this dissertation, to carry out a literary analysis of gospel texts relevant to the women making up the composite character. In order to separate from and compare the narratives contained in the New Testament with centuries of transmitted folklore, an examination of some of the legends surrounding Mary Magdalene will be both necessary and beneficial. A further advantage will be to acquire a picture of the saint in the era in which this dissertation is written, and this will be done through an examination of the lyrics pertaining to Mary Magdalene found in the rock opera, *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

It is my hope that the type of questions asked by the members of the Western Churches who sit in the pews on a Sunday can be answered at the end of this dissertation. Such questions would be as follows:

Was Mary Magdalene a prostitute?

Did she anoint Jesus' feet after wetting them with her tears and drying them with her hair?

Did Jesus heal her from demon possession or from a peculiarly forceful lust for sexual activities?

How can Mary Magdalene have retired to both Ephesus and the south of France?

Did she really become a preacher?

Did she live in a cave as a hermit, continually doing penance for her sins?

Was Mary Magdalene really martyred?

My research will begin with Chapter 2 and will show that, through *Jesus Christ Superstar*'s ongoing stage productions, films and music albums, Mary Magdalene was identified and, it can be reasonably assumed, will for some time continue to be identified, by audiences and auditors throughout the planet as the former prostitute who loved Jesus. Since some of the rock opera's lyrics pertaining to the saint call to mind the traditional stories received by my generation during the fifties and sixties of the previous century, I am led to attempt a search for their beginnings.

As the harmonization of texts seems to be the foundation of the composite Mary Magdalene, the third chapter of this dissertation will take me to the commencement of the harmonizing tradition which prevailed in the Western Church from the second century until the first half of the twentieth century. This chapter will also look at Pope Gregory the Great and two of his sermons, one of which presents the harmonizing of the three female New Testament characters into the single composite character. A brief look at parts of the gospel harmonies of three Catholic writers from the end of the nineteenth century up until 1959 will also take place.¹ Thereafter the chapter will concern itself with looking at some of the legends surrounding Mary Magdalene's conflated character.

Since Mary Magdalene's conflated character is made up of Mary of Bethany, Mary Magdalene and the unnamed female anointer of Luke, the fourth, fifth and sixth chapters of this dissertation will pay close attention to the gospel texts referring to these women as presented by evangelists Mark, Luke and John. Since I intend to explore an image of Mary Magdalene more in accordance with the gospel presentation of her, the key element of this study will be a literary analysis of each of the following texts:

Mk 14:3-9; 15:40-41, 47; 16:1-8.
Lk 7:36-50; 8:1-3; 23:49, 55-56; 24:1-12.
Jn 11:1-2; 12:1-8; 19:25; 20:1-18.²

¹ Lagrange's two-volumed *The Gospel of Jesus Christ* (1938), not cited in the body of this dissertation, is a further example of gospel harmonization during the early part of the twentieth century.

² Biblical texts in this dissertation will be quoted from *The New American Bible* unless otherwise indicated.

The supposition is that the literary analyses will reveal three individual women whose worth, in due course, can be reassessed in the light of the independent parts they played in the life of Jesus and the early Church. This dissertation will concern itself only with the gospels' Mary Magdalene and not that of the other two women.

The seventh chapter will, in the light of the literary analyses of the above relevant texts, reveal my interpretation of the gospels' Mary Magdalene. In the same chapter I shall study both the Western Church's Tridentine and post-Vatican II liturgical celebrations of her sainthood, focusing on the Catholic tradition. Once I have compared the values of their scriptural texts and prayers, I shall point out what obstacles there may be to a global recognition of the gospel presentation of her character.

In the eighth chapter I shall recapitulate my intentions in this introduction, bringing to conclusion my endeavour to return Mary Magdalene to the pages of the canonical gospels.

Having conveyed the intentions of this dissertation I shall proceed to the first chapter in Part I to analyze songs in *Jesus Christ Superstar* where the lyrics involve the character of Mary Magdalene.

PART 1

CHAPTER 2

The portrayal of Mary Magdalene in the Rock Opera 'Jesus Christ Superstar'

This chapter provides a literary analysis of the lyrics of four songs associated with the character of Mary Magdalene in the rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar*. They are entitled as follows: 'What's the Buzz', 'Strange Thing Mystifying', 'Everything's Alright' and 'I Don't Know How to Love Him'. The purpose of such an examination is to gain an understanding of the perception of her character at the time the rock opera was composed.

2.1 Introduction to chapter

In October 1970 the music album of the rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar*, written by two young Englishmen named Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice, was released in the United Kingdom.³ The London stage production,⁴ which followed almost two years later, opened at the Palace Theatre on 9 August 1972.⁵ *Jesus Christ Superstar*'s story, told entirely in song, covers Jesus' final week in Bethany and Jerusalem and ends with his crucifixion and death. It is built upon the four canonical gospels, in particular the Gospel of John, and '*The Life of Christ* by Fulton J. Sheen' (Rice 2000:192).⁶

Rice, the lyricist of the duo composers did, however, place considerable emphasis on his own notion of personal interactions, not described in the gospels, especially with regard to 'the words and motivations of Judas Iscariot' since his intention, from the onset, was that the opera would be 'the story of Christ's last week on earth as seen through the eyes of Judas Iscariot' (Rice 2000:171,192). His notion of

³ Jesus Christ Superstar, 2014. The Album. [Internet].

⁴ It was the first official stage production in the United Kingdom (Sir Tim Rice, 2012. Jesus Christ Superstar). The first in the United States began on Broadway a year earlier.

⁵ AndrewLloydWebber.com, 2013. Jesus Christ Superstar Opens in London.

⁶ According to Rice, *Life of Christ* was 'written from a committed Christian viewpoint and was invaluable in making much of the political and historical background of the story clear' (Rice 2000:192).

personal exchanges would naturally encompass other players interacting with Judas, these being principally Jesus and Mary Magdalene. The lyrics generally express a combination of Rice's personal response to the gospels as well as his understanding of earlier responses to the same.

Although the rock opera has entertainment with music and song, and not preaching or teaching, as its basis, disapproving Christians from all over the English speaking world protested against blasphemies allegedly contained therein, the personal creeds of the two men responsible for its composition, and even its musical genre.⁷

As this dissertation concerns itself mainly with the picture of Mary Magdalene presented by Tim Rice's lyrics, most noteworthy are the statements made about her which proceed towards condemning the rock opera as a whole, one of them being: 'The blasphemous "Rock Opera" Jesus Christ Superstar ... includes the following [blasphemy]: That Jesus Christ fornicated with Mary Magdalene who is portrayed as a harlot'.⁸

In order to gain an understanding of Mary Magdalene's character in *Jesus Christ Superstar* I shall closely examine the lyrics of the melodies sung about her, by her alone and by her along with other members of the cast, with the exception of only one: the duet 'between Mary and Peter, entitled "Could We Start Again Please"' (Rice

⁷ Some are of the opinion that Christianity's God cannot be truly praised through the medium of Progressive Rock. 'Even the most talented and dedicated musicians cannot make ROCK music honor the Lord' (WordPress, 2010. *The Christianity: Jesus Christ Superstar is against our Faith*. Comment 5).

Further objections are that neither of the two composers believed in the divinity of Jesus Christ (WordPress, 2010. *The Christianity: Jesus Christ Superstar is against our Faith*). 'Webber is quoted in *Rolling Stone*, December 2, 1970 as saying, "I personally don't think that Jesus is God"' while Tim Rice is quoted in March 1971's *Seventeen* as stating that he regards "'Christ as a man, placing him on a human level'" (2010). Because of Lloyd Webber and Rice's personal creeds, the rock opera's critics to this day make statements to the effect that 'such songwriters are incapable of writing anything that would glorify the Lord [since] they are unsaved and ignorant of God's Word' (2010).

'Blasphemies' in *Jesus Christ Superstar* include: There is no resurrection; God is made responsible for Judas' sin (WordPress, 2010. *The Christianity: Jesus Christ Superstar is against our Faith*); and, Jesus is portrayed as confused and ignorant of his identity (WordPress, 2010. *The Christianity: Jesus Christ Superstar is against our Faith*. Comment 5).

Jesus Christ Superstar was originally banned in South Africa 'where it was considered to be irreligious with its underlying themes of celebrity and (super)stardom, and its intermittent use of humour' (Anton Luiting, 2009. *Jesus Christ Superstar*).

⁸ WordPress, 2010. *The Christianity: Jesus Christ Superstar is against our Faith*. Comment 3.

2000:251).⁹ The songs to be analyzed are entitled: ‘What’s the Buzz’, ‘Strange Thing Mystifying’, ‘Everything’s Alright’ and ‘I Don’t Know How to Love Him’.

2.2 The first song in the first scene

The stage opera commences with Judas singing ‘Heaven on their Minds’, a song which belittles Jesus by reducing his teaching to lies and accusing him of enjoying the interest of the public too much to observe the obvious warnings that his apostles’ lives are being threatened by his talk of God and the new Messiah.¹⁰

After the overture we find Mary Magdalene on stage during the first scene, Friday night in Bethany. Other characters on stage are Jesus, the twelve apostles and the apostles’ women. There are three songs in this scene relating to Mary Magdalene, the first is:

WHAT’S THE BUZZ?

APOSTLES

What’s the buzz? Tell me what’s happening

JESUS

Why should you want to know?

Don’t you mind about the future, don’t you try to think ahead

Save tomorrow for tomorrow, think about today instead

APOSTLES

What’s the buzz? Tell me what’s happening

JESUS

I could give you facts and figures – I could give you plans and forecasts

Even tell you where I’m going –

APOSTLES

When do we ride into Jerusalem?

JESUS

Why should you want to know?

⁹ This song, not on the original album, was added to the stage production so that the voice of Yvonne Elliman (*Superstar*’s Mary Magdalene on Broadway) could be heard in the second half (Rice 2000:251).

¹⁰ As the story would be as seen through the eyes of Judas, the composers felt that they could ‘put words into Judas’ mouth without fear of being scripturally inaccurate ... we had no wish to offend’ (Rice 2000:171).

Why are you obsessed with fighting times and fates you can't defy?
If you knew the path we're riding you'd understand it less than I

APOSTLES

What's the buzz? Tell me what's happening

MARY MAGDALENE

Let me try to cool down your face a bit

JESUS

That feels nice, so nice ...

Mary that is good –

While you prattle through your supper – where and when and who and how

She alone has tried to give me what I need right here and now

APOSTLES

What's the buzz? Tell me what's happening

2.2.1 Notes¹¹

1 What's the buzz? Tell me what's happening (First chorus)

The lyrics of this composition indicate impatience on behalf of the apostles, exacerbated by the repetition of each question in song. Their questions are hurled relentlessly at Jesus, demanding to be answered.

2 Why should you ... today instead

Jesus' first reply begins with a question. The second and third lines recall Matthew's Sermon on the Mount where Jesus, at 6:34, urges his listeners not to 'worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Today's hardship is enough for today.' In the gospel account Jesus' appreciation of God as a loving father is made transparent by the evangelist. Their heavenly Father, says Jesus, feeds the birds and clothes the wild flowers, even though they do not work. The question that he adds speaks for itself: 'Aren't you more important than them?' (6:26-28) Tim Rice's Jesus, however, indicates that their concerns are inappropriate at this point in time.

¹¹ *The New Testament* by Nicholas King is referred to in this song.

3 What's the buzz? Tell me what's happening (Second chorus)

The apostles appear not to have heard Jesus. Tim Rice, perhaps unknowingly, reveals the fact that much of what Jesus had taught them throughout his ministry went in through one ear and out the other. Verification of the disciples' obtuseness can be found on various pages of the gospels, particularly those of Mark: When, for example, Jesus warns them against the leaven of the Pharisees, they ask one another if he said this because they had forgotten to bring food with them. Jesus' subsequent rebuke would have mortified the most mediocre of IQs: 'Why are you discussing that you don't have loaves? Do you neither understand nor comprehend? Having eyes, do you not see, and having ears do you not hear' (Mk 8:17-18)? Other examples are Jesus' admonishing of Peter (already appointed as one of the Twelve) in Mark 8:33 and the Twelve's inability to understand the second Passion prophecy in 8:32.

4 I could give you ... where I'm going

In the gospels Jesus had repeatedly told his disciples that he would die and rise again. During the third prophecy of his Passion in Mark he had made it clear that it would be in Jerusalem that he would be handed over to the chief priests and scribes who would condemn him to death and, in turn, hand him over to the Gentiles. The Gentiles would 'mock him, and they'll spit on him, and they'll whip him. And they will kill him. And after three days he will rise' (10:33-34). Tim Rice unambiguously demonstrates Jesus' exasperation in three short phrases of facts, figures and forecasts previously given and already forgotten.

5 When do we ride into Jerusalem? (Third chorus)

The change of chorus words underlines the fact that the apostles are still not listening. They are consumed with their own agenda which, because of their lack of listening, they believe to be Jesus' agenda as well.

6 Why should you ... it less than I

Rice's Jesus asks the same question as before. Replying with a question is something Jesus often did when people tried to trap him (Mk 11:29-30).¹² His questions in this song bring to mind Peter (Simon) when, at the first passion prediction, he objected to Jesus' forecast of his own death (Mk 8:32-33). Another event which comes to mind is that of the woman who wanted her sons to sit at Jesus' right hand (Mt 20:21-22).

7 What's the buzz? Tell me what's happening (Fourth chorus)

The apostles return to their annoying demand, made worse by its relentless repetition. Rice's Jesus is clearly agitated and exhausted. His patience and energy have been depleted like that of a parent responding again and again to an over-inquisitive child. He either refuses to reply, or does not get the chance to as Mary Magdalene steps in to cool his brow.

8 Let me try to cool down your face a bit

As the players of the scene include twelve apostles, the apostles' women, Jesus and Mary Magdalene, the suggestion here is that Mary Magdalene is Jesus' woman. She approaches Jesus with the self-assurance of a life-partner in order to, it seems, wipe his forehead and face. An audience would become aware that the anointing scene is about to begin.

9 That feels nice ... right here and now

The first two phrases that Rice puts on Jesus' lips could be words said during intimate moments with a sexual partner, particularly during the 'Hippie' period of the sixties and seventies when free love was so widely promoted. These would be the first of the lyrics regarding Jesus and Mary Magdalene to shock those against the rock opera into defending Jesus' moral integrity. A comment posted by *The Christianity* includes the following warning to the public: 'Before you watch Jesus Christ Superstar you should know that it presents Christ as a mere man, and an immoral one at that'.¹³

¹² When the chief priests, scribes and elders demand to know by what authority he acts, Jesus replies with a question.

¹³ WordPress, 2010. *The Christianity*: Jesus Christ Superstar is against our Faith. Comment 6.

Rice's Jesus then turns to the apostles and hauls them over the coals for their continuous prattling about the future when what he, Jesus, most needed was a little slack and some tender, loving care.

10 What's the buzz? Tell me what's happening

An audience would feel Jesus' relief as the apostles' chanting eventually dies down.

2.3 The second song in the first scene

The second song on Friday night in Bethany begins immediately. It is entitled:

STRANGE THING MYSTIFYING

JUDAS

It seems to me a strange thing, mystifying
That a man like you can waste his time on women of her kind
Yes I can understand that she amuses
But to let her stroke you, kiss your hair, is hardly in your line
It's not that I object to her profession
But she doesn't fit in well with what you teach and say
It doesn't help us if you're inconsistent
They only need a small excuse to put us all away

JESUS

Who are you to criticize her? Who are you to despise her?
Leave her, leave her, let her be now
Leave her, leave her, she's with me now
If your slate is clean – then you can throw stones
If your slate is not then leave her alone
I'm amazed that men like you can be so shallow thick and slow
There is not a man among you who knows or cares if I come or go

ALL (save JUDAS)

No you're wrong! You're very wrong! How can you say that?

JESUS

Not one – not one of you!

2.3.1 Notes

11 It seems to me ... put us all away

Judas voices his disapproval of Jesus' acceptance of Mary Magdalene.

11.1 Women of her kind

According to Rice's Judas, Mary Magdalene is a prostitute and the amusement she provides is of a sexual nature. In Luke's gospel at 7:39 the Pharisee says 'If this man were a prophet, he would know who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, that she is a sinner.' *The Christianity* comments as follows: 'One of the most blasphemous parts of "Superstar" is the part where Jesus is pictured as a lover of Mary Magdalene, who is portrayed in the opera as a prostitute'.¹⁴ That Jesus is made the woman's lover is clearly fabricated to increase the drama of *Jesus Christ Superstar* but it is unlikely that Rice, alone, would have come to the mistaken conclusion that Mary Magdalene was the sinner described by Luke. In his research the lyricist would have been strongly influenced by Sheen's depiction, and therefore the Western tradition, of Mary Magdalene as the repentant sex offender.

11.2 Stroke you, kiss your hair

Tim Rice harmonizes the anointing scenes of the four gospels with the support of *Life of Christ* but, with his own creative talent, he changes sincere and accepted hospitality of first century Palestinian culture to a theatrical example of sexual foreplay in the seventies. At 14:3 Mark has the perfumed oil 'poured ... on [Jesus'] **head**' and, equally, at Matthew 26:7 the woman 'poured it on his **head**'. At 7:37-38 Luke's anointer took a 'flask of ointment ... and began to bathe his **feet** with her tears. Then she **wiped** them with her **hair**, **kissed** them and anointed them with the ointment. Rice has rearranged the events to suit the 'prostitute' innuendo, switching the woman's hair which she used for drying Jesus' feet in Luke's gospel account to the hair on Jesus' head which Mary Magdalene anoints on stage. The lyricist, like Mark and Matthew, has Jesus' anointed on the head, so kisses for the feet in Luke become kisses on the head during the show. Rice's Mary Magdalene does

¹⁴ WordPress, 2010. *The Christianity*: Jesus Christ Superstar is against our Faith.

not wipe, or dry, Jesus' feet as Luke's anointing woman does. Instead, she caresses and strokes his face and head [see Note 8 above].

11.3 It's not that I object to her profession

Judas objects in John's anointing scene at 12:4-5, not to Mary of Bethany per se but, to the costliness of the perfumed oil which could have been 'sold for three hundred days' wages and given to the poor'. Rice has chosen John's Judas, mentioned by name only in the fourth gospel's anointing scene, for this section of his lyrics. He now employs the harmony of John 12:4-5 with the synoptic versions arranged by Sheen, and skillfully brings the traitor into play (Sheen 1959:296-299).¹⁵ For the moment Rice has Judas ignore the price of the perfume and, instead, emphasizes Mary Magdalene's line of work with the word 'profession' strongly suggesting prostitution, the age old profession.

11.4 Fit in well ... inconsistent

Tim Rice's Judas goes on to suggest that Jesus' actions contradict what he teaches. In Matthew 23:3 it is Jesus who points out to his disciples that the Pharisees do not practise what they preach, and tells them to do what they say but not to do what they do. Since both Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber's 'idea was to have Christ seen through the eyes of Judas',¹⁶ the lyricist cleverly takes Jesus' words and transforms them into a bitter accusation on the lips of Judas.

11.5 They only ... put us all away

Here Judas refers to the Roman Empire. Judea was, at the time, one of its smaller provinces governed by an equestrian prefect with a single regiment of cavalry and five of infantry (D'Oliveira 2009:107, 123). Since Rome's main objective was peace throughout the empire, the maintenance of law and order would have been the governor's main

¹⁵ The Venerable Fulton John Sheen, a bishop of the Archdiocese of New York and later of Rochester, was an exceptionally popular preacher, well-known especially for hosting radio and television shows (Reeves, 2005. *Fulton J Sheen, Catholic Champion*. Catholic Education Resource Center. 1-3). He died in 1979 at the age of 84. When preparing to write Sheen's biography, *America's Bishop: The Life and Times of Fulton J. Sheen*, Reeves 'discovered a brilliant, charismatic, and holy man' (2005:1).

¹⁶ WordPress, 2010. *The Christianity*: Jesus Christ Superstar is against our Faith.

concern (:3). It is highly unlikely that a religious leader's supposed inconsistencies would get the group arrested.

12 Who are you to ... come or go

Jesus challenges Judas' discrimination against Mary Magdalene.

12.1 Who are you to ... her alone

For the basis of this stanza Rice reads Sheen's reflection on John 7:53-8:11, the pericope which tells of Jesus saving a woman from being violently executed (Sheen 1959:202-210). The gospel story begins with the scribes and the Pharisees attempting to trap Jesus. They 'bring a woman who had been caught in adultery' (8:3) and challenge Jesus to give his opinion on whether or not the Law of Moses, concerning the stoning of women caught in adultery, should be obeyed. Jesus bent down and doodled in the sand, paying no heed to their prodding for a while. He eventually stood 'up and said to them, "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her"' (:7). Rice's Jesus speaks of throwing stones 'only if your slate is clean', which statement is compatible with the colloquial language of the seventies. In John, Jesus is left alone with the unnamed woman; in the rock concert Jesus tells Judas 'to leave her, she's with me now'. Rice's Judas criticizes and despises the woman; John's Jesus neither condemns nor de-humanizes the woman. Although Rice borrows his 'Leave her, let her be now' from Mark and John's parallel anointing scenes, his addition 'she's with me now' is his own (Mk 14:7 and Jn 12:8). These four words from the mouth of Rice's Jesus conjure up feelings of safety, shelter, warmth, support and, above all, the knowledge that one will never be alone again.

12.2 I'm amazed that ... and slow

Tim Rice, more openly than in the first song, makes known the obtuseness of the disciples by placing a straightforward reprimand on Jesus' lips.¹⁷ Rice's research would have revealed that in Mark the disciples are represented as continually 'misunderstanding aspects of Jesus and his ministry' (Perrin 1974:8). They do not understand the parable of the sower in 4:13 and Jesus' power over the storm in 4:35f; they do not grasp the

¹⁷ See Note 3 on the second chorus of 'What's the Buzz?'

significance of the first feeding of the crowds and the walking on the water in 6:50-52; in fact, they are completely lost to the meaning of ‘the leaven of the Pharisees’ and both feedings of the crowds in 8:16-21. In 7:18 the disciples cannot appreciate the distinction between clean and unclean and in 9:5f they misunderstand the implications of the transfiguration. In 10:24-26 they do not understand that riches can be an obstacle for entering the kingdom and in 14:37-41, at Gethsemane, they are utterly perplexed. Peter’s inability to comprehend the passion prediction can be read in 8:31f and, in 9:30-32 and 10:32-34, none of the disciples grasp Jesus’ forecast of death. James and John, in 10:35-40, show their miscomprehension of Jesus’ ministry by requesting high positions in the kingdom. Furthermore, in 9:10 the disciples show that, not only are they unable to grasp Jesus’ forecast of his death but, also, ‘the prospective glory of the resurrection’ is beyond the limits of their understanding (:8-9).

It is no wonder that Rice’s Jesus would use such offensive words to reprimand the apostles on stage.

12.3 There is not ... come or go

What comes to mind are the eleven remaining apostles, after Judas’ betrayal, deserting Jesus when the guards of the Sanhedrin came to make an arrest. Jesus predicts the flight of the apostles in Matthew 26:31 when he says: ‘This night all of you will have your faith in me shaken, for it is written: “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be dispersed”’.¹⁸

13 No you’re ... you say that?

Rice’s apostles give the same response to Jesus as they do in the three synoptic gospels, only using different words: In Matthew’s gospel ‘Peter said to him, “Even though I should have to die with you, I will not deny you.” And all the disciples spoke likewise’ (Mt 26:35; Mk 14:31 and Lk 22:33).¹⁹

¹⁸ Also in Mk 14:27 and Lk 22:31.

¹⁹ In Luke only Peter responds.

14 Not one – not one of you!

Jesus Christ Superstar is adamant that not one of the apostles is concerned about his comings or goings. In the scriptures two of the evangelists testify that not one of the chosen twelve was with Jesus once he was arrested: ‘And they all left him and fled’, leaving him on his own to face the music (Mk 14:50 and Mt 26:56). Luke and John say nothing about their flight but Luke mentions that only Peter followed the arresting party to the high priest’s house (22:54). In John, ‘Simon Peter, in company with another disciple, kept following Jesus closely’ (18:15). The lyricist would certainly have referred to these segments of the Passion Narratives when writing this song.

2.4 The third song in the first scene

It is on this prophetic note of abandonment that Mary Magdalene begins her song entitled ‘Everything’s Alright’. The scene is still Friday night in Bethany.

EVERYTHING’S ALRIGHT

MARY MAGDALENE

Try not to get worried, try not to turn on to
Problems that upset you oh don’t you know
Everything’s alright yes everything’s fine
And we want you to sleep well tonight
Let the world turn without you tonight
If we try we’ll get by so forget all about us tonight

APOSTLES’ WOMEN

Everything’s alright yes everything’s alright yes

MARY MAGDALENE

Sleep and I shall soothe you, calm you and anoint you
Myrrh for your hot forehead oh then you’ll feel
Everything’s alright yes everything’s fine
And it’s cool and the ointment’s sweet
For the fire in your head and feet
Close your eyes close your eyes
And relax think of nothing tonight

APOSTLES’ WOMEN

Everything’s alright yes everything’s alright yes

JUDAS

Woman your fine ointment – brand new and expensive
Could have been saved for the poor
Why has it been wasted? We could have raised maybe
Three hundred silver pieces or more
People who are hungry, people who are starving
Matter more than your feet and hair

MARY MAGDALENE

Try not to get worried, try not to turn on to
Problems that upset you oh don't you know
Everything's alright yes everything's fine
And we want you to sleep well tonight
Let the world turn without you tonight
If we try we'll get by so forget all about us tonight

APOSTLES' WOMEN

Everything's alright yes everything's alright yes

JESUS

Surely you're not saying we have the resources
To save the poor from their lot
There will be poor always, pathetically struggling –
Look at the good things you've got!
Think! While you still have me
Move! While you still see me
You'll be lost and you'll be so sorry when I'm gone

MARY MAGDALENE

Sleep and I shall soothe you, calm you and anoint you
Myrrh for your hot forehead oh then you'll feel
Everything's alright yes everything's fine
And it's cool and the ointment's sweet
For the fire in your head and feet
Close your eyes close your eyes
And relax think of nothing tonight
Close your eyes close your eyes and relax

ALL

Everything's alright yes everything's alright yes

2.4.1 Notes²⁰

15 Try not to get worried – forget all about us tonight

Wholly attentive to Jesus' earthly needs, Mary Magdalene reassures him that all's well and encourages him to get a good night's sleep.

15.1 Problems that upset – about us tonight

The gospels are theological writings, not biographies, and therefore their writers were neither obliged nor inspired to report every time that Jesus needed sleep. Only the synoptic 'Calming of the Storm' pericopes tell of an event when the disciples are forced to awaken a sleeping Jesus (Mk 4:38; Mt 8:24 and Lk 8:23). In Luke's gospel, especially, Jesus gets energy and inspiration through prayer, not sleep (3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18; 9:28-29; 11:1 and 22:41). Tim Rice's Mary Magdalene, however, would like Jesus to escape from his anxieties and the misfortunes of the world for just one night. Although Rice is known to have denied that Jesus Christ is God, it is perhaps with tongue in cheek that he gets Mary to suggest that the universe can do without Jesus for the length of time it takes a man to have a revitalizing night's sleep.

16 Everything's alright yes

In the chorus the apostles' women continue to pacify Jesus. Jesus, through the words of the song 'Strange Thing Mystifying', had recognized pettiness and stupidity in his disciples and had, also, conceded that they were unappreciative of his presence. Acknowledging this fickleness in the men he had chosen has left Rice's Jesus harassed, distraught and badly in need of consolation.

17 Sleep and I shall – think of nothing tonight

The lyrics in both the Magdalene verses indicate that Mary tends and counsels Jesus as a mother would her adult son. However, the suggestive lines in the songs from the first scene considered in this chapter have made their impact – the audience, whether Christian or not, has accepted that Mary Magdalene owns a sexually sordid past.

²⁰ *The New Testament* by Nicholas King is referred to in this song.

17.1 Myrrh for your hot forehead – head and feet

Mary Magdalene applies a soothing balm of myrrh over Jesus' forehead and feet. The inference is that the anointing action is a therapeutic one while in the gospel accounts the anointing scenes signal theological interpretation. In ancient Egypt corpses were embalmed with myrrh, at the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem myrrh formed a component of the sacred incense and, in the New Testament, the infant Jesus was given the treasures of the East – 'gold, frankincense and myrrh' (Mt 2:11).²¹ In modern times this bitter and spicy herb is used in aromatherapy and in the treatment of ailments such as coughs, sprains, asthma, ulcers and indigestion.²²

Rice's Mary Magdalene sings of the ointment's sweet fragrance, attesting the fact that the lyricist is aware of myrrh having been used throughout history as a perfume.²³

In John's gospel Mary of Bethany anoints Jesus' feet and, in Luke, the unnamed female 'sinner' does the same (Jn 12:3 and Lk 7:38). Both Mark's and Matthew's unnamed woman pours the ointment over Jesus' head (Mk 14:3 and Mt 26:6). In Rice's lyrics, where the lyricist is clearly influenced by Sheen's reflection on the second anointing in *Life of Christ* (Sheen 1959:296), Mary's anointing of both head and feet is a clear case of synthetic harmonizing resulting in a 'conflated version' of the gospels' anointing accounts.²⁴ The song entitled 'Strange Thing Mystifying' does not indicate that Mary had touched Jesus' feet.

18 Woman your fine – your feet and hair

Judas once again steps in, offensive and mercenary, deviously getting back at Jesus and Mary Magdalene by pretending a concern for the poor. This image is originally from John's gospel where Judas is the aggressor who argues that the perfume should have been sold and the money given to the poor (Jn 12:5). John is also the only evangelist who calls Judas a thief (Jn 12:6).

²¹ Never Ending Word, 2010. Myrrh in the Holy Anointing Oil: 2-4.

²² MNT Knowledge Center, 2003. What is myrrh used for? What are the benefits of myrrh? :2.

²³ Never Ending Word, 2010. Myrrh in the Holy Anointing Oil: 5.

²⁴ Synoptic Gospels Primer, 2008. Harmonize. [Webpage].

18.1 Woman your fine – or more

The lyricist goes to Mark for the ointment's worth, as Mark is the only gospel which calculates the price of the ointment: 'For this myrrh could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and given to the poor' (14:5). Rice has taken 'silver pieces' from Matthew's gospel where the evangelist is the only one to calculate Judas' price for betraying Jesus: "'What are you willing to give me? And I'll hand him over [or, 'betray him'] to you.'" They settled on thirty silver coins ...' (Mt 26:15-16).²⁵

18.2 People who – feet and hair

Tim Rice maintains the feet and hair/head/forehead elements that were merged when writing the lyrics pointed out in 11.2 and 17.1 above. He skillfully portrays the hatred, spitefulness and bitterness that the audience has come to expect from Judas with the lines stating that the hungry 'matter more than [Jesus'] feet and hair'.

19 Surely you're not – when I'm gone

Rice composes seven lines of lyrics which effectively reflect Jesus' statement made to Judas in John's gospel: 'For the poor you always have with you – but me you do not always have' (12:8).²⁶

20 Close your eyes close your eyes and relax

Mary closes her song. This extra line underscores the opinion in notes 11.2 and 17.1 above – the anointing action in *Jesus Christ Superstar* suggests therapy mingled with a good measure of sexual intonation.

In a later scene, at the Temple and after Jesus has chased away those who 'have made it a den of thieves', Jesus gets agitated by the many destitute and ailing persons seeking his attention. Mary Magdalene consoles him again with the first three lines of the song 'Everything's Alright.' After her attention Jesus, now cool and unruffled, completes the notion with:

And I think I shall sleep well tonight

²⁵ The '[]' brackets are from *The New Testament* translation by Nicholas King.

²⁶ Jesus replies to his disciples in Mt 26:11 and to "some who were there" in Mk 14:7.

Let the world turn without me tonight.

2.5 The song in the fourth scene

The final song concerning Mary Magdalene to be examined in this dissertation is from the fourth scene, The Temple, and follows the rock opera's version of the Cleansing of the Temple. The song is entitled:

I DON'T KNOW HOW TO LOVE HIM

MARY MAGDALENE

I don't know how to love him
What to do how to move him
I've been changed yes really changed
In these past few days when I've seen myself
I seem like someone else

I don't know how to take this
I don't see why he moves me
He's a man he's just a man
And I've had so many men before
In very many ways
He's just one more

Should I bring him down should I scream and shout
Should I speak of love let my feelings out
I never thought I'd come to this – what's it all about
Don't you think it's rather funny
I should be in this position
I'm the one who's always been
So calm so cool, no lover's fool
Running every show
He scares me so

I never thought I'd come to this – what's it all about
Yet if he said he loved me
I'd be lost I'd be frightened
I couldn't cope just couldn't cope
I'd turn my head I'd back away
I wouldn't want to know
He scares me so
I want him so
I love him so

2.5.1 Notes

21 I don't know ... move him

Jesus is foremost on Mary Magdalene's mind. She does not understand the feelings she has for Jesus and what they may lead to. Her desire to 'move' him, to get him to react to her longing, has explicit sexual intonations. At this stage of the song, Mary seems to want Jesus to be sexually attracted to her.

22 I've been changed ... someone else

The thorough transformation within her has shocked her into confusion. Mary does not give details regarding her transformation but the audience easily brings to mind the lyricist's innuendos through words such as 'women of her kind', 'she amuses' and 'her profession'. Many Roman Catholic members of the audience will also be familiar with the Western Church's fourteen centuries-old Mary Magdalene tradition. Rice's suggestion is that Mary Magdalene has changed from being a prostitute who exchanged sex for money, to a conventional woman who desires sex for love. This inference would remind those familiar with the Breviary of the portion of a homily by St Gregory the Great read on Mary Magdalene's feastday where he praises Mary for having changed from a cold, detached love of Jesus to the ardent love which she expressed at the tomb on the morning of the resurrection (*The Divine Office* 2009:1397-1398).

23 I don't know ... just one more

Even though Rice declared in the *Seventeen* magazine of March 1971 that he regards 'Christ as a man, placing him on a human level',²⁷ his lyrics here do not fail to bring to mind 'The Son of God' and 'The Son of Man' titles, especially in Mark's gospel. When Mark wrote his gospel he was certain that Jesus was more than 'just a man'. This can be seen from its title: 'The beginning of the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God' (1:1). When Jesus dies, the evangelist confirms his belief through the centurion at the cross who announces that 'In truth this man was a son of God' (15:39).

²⁷ WordPress, 2010. *The Christianity*: Jesus Christ Superstar is against our Faith.

Mark uses the title ‘The Son of Man’ fourteen times in his gospel.²⁸ This term, indicating a human being, was commonly used in early Palestine when referring to a man or a boy and corresponds with somewhat recent colloquial terms such as ‘fellow’, ‘chap’ or ‘guy’. In the gospels the title is always found on Jesus’ lips in the third person.

However, it is not the Son of Man of the gospels that Rice’s Mary Magdalene seems to have in mind. To her, the lyrics seem to be saying, Jesus is like any other man, guided in the same way as all men are – by sexual need and lust. Since Tim Rice conveyed to *Life* magazine that Jesus ‘increases in stature by looking at him as a man’,²⁹ it is clear that the Magdalene of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, and her opinion of Jesus, is a creation of the same lyricist.

23.1 And I’ve had ... many ways

These two lines clearly indicate a promiscuous past in Mary Magdalene’s life. To ‘have’ or to have ‘had’ a person is a comparatively modern term that may have arisen even before the hippie era when open discussion of sex took the place of Victorian reserve and inhibition. It is a term usually used by a man of a woman in order to boast his virility.

24 Should I bring – what’s it all about

Ehrman reads the first question asked in this stanza as Mary talking ‘about having sex with Jesus’ (Ehrman 2006:180). ‘Should I bring him down?’ however, conveys thoughts far baser than a desire for physical intimacy because Mary is, essentially, asking herself if she should seduce Jesus and, thereby, destroy his ‘claim to be god’, a claim which carries with it ‘the implication that he is immune to sins of the flesh’.³⁰ It should be noted, however, that Rice has given devious and dishonourable thoughts to Mary Magdalene and not to Jesus. This is unlike Nikos Kazantzakis who, in his 1953 novel *The Last Temptation of Christ*, describes Jesus being tempted by means of a dream wherein he engages in sexual activities.³¹

²⁸ The title ‘The Son of Man’ can be found in Mark 2:10; 2:28; 8:31; 8:38; 9:9; 9:12; 9:31; 10:33; 10:45; 13:26; 14:21(twice); 14:41 and 14:62.

²⁹ Google Books, 2013. *Life*. PDF Magazine Article 28 May 1971:20-26.

³⁰ Facebook, 2 August 1012. Communication between Lynda Gilfillan and myself.

³¹ First Things, 2014. *The Last Temptation Reconsidered*. Carol Iannone. :4-5.

Don't you think – every show

The first five lines of this six-line strophe are redolent of the alleged risqué activities of couples experimenting in the sexual freedom of the hippie era.³² The word 'position' could reflect one of the many positions one could take up when coupling while 'cool' no longer reflects only a lower temperature, serenity or animosity but, in hippie slang, embraces notions of excellence, trendiness and the ability to be street-smart. Rice's Magdalen also seems to understand that, by being in charge during a sexual encounter, she would make certain that her client could never humiliate her.

He scares ... scares me so

In *Life* magazine Lloyd Webber is quoted as saying that Jesus 'must have been an incredibly powerful man. He had great power over women, so he was either very attractive or very magnetic'.³³ Whatever it was about Jesus that magnetized people in general, Rice's lyrics indicate that Mary Magdalene was attracted to something in Jesus that she could not explain, something so unlike her experience of other men that it rendered her afraid of his love.

I want ... love him so

Notwithstanding her fear, Mary declares that she loves Jesus. These two short concluding lines epitomize the highpoint of the song. Rice's Mary Magdalene, although clearly a reformed prostitute, needs to show her love of Jesus in the only way she knows – through sex.

2.6 Summary

Tim Rice has painted a picture of Mary Magdalene that corresponds well with the view of sex and romance during the Sixties and Seventies of the previous century when hippies experimented with 'Free Love', sharing their 'bodies as easily as we share our food or our thoughts'.³⁴ A notable distinction in this theme, however, is that Rice has retained the Western Church's traditional image of Mary as a former sex worker who had shared

³² Hip Planet, 2014. *Hippies from A to Z*. Skip Stone. 1.

³³ Google Books, 2013. *Life*. PDF Magazine Article 28 May 1971:20-26.

³⁴ Hip Planet, 2014. *Hippies from A to Z*. Skip Stone. 1, 3.

her body for pay rather than for enjoyment, an image clearly taken from Sheen's book, *Life of Christ*.³⁵ Further of note is that, while the Western Church has always encouraged, through the example of Mary Magdalene, penitence after forgiveness, Rice has introduced a new picture of her: Mary Magdalene would now prefer to have sex for love rather than for money. It can therefore be seen that, in reading the traditional Western depiction of the saint, the lyricist sees the story of Mary Magdalene through the glasses of his own time and understands her change from giving sex for pay, to choosing sex as an expression of love.

The lyrics, consequently, first reveal the Magdalene who had readily provided caresses, kisses and their inevitable consequences for men who were willing to pay for sexual pleasure. Thereafter they present a woman selfless and generous, taking care of her man who is clearly under great stress and in need of sleep. In the final song analyzed in this dissertation the lyrics reveal a Mary Magdalene who has left behind previous promiscuous and ignoble activities because of her attraction to the man who may be, or may not be, simply a man. She is a woman deeply in love with Jesus but, at the same time, these new and unfamiliar feelings have left her in a state of physical and emotional confusion.

Exploration of the New Testament gospels enabled Tim Rice to successfully create lyrics that portray Jesus Christ as a man (but not the Son of God) seen through the eyes of Judas the betrayer. His creation of the sexually seductive Mary Magdalene, however efficacious that may be in the genre of opera and stage productions, is not so much a result of his New Testament research but of his exploit during the late 1960s to the readers' response and creative mistakes made throughout the centuries following the writing of the gospels. This leads to the aforementioned fifth and final book in Rice's research repertoire of the rock opera, *Life of Christ*.

In this book, published about ten years before Tim Rice began writing the opera's lyrics, the Venerable Fulton J Sheen (1895-1979) gives not a biography of Jesus' life but a harmonized reflection of numerous events found in the four canonical gospels. It was in reading this book that the lyricist learnt of the Western image of Mary and of the harmonization of the three female figures. What Sheen transmitted to him was the tradition

³⁵ As a Roman Catholic bishop, Sheen would have been familiar with Pope Gregory the Great's Homily 25 read on St Mary Magdalene's feastday from the Tridentine Breviary.

that spoke of Mary of Bethany as the unnamed female sinner in Luke, as a repentant prostitute and as the woman who anointed Jesus twice, once over his feet and (1959:128), the second time, over his head and feet (:296-297). Sheen later confirms that Mary Magdalene was the paradigm of penitence, verifying his supposition that Mary of Bethany, the female sinner in Luke and Mary Magdalene were one and the same person, and her name was Mary Magdalene (:439).

I have shown that Mary Magdalene is depicted in *Jesus Christ Superstar* as a former prostitute and female partner of Jesus who, in spite of her love and longing for him, has not yet experienced sex in this relationship. This portrait emerged partly from Tim Rice's familiarity with the Western readers' response to the gospel stories as presented in Sheen's *Life of Christ*, as well from as his own understanding of love and sex generated during his youth within the hippie era. In the next chapter I shall explore the Western tradition in an attempt to find the reasons why the Church's preachers of the twentieth century would regard Luke's sinner, Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene to be the same person.

CHAPTER 3

Steps leading to the creation of the composite figure of the female anointers and Mary Magdalene

This chapter consists of four themes: the first introduces the harmonizing tradition of the Western Church, most likely the earliest initiation of the eventual composite figure named Mary Magdalene; the second theme concerns Pope Gregory the Great, the man who preached that the three anointers were one and the same woman, called Mary Magdalene;³⁶ the third looks at the perceptions of two popular Catholic writers, one from the late 19th century and the other from the early 20th century, with regard to St. Mary Magdalene; and, in the final theme, an attempt is made to provide certain stages of the saint's journeying, and/or that of her bodily remains, to two countries on the Mediterranean coastline. The purpose of this exploration is to understand the trends in the development of the Western tradition which depicts the female anointers as Mary Magdalene.

3.1 Introduction

In order to understand why, in 1959, Sheen would regard the female sinner in Luke, Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene as the same person, and named Mary Magdalene, this dissertation firstly explores the response of selected New Testament readers who lived during the centuries following the writing of the four gospels.

It was at that time that the practice of synchronizing data from diverse sources was customary.³⁷ This coordinating of assorted materials, which was born out of oral cultures,³⁸ developed into the practice of harmonizing the Christian texts which had become available. In the scriptures harmony became an attempt to merge two or more similar biblical passages into a composite form, without destroying the elements found in each pericope but in the hope of arriving at a balanced and historical composition of the

³⁶ Winkett remarks as follows: 'The Eastern Church has not suffered from this false picture of Mary; it is almost totally a Western misinterpretation' (2002:23).

³⁷ Synoptic Gospels Primer, 2008. Harmonize. [Webpage].

³⁸ *ibid.*

given material.³⁹ Gospel harmonies, therefore, are attempts to merge the four canonical gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John into a new gospel version which, in reality, becomes a fifth gospel written by the harmonizer (Palmer 1968:119).

The next section in this chapter deals with two homilies, named and numbered Sermon 25 and Sermon 33, given by the spiritual and saintly Pope Gregory the Great [c.540-604] to the Christian congregation in Rome.⁴⁰ These homilies fall into the literary genre of preaching, where creative mistakes are often necessary tools used to enlighten the congregation.

The subject matter of the third section shows written portrayals of Mary Magdalene by two authors prior to Sheen's publication of *Life of Christ* in 1959. Although historical exploration has always been both useful and interesting, the harmonizations referred to in this section were produced for the purpose of supplying devotional literature for Christian readers.

The final section of this chapter attempts a rendering of the growth of the veneration of the composite figure of Mary Magdalene, as understood by the Western Church, by looking at certain stages of the saint's travels to the Mediterranean shores north and west of Jerusalem.

3.2 The harmonizing tradition of the Church begins

Gospel harmonizing has a long tradition, the oldest existing completed harmony being the Diatessaron of Tatian, born CE 120 in Assyria.⁴¹ In this document there are two anointing narratives. The first follows Luke 7:36-50 where the woman is not named: she is a sinner of that city who weeps over Jesus' feet, wipes them with her hair, kisses them and anoints them with sweet ointment. The second anointing scene is a combined narrative which mainly follows John 12:1-8. It takes place at Bethany, Martha is serving, Lazarus is among them but the woman, Martha's sister Mary, pours the ointment on his head as in Matthew 26:7 and Mark 14:3 and, as in John 12:3, anoints his feet and wipes

³⁹ Harmony is contrary to analysing, the latter being an examining technique which requires the different components of a composition to be separated (Synoptic Gospels Primer, 2008. Harmonize. [Webpage]).

⁴⁰ Pope Gregory the Great served the Church until his death in 604. He wrote that a bishop should be: 'skilled as a physician of the soul'; his 'life should be ordered from a spiritual point of view'; he should 'teach and admonish those under him'; and, he 'should bear in mind his own weakness' (New Advent, 2013. Pope St. Gregory I ['the Great']). This was the way Gregory lived his life as bishop of Rome (2013).

⁴¹ *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2014. Tatian.

them with her hair. Furthermore, as in John 12:4-5, Judas voices a complaint at the waste *and*, as in Matthew 26:8, the disciples complain together about the same thing.⁴²

St Augustine [354-430], Bishop of Hippo and Father of the Church who left the largest number of inscribed works, penned his reflections on what a balanced composition of the four gospels might be in his *Harmony of the Gospels*.⁴³ However, unlike Tatian, he did not produce a completed one.

In *The Harmony of Gospels, Book II, Chapter 79*, Augustine discusses in what way he believes Matthew, Mark and John agree in their ‘Supper at Bethany’ scene at which Jesus was anointed, and how their accounts can be harmonized with that of Luke who records a similar incident at a different time. Augustine’s ‘theory is that it was the same Mary who did this deed on two separate occasions, the one being that which Luke has put on record’ and the other being the anointing by Lazarus’ sister in John 12:1-8. Augustine speculates that the statement made in John 11:2 indicates that ‘Mary had acted in this way before...’⁴⁴ Augustine therefore regards the anointing in John to be Mary’s second anointing in Bethany, an entirely different occasion from that reported in Luke. He also believes that this second anointing ‘is related by three of the evangelists in concert, namely, John, Matthew and Mark’.⁴⁵

Augustine speculates but is by no means positive about the identity of the unnamed woman in Luke’s anointing scene because, in a lecture about ‘what is meant by the resurrection of Lazarus’, he speaks of the raised man’s sister and adds, in brackets, ‘if, indeed, it was she who anointed the Lord’s feet with ointment, and wiped with her hair what she had washed with her tears’.⁴⁶

Augustine asserts that the fact that Matthew and Mark have the ointment poured on the head and John has it on the feet ‘can be shown to involve no contradiction ... that

⁴² Tatian 2012, *Diatessaron*. Sections XIV:45-47; XV:1-14 and XXXIX:1-24. [Internet].

⁴³ Theology of the Heart – Life of the Saints, 2012. Life of St Augustine. [Internet].

⁴⁴ ‘Mary was the one who had anointed the Lord with perfumed oil and dried his feet with her hair’ (Jn 11:2).

⁴⁵ New Advent, 2009. *Fathers of the Church*. The Harmony of the Gospels, Book II. Chapter 79 (Augustine), n154-155.

⁴⁶ New Advent, 2009. *Fathers of the Church*. Tractates on the Gospel of John, Tractate 49. (Augustine), 2, n3.

both things were elements in the actual occurrence ... that the woman poured the ointment not only upon the Lord's head, but also on His feet'.⁴⁷

While Augustine reasoned that there had been a single female anointer who anointed Jesus twice, St John Chrysostom [347-407], Archbishop of Constantinople and Doctor of the Church, came to a different conclusion.⁴⁸ In his homily on Matthew 26:6-7 he muses that although the female anointer may seem to be the same person in each of the four gospels, she cannot be. She is the same person in three gospels, says Chrysostom, 'yet not so with John, but another person, one much to be admired, the sister of Lazarus'.⁴⁹ He further reasons that she wiped Jesus' feet with her hair because he was not 'a mere man' ... 'but one greater than a man can be'; and that she poured oil on his head as Jacob had 'anointed a pillar to God, and oil was offered in the sacrifices, and the priests were anointed with ointment'.⁵⁰ Chrysostom calls the woman in the synoptic gospels a 'harlot', an inference that he cannot find himself to associate with Mary of Bethany.⁵¹

Augustine, on the other hand, does not speak of harlots, prostitutes and the like in the anointing scenes. In his sermon on the remission of sins he refers to Luke's anointer as 'a "woman" famous in the city, famous indeed in ill fame, "who was a sinner"'.⁵² Nonetheless, in the final paragraph he exhorts those in sin to:

approach the Feet of the Lord, seek his Footsteps, confess in pouring out tears upon them, and wipe them with her hair [in order to be] cleansed as it were in the Church from her filthy prostitution.⁵³

During early Christian times theologians and scripture scholars believed that the canonical gospels were historical documents narrating the life of Jesus Christ. In his *Harmony of the Gospels*, Augustine dealt cautiously with the different texts from Sacred Scripture, sincerely and competently seeking evidence of inconsistencies which might

⁴⁷ New Advent, 2009. *Fathers of the Church*. The Harmony of the Gospels, Book II, Chapter 79 (Augustine), n155.

⁴⁸ New Advent, 2009. *Fathers of the Church*. Homilies on Matthew, Homily 80 (Chrysostom).

⁴⁹ New Advent, 2009. *Fathers of the Church*. Homilies on Matthew, Homily 80.1 (Chrysostom).

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, Homily 80, 2.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, Homily 80, 1.

⁵² New Advent, 2009. *Fathers of the Church*. Sermons on the New Testament, Sermon 49 (Augustine), n1.

⁵³ *ibid.*, Sermon 49 (Augustine), n13.

impair the merging of the four gospels. His aim, to earnestly and accurately seek the chronology of events in Christ's life on earth, can be understood by his statement:

When we consider how questions are ... raised regarding the possibility of proving the consistency of the one set of historians with the other on these subjects, and of fixing the order in which those said things took place, we see that, unless we submit the whole to a careful examination, there may easily appear to be contradictions ... between the several narratives.⁵⁴

3.3 The birth of the Mary Magdalene tradition within the western Church

We note that neither St Augustine nor St John Chrysostom had made any connection between Mary Magdalene and the woman/women of the anointing scenes. In fact, as seen above, St Augustine was hesitant to even link the unnamed female sinner in Luke with Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus of Bethany.

For the next two hundred years the writings of Augustine and Chrysostom, as well as the harmonizing considerations of other Church Fathers on the same subject, were read, studied, preached, received and responded to throughout the east and west. Then came Pope Gregory the Great [c.540-604] and, during a homily on Luke's female anointer, three gospel women became one and her name was Mary Magdalene. This composite figure came to be accepted only in the West.⁵⁵

3.3.1 Sermon 33 of Pope St Gregory the Great

In Pope Gregory's 33rd homily, where he expands on Luke 7:36-50, we see that he identifies Mary Magdalene with Luke's female anointer as well as with Martha's sister, Mary, who anoints Jesus in John 12:1-8:

⁵⁴ New Advent, 2009. *Fathers of the Church*, The Harmony of the Gospels, Book III, Chapter 24 (Augustine), n68.

⁵⁵ The East was in possession of the first legend surrounding the life of Mary Magdalene (see '5.1 The earliest legend of St Mary Magdalene and her relics' below). The tradition had her buried, first, in Ephesus and, later, at Constantinople. Both sites were visited until the siege of Constantinople in 1204. With the papacy being subordinate 'to the emperors at Constantinople' (Duffy 1997:57), and the emperor of the time resenting 'Gregory's independent negotiations with the Lombards' (:50), the political climate was not conducive to the spread of the word east of Gregory's pulpit.

Luke describes her as a sinner, but John as Mary. We believe that she is that Mary of whom Mark attests that seven demons were driven out of her (De Boer 2007:172).⁵⁶

This identification could have been suggested by the fact that, a few verses later, Luke introduces a group of women, among whom one is named Mary Magdalene, who were healed of demon possession (8:1-3).

In another segment of Sermon 33 Pope Gregory explains his moral interpretation of the newly-named woman of the gospel text. Mary Magdalene represents members of the Church who regret the sins they have committed:

So we, we are meant by this woman when after sins we turn to the Lord with all our heart, when we take the sorrow of her penitence as an example (:172-173).

She represents Christians who do good works:

... when we do good works ... what do we do other than pour anointing oil over the Lord's body? ... whenever we convert to true penitence after sin, we stand behind his feet, because we then follow the footsteps that we first opposed (:172-173).

Mary Magdalene represents those who do good works with unpretentious love, empathy and generosity:

With tears the woman makes his feet wet. We also do that ... when we bend with a feeling of compassion to the least members of the Lord ... Whoever has compassion on the suffering of the neighbour, but does not have compassion on him out of his abundance, makes the feet of the Lord wet without drying them ... The woman kisses the feet which she dries. We also do that perfectly when we zealously love those whom we support ... (:172-173).

As the segments quoted above are from a homily of the gospel of the day and not from an official church document, we should not, at this point, come to the conclusion that Pope Gregory the Great intended to teach to the whole Church, by means of his

⁵⁶ Two other works by De Boer which document writings concerning Mary Magdalene are as follows: *Mary Magdalene: Beyond the Myth* (1997) and *The Gospel of Mary* (2004).

supreme authority, that it is a matter of faith and morals to believe that Mary Magdalene was the female sinner of Luke 7:36-50.⁵⁷ We should, rather, endeavour to grasp the essence of this famous homily. Central to understanding the pope's homilies is the early mediaeval 'Church's growing gloomy view of humanity ... its morbid obsession with its sins' and the subsequent yearning by its members for forgiveness (Haskins 1993:116). Preaching during the Middle Ages tended to be mostly about sin (:116), sound proof that an evolution of the thoughts and mindset of the people had extended into the Church.

For Pope Gregory, the main concern of his homily was not to give an exact account of the day's reading and how it corresponded with the rest of the gospel, in this case that of Luke, but to convey to the Roman congregation the spiritual and moral message implied by the text in question. The focal point of the gospel is, after all, that 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners' (1 Timothy 1:15), and the most dramatic demonstration of acquiring this salvation can be seen in the action of the penitent woman who turned to the Lord with all her heart (Ward 1987:13). The main threads woven through Gregory's homily on Luke 7:36-50 are penitence, compassion and support of the poor, and penitence is what initiates the last-mentioned two actions. Gregory sets Mary Magdalene up as an icon of hope to sinners: like her, they *will* be forgiven but, first of all, they must repent, turn around and do good works (Maisch 1998:45).⁵⁸ There is a suggestion here of the good works that Mary is recorded of as doing immediately after being cured of demon possession in Luke 8:1-3.

3.3.2 Sermon 25 of Pope Gregory the Great

In another homily, recorded as Sermon 25, Pope Gregory passionately urges his listeners to repent of their sins and turn to God. To motivate them he points to Mary Magdalene's unwavering devotion and love revealed at the empty tomb (De Boer 2007:171):

⁵⁷ Papal infallibility was declared by Vatican I held during 1870-1871 but 'was accepted and practiced from the earliest times' (EWTN, 2012. Papal Infallibility, 1). Nonetheless, a general council would have been needed to formally proclaim Jesus' unnamed anointer in Luke to be Mary Magdalene. In her 1993 dissertation on Mary Magdalene, Cormick states erroneously that Pope Gregory made 'a doctrinal pronouncement on the proper identification of Mary Magdalene' (1993:71).

⁵⁸ Luke has Mary Magdalene and other women doing good works after 'been cured of evil spirits and maladies' (8:1-3).

For the spirit of a person who does not long to see his Creator is much hardened, because it remains ice-cold in itself. But when it already begins to burn with longing to follow him whom she loves, then she hastens, melted by the fire of love ... There is nothing outside the Creator in which she takes pleasure. And things with which previously the spirit diverted itself later become a heavy burden. Nothing comforts her sorrow as long as he who is longed for is not seen (:175).

Later in the homily Pope Gregory likens Mary Magdalene to Moses who had won the Lord's favour and received a promise that the Lord would accompany him on his journey to Canaan (Ex 33:12-17). This suggests that the pope deeply respected the woman who spoke to Jesus at the empty tomb.

“Jesus said to her: ‘Mary’.”⁵⁹ After first addressing her with the general terms which denoted only her sex, he called her now by her name, as if he was openly saying to her: recognize the one by whom you are recognized. The perfect man is also told: “I know you by your name”, because “man” is a word that refers to all of us in common.⁶⁰ But Moses is a proper name and to him it is rightly said that he is known by name. As if the Lord were openly saying to him: I do not know you in general like the rest of human beings, but particularly (De Boer 2007:177).

Even more profoundly, Pope Gregory proclaims to his audience that it is from Mary Magdalene's hands that the cup of life is offered to fallen humanity:

Mary Magdalene came to proclaim to the disciples: “I have seen the Lord and he has said these things to me.” Behold, the guilt of the human race is here cut off where it sprouted. For because in paradise a woman gave a man death to drink, from the tomb a woman gave men life.⁶¹ And she tells what he who gives life has said to her, who had once related the words of the death-bringing serpent. As if the Lord says to the human race, not with words but with concrete things: “Receive now, from the hand with which the drink of death was, offer you the cup of life” (:178).⁶²

⁵⁹ Jn 20:16.

⁶⁰ Ex 33:12.

⁶¹ Gen 3:6.

⁶² Commas inserted by me.

Pope Gregory points out that, through the death of the Lord he preaches, Mary Magdalene now lives forever:

Hence too she, Mary, lives. Because he who in no way owed anything to death died for the human race (:179).

This gift of eternal life was given to her because she repented of her sins and she is, therefore, an icon of hope to any brother who has succumbed to the temptations of his own flesh:

What, then, brothers, must we see here but the immeasurable mercy of our Creator? He who shows us as a sign of mercy those whom after penitence he made alive after the fall. For I look at Peter, I regard the murderer, I see Zacchaeus, I look at Mary, and I see in them none other than examples of hope and penitence which are set before our eyes ... [If] someone, inflamed with the fire of passion, has lost the purity of his flesh – let him look at Mary, who in herself melted the fleshly love through the fire of the divine love (:180-181).

It is clear that the speaker preaches from a heart nourished by long periods of prayer and meditation.

There is no misogyny here, only a deep appreciation of Mary Magdalene. Neither is there sexism as Gregory places Zacchaeus alongside Mary, holding both up as equal examples of hope and penitence. In fact, his admiration for Mary Magdalene is so profound that he places in her hands the ‘cup of life’.

Pope Gregory then honours her as a saint in heaven and exhorts his audience to imitate her. This is indeed high praise, the highest that can be given to anyone.

3.4 The harmonizing tradition of the western Church continues into the twentieth century

As did Augustine and Chrysostom above, Catholic New Testament scripture scholars during the late 19th century and early 20th century saw the gospels as straightforward historical accounts recording events in Jesus’ life. Although the emergence of the historical-critical method opened up new possibilities for understanding

the human dimension of the word of God, the harmonizing tradition of the West remained constant.

Toward the end of the 19th century Henry Coleridge, author of the two-volumed *The Life of Our Life*, objected to the many harmonies where ‘reflections and affections occupy the chief space’ (1890:1, ii).⁶³ Calling his publication a ‘history’, he indicated that the object of his harmony was ‘to give the whole that the sacred text contains on the subject matter, without omitting anything’ so that the readers may be in the position, by means of individual meditations, to encounter their own sentiments and arrive at their personal observations (:1, n3). Although many contested this at that time, the author believed that Mark’s gospel was a short edition of Matthew’s. Furthermore, Coleridge unwaveringly claimed that Matthew wrote first of all, followed consecutively by Mark, Luke and John (:1, xii). He believed that in the four gospels one could clearly see:

... the guiding hand of the divine Author holding back in the earlier writers what He saw fit to have omitted, in the later what He chose to have supplied, and ... directing the pen of a later writer distinctly to enlarge and explain the statement of an earlier (:1, xiii).

Moreover, he judged that an accurate understanding of the Gospel history depended on ‘the successive character of the later Evangelists’ who, each in turn, supplemented the earlier in what he wrote (:1, xiii). Coleridge reveals the importance of the western harmonizing tradition during the 19th century when he declares that:

... to state the fact that the late Gospels are supplementary is to state the grounds on which the necessity, or, at least, the high importance of the study of Harmony must be defended. When St. Mark, St. Luke and St. John – each in an increasing proportion to the whole of their work – add, the first slightly, the second largely, and the third in still greater abundance, to the narrative as it stood before their time, they authorize us and even set us an example in our endeavours to produce one

⁶³ Coleridge’s book was based on a Latin harmony of the gospels published in 1869 under the title *Vita Vitae Nostrae Meditantibus Proposita* (:1, i). Throughout both volumes the influence of the harmonizing method of exegesis can be clearly seen. Although Vol. 2 does not function in this thesis, it is listed in the bibliography.

full and harmonious history of our Lord's earthly Life (:1, xlv).)

In writing the history of the life of Jesus Christ, Coleridge would also, of necessity, have had to harmonize the pericopes relating to Mary Magdalene. In the following excerpt he blends at least two of the female anointing figures into one, delicately insinuates the state of her soul and cautiously places Jesus in a specific town:

Our Lord was at the table of a friendly Pharisee, in some town which is not named, and which may have been Capharnaum itself, when the blessed penitent Magdalene came to His feet, the first of a long line of souls who were to be forgiven many sins because they loved much, anointed His feet with ointment, washed them with her tears, and then wiped them with the hairs of her head. She did not come for any boon of healing, for any external favour for herself or others, but simply to weep at her Saviour's feet for her sins, and implore His forgiveness (1890:1, 205).

On a later page Coleridge explains that, unlike Luke, neither Mark nor Matthew mention this first anointing by Mary Magdalene 'on the occasion of ... her conversion' for the probable reason that they do not like repetition. On the other hand, Mark and Matthew mention the 'second unction of our Lord at the Supper at Bethany' because it leads directly to Judas' betrayal. Coleridge makes no conjecture about Luke's failure to include the second anointing; instead, he remarks on that gospel being 'so full of what is touching and compassionate' (:1, 228).

Alban Goodier, in the early part of the 20th century, was content to accept the decisions of writers more learned than he in source analysis and the accuracy or inaccuracy of text translations but felt that, in the end, the impact of their discoveries was minor. These 'digressions', he felt, served only to degenerate works on the life of Christ into scripture commentaries. Goodier, it can be seen, wrote from a mindset which was the complete opposite of Coleridge's. The central purpose of his writing was to develop his harmony into a biography on the public life of Jesus Christ with the 'personality of the

central Figure ... made to dominate all else'. What 'Our Lord Jesus Christ' had been like as a man was, to him, a major concern (1932:1, x-xii).⁶⁴

About Mary Magdalene, Goodier writes the following:

Many scholars, Catholic and non-Catholic, would regard her as several different persons; while acknowledging the strength of their argument the author does not think it is by any means conclusive, and therefore prefers the old tradition (1932:1, xiii).

He then places Jesus in Magdala for an anointing scene insinuating, thereby, that the identity of the unnamed woman who was a sinner is Mary the Magdalen. He says of this woman:

For who she was could not be mistaken. She was known in Magdala; even in wicked Magdala she was notorious; had she not been known, her very dress would have proclaimed what manner of creature she was (:1, 266-267).

Goodier, like his predecessors in the Western tradition of Mary Magdalene, completes the merge when Martha's sister, Mary, remembers the time when, as an outcast, she had anointed Jesus' feet in Magdala (1932:2, 358).

It is clear that, when Sheen wrote *Life of Christ* some twenty seven years after Goodier had his two-volume *The Public Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ* published, the picture of Mary Magdalene in the Western Church was still that of penitent and prayerful prostitute. In his reflection on Luke's anointer in the house of Simon the Pharisee (Sheen 1959:296-299), he identifies her as Mary, Lazarus' sister but, in his final chapter, when he speaks of 'the three types of souls for ever to be found beneath the Cross of Christ' (:439), Sheen corroborates the Church's longstanding stance on the permanently penitential life of St Mary Magdalene.

⁶⁴ Alban Goodier, SJ, had been Archbishop of Hierapolis and not a scripture scholar (1932. *The Public Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, vol. 1: Title page.). As with Coleridge above, both volumes depict the influence of the harmonizing method of exegesis. Vol. 2 does not function in this thesis but is listed in the bibliography.

Easily available to Sheen, Coleridge and Goodier had been Magdalene's biography, posthumously created over the centuries following some period after the writing of gospels,⁶⁵ and preserved and eulogized in a 'legend [which] was complete ... by the twelfth century' (Schaberg 2003:96).

3.5 A brief look at the development of the veneration of saints

The Christian faithful have collected the bones of, and objects 'believed to have been in contact with ... the saints since the second century' when the relics 'of those who had died as martyrs' were held dear (Haskins 1993:100). When persecution and the subsequent execution of Christians were no longer rife the remains, and other objects touched by departed persons believed to be saints, became equally precious. Not only did these relics give 'tangible evidence' that saints had lived on earth but, more importantly, they substantiated the belief that the martyrs and other holy people were in close contact with God 'and could therefore act as' influential mediators 'and protectors' (:100). Consequently the 'cult of relics' became 'an integral part of medieval civilization', and bodies of saints, intact or in pieces, became sought after with much zeal (:100). Paired with the saint's corporeal evidence was the Church's preaching undertaken to instruct the faithful in the life of the saint being held up as an icon of one or more Christian virtues.

It is also true that the possession of relics was of major importance. This was because it gave status to the churches and power to those in their control: 'Status because of the veneration of the relics themselves, and power because of their ability to attract the faithful in large numbers' (Haskins 1993:102-103). It therefore followed that an influx of pilgrims served to bring wealth and fame to the monasteries and churches which housed these relics (102-103). What transcended this negative aspect within the cult were the prayers which rose up from the pilgrims, who had undertaken the journey in order to be in close proximity of the saint's relics when requesting intercession, and the hope which they carried with them as they returned home.

⁶⁵ It is unlikely that the legend began directly after the gospels were written. Schaberg finds Tertullian, Irenaeus, Hippolytus and Origen to be 'the only major "fathers" of the second and third centuries [who dealt] with Mary Magdalene' (2003:86). Only in 'fourth century texts' does she see developments of significance: Firstly, criticism of Mary's faith and intelligence by Jerome and, secondly, acceptance of her 'status as messenger from the risen Jesus' by Gregory of Nyssa, since it behoves a 'fallen woman [to be] instrumental in the rest of her fallen sex' (:86-87).

It was within this mediaeval mindset Mary Magdalene's story was developed and embroidered into the legends that reached into the twentieth century of the Western Church's life.

3.5.1 The earliest legend of St Mary Magdalene and her relics

The earliest legend concerning St Mary Magdalene's relics and, also, her life in the Palestine of today was generated in the East during the century and a half before Gregory the Great's papacy began in 590 (Haskins 1993:107-108).⁶⁶ Magdalene had been engaged to be married 'to John the Evangelist' who, on their wedding day at Cana in Galilee, 'had abandoned her' at the altar to follow Jesus' call (Schaberg 2003:89). Bitter about the desertion, she fled the area and took up residence in Jerusalem as a prostitute in the brothel she herself had set up (:89).

After 'an unsuccessful attempt at Simon's house to seduce Jesus', Mary laid aside her immoral tendencies and became 'a disciple who [rivalled] John', her former lover (Schaberg 2003:90). It is interesting to note that Mary Magdalene's sexually iniquitous 'past', produced from her association with Luke's sinner in the city (7:37), had been part of her eastern curriculum vitae during this early legend.⁶⁷

Following Pentecost, Mary Magdalene left Palestine with John, her former lover (identified at the time as the disciple who had stood beneath the cross) and Mary, the mother of God,⁶⁸ to take up residence in Ephesus (Schaberg 2003:90). There she led a commendable life, remaining a virgin and teaching other women who, consequently, also became holy (Haskins 1993:106-108). Her life on earth had ended through martyrdom, continued the legend, and her body was placed in a sepulchre near a grotto at Ephesus (:107). Approximately 300 years after the birth of the legend, Emperor Leo VI (866-912) transferred her supposed remains to a site below the imperial palace at Constantinople and placed them in a crypt beside that of her 'brother', Lazarus (:108). In spite of Leo VI's relocation of the saint's body to Constantinople 'pilgrims were still visiting [Ephesus] in

⁶⁶ Haskins bases her information of this legend mainly on: Saxer 1958:21-26 [Les saintes Marie]. Schaberg cites Yourcenar 1981:75, Haskins 1993:106-107; and, Ward 1987:16.

⁶⁷ The Eastern Church holds 'that Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany, and the "sinner" are different women' (Schaberg 2003:89).

⁶⁸ Mary, as birth mother of Jesus, the second person of the Blessed Trinity, was pronounced Mother of God at the Council of Ephesus in 431.

the twelfth century to see her sepulchre [and] numerous miracles were said to have taken place there' (:108). The legendary remains of Mary Magdalene were to rest in the gardens beneath the palace for a further 300 years before its next unfortunate transferal. In 1204, during the second siege of Constantinople, Latin Crusaders and Venetian forces ravaged the city, stripping it of everything of value, including the relics of saints.⁶⁹ Since history reveals that the Venetians, instead of 'wantonly destroying all around' as did their comrades, 'stole religious relics and works of art which they would later take to Venice to adorn their own churches',⁷⁰ it would not be rash to presuppose that the Magdalen's legendary skeleton would, in due course, be housed in a church in Venice. However, during the same century Mary's skeleton, 'minus the head', lay beneath 'an altar dedicated to' her within 'the church of S. Giovanni Laterano in Rome' (Haskins 1993:108).'

3.5.2 Two mediaeval English legends of Mary Magdalene, hermit and contemplative⁷¹

The first of two legends about her reclusiveness comes from mediaeval Northumbria and has Mary Magdalene yearning to such an extent for Jesus that, after his departure to his Father, she could no longer look on any man. She thus retired into the desert, fasting until her death thirty years later when she was given the last sacrament and buried by a priest. Throughout Mary's sojourn in the wilderness angels had lifted her to heaven at prayer-time for spiritual sustenance and, after her burial, profound miracles had taken place at her grave (Haskins 1993:110-111).

During the same era, more specifically in the 9th century, an English legend had Mary Magdalene confused with Mary of Egypt, a 5th century sex worker who had spent her final forty-seven years doing penance in the deserts of Palestine. Clothed only in her hair she, too, had been lifted up by angels for heavenly sustenance. In contrast to Mary of Egypt, the Magdalen's second English legend had Mary clothed, living in a cave, and her withdrawal from the world was fuelled by grief, love and the desire for prayerful contemplation (Haskins 1993:111).

⁶⁹ Roman Empire, 2014. The Sack of Constantinople. 9-10. [Internet].

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, 10. [Internet].

⁷¹ The bodily remains of St Mary Magdalene do not play a part in these two legends.

3.5.3 Mary Magdalene relocates to Marseilles

Like the Eastern legend of the living Mary Magdalene relocating to Ephesus, Provençal folklore states that, after the Ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ into heaven, Lazarus and his two ‘sisters’, Maximius, Cedon, Marcella and seventy two other disciples were forced onto a ship by antagonists of the Christians and set adrift on the Mediterranean Sea (Croake 1892:47).⁷² Lazarus’ ‘sisters’ were Martha of Bethany and Mary Magdalene. By divine intervention they landed, with no loss of life, at Marseilles in Provence but, since the inhabitants looked upon idols as gods (the legend reasoned), newcomers announcing the Christian God were not made welcome. Mary Magdalene at once began to preach to them, pointing out the futility of idol worship. Persuaded ultimately by her eloquence, and by the miracles performed by the ‘sisters’, the citizens asked for baptism and became Christian. Lazarus became the first bishop of Marseilles and Mary Magdalene retired to a nearby desert where she:

devoted herself to solitary penance for thirty years, weeping and bewailing for the past. She fasted rigorously, and must have perished, but the angels came down from heaven every day and carried her up in their arms into regions where her ears were ravished with the sounds of heavenly melody, and where she beheld the glory and the joy prepared for the penitent sinner (Croake 1892:47).

⁷² The names ‘Maximius, Cedon’ and ‘Marcella’ do not appear in the New Testament and the name ‘Cedon’ is not listed in the Canon of Catholic Saints.

‘St Marcella (325-410)’, the only female saint by that name, was a young and wealthy Roman widow who, after the untimely death of her husband seven months into their marriage, lived a life ‘marked by asceticism and [devotion] to the Word of God’ (Vultus Christi, 2008. Saint Marcella of Rome.). She denied herself the luxuries of her class, preferring to bestow her wealth upon the poor. St Mary Magdalene’s legendary fasting is reminiscent of St Marcella’s life of self-denial, or vice versa. Haskins finds a version of the legend where ‘Marcellina’ is Martha’s servant (Haskins 1993:122).

Of the male saints who bear the name ‘Maximus’ (without the ‘i’), St Maximus (d 462), ‘second abbot of Lerins’ from 426 and Bishop of Riez from 433, would be the most likely saint to have been adopted by the legend as a member of the group which landed at Marseilles (Bartleby.com, 1993. St Maximus, Bishop of Riez, Confessor. Alban Butler, *The Lives of the Saints*, vol xi). Firstly, his birthplace was Provence and, secondly, his life in the monastery was known to have been abstemious and holy. The common denominator here is, without doubt, self-restraint for the sake of acquiring holiness.

Although Croake's description is that of a penitent Mary, the *Golden Legend*, as told by Jacobus de Voragine in about 1267,⁷³ does not dwell on her sojourn in the desert as penance for past sins but 'to live in contemplation of the things of God' (Schaberg 2003:90-92). The *Golden Legend* has Mary declaring herself as 'the notorious sinner who washed the Savior's feet, wiped them with the hairs of her head, and obtained pardon for all her sins' only shortly before her death (:92). The early part of the book, however, describes that she had so completely involved herself in the sins of the flesh that she had become known, simply, as 'the sinner' but had been forgiven by 'the Lord' ... at 'the house of Simon the leper' (:91).

When 'the relics of these saints' were allegedly discovered during the thirteenth century, Mary Magdalene's were found to be at 'St Maximus', near Marseilles in south-eastern Gaul (Croake 1892:47).⁷⁴ This thirteenth century discovery brings us to the Mary Magdalene legend of Vézelay, a town which lies in the Burgundy region of north-central France, approximately five hundred kilometres from Marseilles.

3.5.4 Mary Magdalene is simultaneously at Vézelay

Meanwhile, the monks of Vézelay claimed that Mary Magdalene's body had been housed at their abbey since the mid-eleventh century (Haskins 1993:113).⁷⁵ From that time onward pilgrims from near and far travelled to its location in the Burgundy region of France in order to 'venerate [her] relics' and pray for the saint's intercession (:113). In the meantime, the building of a massive structure to 'contain the thousands of pilgrims' was begun and completed well before the middle of the thirteenth century (:113). But the folk of Burgundy appeared not to know about the Marseilles tradition and, therefore, could not answer the pilgrims' questions about how her body had come to rest in Gaul, let alone Vézelay (:117). Even more disquieting for the monks, certain pilgrims wanted to know why Mary Magdalene's remains were not exposed to the public (:117). When the

⁷³ De Voragine (d. 1298) had been archbishop of Genoa. 'Over 700 manuscripts and 173 printed editions' of his *Legenda Aurea* survive, including translations 'for almost every Western European language'. This is concrete evidence of the book's popularity (Schaberg 2003:90).

⁷⁴ In about 1000 the monks of the Lerins Islands built a monastery on the mainland coast and called it St Maximus, most likely after the saintly abbot and bishop of their own order. They evangelized the local people and the village, which grew up around the monastery, became known by the same name (Provence Beyond, 1995. Sainte Maxime, 4).

⁷⁵ The abbey of Vézelay had grown from 'a small monastery founded in c.860' (Haskins 1993:113).

number of pilgrims began to noticeably decline during the thirteenth century, it was clear that the monks needed to formulate a plan that would make ‘their claim [of possessing the Magdalen’s] relics [more] credible’ (:118).

Someone who joined the abbey during the thirteenth century, however, did know of the Provençal legend because it was at that time when pilgrims’ questions began to be answered more adequately than before. To explain the presence of Mary’s remains in Vézelay, the following story was told:

In the eighth century, the monk Badilon was sent to Provence by the abbey’s founder ... and its abbot, to retrieve the glorious remains from near Aix. Some old men show him the ruined tomb, which still contains the sweetly smelling uncorrupted body of Mary Magdalen. During the night he dreams that Mary Magdalen appears to him, swathed in a shining white garment, telling him not to fear, and that she is to be taken to a place pre-ordained by God. The relics thus arrive at Vézelay (Haskins 1993:118).

To explain ‘how and why ... Mary Magdalene [had] come to be in Gaul’ (:118), the story of Marseilles was adopted, embellished upon and altered. ‘The most widely believed story’, however, corresponded mostly to that of Marseilles (:121).

The reason given for the Magdalen’s relics not being exposed to the public required another story of the same genre. Haskins finds it in a document dated the latter part of the twelfth century which states that the abbot Geoffrey (abbacy from 1040):

... himself had decided to remove the Magdalen’s relics from the little crypt where they had been found to put them in a precious reliquary. The church had suddenly been plunged into thick darkness, and the people assisting had fled terrified, and all those present had suffered; it had henceforth been decided to relinquish all ideas of opening the holy tomb as such acts clearly provoked wrath from above (1993:116-118).

3.5.5 Similarities among the legends

A certain number of similarities between Mary Magdalene’s Ephesus/Constantinople tradition and a combination of the Marseilles and Vézelay folklore give evidence that some kind of interconnection existed among the Christians of

Europe and the East. Firstly, Magdalene had been a single woman who wantonly engaged in sexual activities; secondly Lazarus, her brother, was present at the same time in her new country; thirdly, Mary Magdalene taught in Ephesus and preached in Marseilles; fourthly, her conversion from a sexually immoral life had taken place in the house of one called Simon. There is a fifth parallel that stands out by its very denial: at the end of his book de Voragine insists ‘that the story of Mary’s betrothal to John is “a false and frivolous tale”’ (Schaberg 2003:92).

The English mediaeval legends mentioned above, combined, indicate a connection to the Magdalene legends of Marseilles. Some similarities are as follows: Mary retires to a cave in the desert, does penance, contemplates the things of God and is lifted up to heaven for spiritual sustenance.

The Mary Magdalene cult grew and spread throughout the Western Church as hymns were written and sung to her in the languages and musical styles of the peoples of today’s England, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Switzerland. The lyrics expressed her as the blessed recipient of divine mercy and the penitent exemplar for all sinners (Haskins 1993:111-112).

3.6 Summary

It is evident that the composite form of the three women in the gospel anointing scenes was prompted by the early church’s tendency to merge biblical passages into what its learned members believed was a balanced composition of data. It was understood at that time that, should a balanced composition be found, it would render an accurate presentation of the history of events told separately by different writers. More than seventeen hundred years after Tatian’s *Diatessaron* would pass before the characteristics and perspectives of the individual gospels and their diverse texts were to be studied and appreciated. In the meantime, the Western Church’s tradition of harmonizing gospel stories formed the basis for the word being preached and received over the centuries as a single event.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ This is evident even today: the most well-known is the Nativity Scene with its mixture of Matthew and Luke’s players.

This dissertation shows that St Augustine, in his composition of *The Harmony of the Gospels*, finds that the woman who anoints Jesus in Luke is called Mary. The same woman, Mary sister of Lazarus, performs her second anointing in Bethany and this is recorded by Mark, Matthew and John. However in *Tractate 49*, where Augustine lectures on the raising of Lazarus, he shows that he is unsure whether or not the anointer in Luke can be Mary of Bethany, but gives no reason for his uncertainty. John Chrysostom, on the other hand, concedes that the anointer is the same woman in Mark, Matthew and Luke but, in John, she is the admirable sister of Lazarus and Martha. Having convinced themselves that the woman who anoints Jesus in Mark and Matthew is the same as in Luke, and that her sin is carnal, it is clear that neither one of the two church fathers can bring himself to associate her with the loving and prayerful Mary of Bethany.

When the Roman Empire came to an end in 476 the world's status quo was drastically altered and, by the time Gregory 1 ascended the Chair of Peter, life in Italy was dismal and the future ominous.

Haskins views 'Gregory's identification of the three [anointing] figures ... as wilful misinterpretation, to suit the purposes of an ascetic Church' (1993:97). However, in order to be fair to Pope Gregory, a judgment should rather be made within the life-context of the people who received this statement from his pulpit. Such understanding may be gleaned from the following brief description of Italy's plight during the Dark Ages, a time which was constantly fraught with wars and plagues:

After the end of the Roman Empire the invaders who ruled Italy were the Goths. In an attempt to regain the country, twenty years of war against the invaders left the Italian peninsula, by the year 554, 'depopulated and impoverished' (Duffy 1997:45). However, ridding Italy of the Goths opened the way to a fresh invasion in 568, this time by the 'part-pagan and part-Arian Lombard tribes ... a far worse scourge' (:46). They 'commanded half the peninsula [and] were to remain in control for the next two centuries' (:46). From the time of the Goth invasion deliberate damage by the invaders to Rome's aqueducts caused on-going leakages which altered 'the Roman Campagna into [a] fever-ridden swamp' (:46).

During the year 589, unprecedented rain fell upon the peninsula.⁷⁷ Houses, farms, buildings and granaries were washed away, taking with them household necessities, cattle, sheep, implements, merchandise and stored food.⁷⁸ ‘Pestilence followed ... and Rome became a very city of the dead. Business was at a standstill, and the streets were deserted save for the wagons which bore forth countless corpses for burial in common pits beyond the city walls’.⁷⁹

This is what Gregory would inherit as the leader of the Christian world. However, his creativity in the face of disaster was such that, even before he was appointed Bishop of Rome, he ‘called upon the people to join in a vast sevenfold procession ... all praying the while for pardon and the withdrawal of the pestilence’.⁸⁰ When he ascended the seat of Peter in the year 590,⁸¹ he consequently took upon his shoulders the guidance of a people convinced that the world was coming to an end.

Gregory understood that his flock needed a renewal of Christian hope. The prayers for forgiveness and an end to the pandemic, initiated by the procession, needed refuelling and reinforcement. With two gospel women already merged (barring a few discrepancies not yet settled) into a figure of penitence, the pope had only to add another who might inject a level of optimism and courage into the equation. Fully ensconced in the harmonizing method of preaching, he sanctioned the conflation of the woman in Luke’s anointing scene with Mary of Bethany by enhancing the merged figure with Mary Magdalene, the would-be anointer whom the resurrected Lord had spoken to outside the empty tomb and entrusted with the message of new life.⁸² Mary Magdalene was to the pope a woman burning in love for the Creator, determined to find him and inconsolable until she could have sight of him. He was strongly impressed by the fact that Jesus knew her by name, not ‘in general ... but particularly’ (De Boer 2007:177), and saw in her hands the cup of life offered to fallen humanity. John’s Mary Magdalene was indeed, to Gregory, a perfect model of Christian hope. Because of the pertinent elements which she would bring to the newly formed character it was fitting that she be called ‘Mary

⁷⁷ New Advent, 2013. Pope St. Gregory I (‘the Great’), 4.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, 4.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, 4.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, 4.

⁸¹ Gregory succeeded Pope Pelagius II who died in February, 590. (New Advent, 2013. Pope St. Gregory I [‘the Great’], 4.)

⁸² As this was communicated by preaching, Pope Gregory’s sanctioning was informal.

Magdalene'. Thus did Pope Gregory the Great, by his creative but necessary misinterpretation of several gospel texts, set up Mary Magdalene as an icon of hope and penitence to all sinners and victims of war and plague.

Although the publications of the two authors in section 4 above fall under the genre of devotional literature, Coleridge approached the subject with the intention of giving a full and correct description of what the four gospels contain. His readers, he believed, could then be led into prayer and meditation from their individual observations of the content of his harmony. Goodier, on the other hand, was more intent on conveying the results of his own, personal reflections to would-be readers, the findings of scholars being of minor importance to him. The legend of Mary Magdalene, reformed prostitute and penitent, would therefore remain in his view an undisputed truth. In the case of Coleridge, even though his approach to his harmony was more scholarly, the fact that the Western Church's traditional Mary Magdalene was deeply ingrained in his psyche is clear.

Pious and orthodox, both authors contextualize the stance taken, as a result of perceived threats from the forces of liberalism, by the Church on modernity. This outlook was underlined by Pope Leo XIII who, in his encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* of November 1893, criticized the employment of the unorthodox and apparently revolutionary historical-critical method of exegesis (The Pontifical Biblical Commission 1994:23-24).⁸³ It would be another fifty years before Pius XII's *Divino afflante Spiritu* would encourage the use of modern exegesis in Sacred Scripture (:24), placing both Coleridge and Goodier well within the era of the Church's siege mentality. Sheen, however, published *Life of Christ* in 1959, sixteen years after *Divino afflante Spiritu* and six years before Vatican II's *Dei Verbum* encouraged Catholic scripture scholars to join the throng of biblical exegetes from the other branches of the Christian Church (:24). He was approximately sixty two years old at the time of writing *Life of Christ* and the

⁸³ Pope Leo XIII's reticence was well-founded as scholars of the time had been rending and tearing the text apart in order to find the sources of the written material but neglected to pay enough 'attention to the final form of the biblical text and to the message which it conveyed in the state in which it actually exists' (The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church: 32).

modern method of exegesis,⁸⁴ legitimated by *Divino Afflante Spiritu* had not yet progressed into the search for the gospel identity of Mary Magdalene.

Searching for the true identity of the Magdalene of the gospels is, with the limited number of extant documents of the time at the world's disposal, an impossible task. Charting the birth and growth of her various traditions in the hamlets, villages and towns of yesteryears' Europe and the Near East, and over the period of nearly twenty centuries, is equally unattainable. Nonetheless, the popularity of the *Golden Legend* scrutinized and summarized by Schaberg (2003:91-92), and broached in 5.3 above, offers a credible outline of the length and breadth of, at least, that particular legend's reach.

In Part II of this dissertation I shall not try the impossible task of seeking the true identity of Mary Magdalene but shall endeavour, by means of literary analyses of texts relating to her, Mary of Bethany and the female gospel anointers in the three gospels mentioned above, to discover what each evangelist thought of her. Chapter 4, which deals with texts taken from Mark's gospel, forms the first chapter of Part II.

⁸⁴ Reeves, 2005. *Fulton J. Sheen, Catholic Champion*.

PART II

CHAPTER 4

An unnamed woman and Mary Magdalene in Mark's gospel

This chapter, the fourth in this dissertation, is comprised of a literary analysis of a group of Marcan texts relative to the Western Church's tradition of the composite Mary Magdalene. The analysis begins with 14:3-9, the anointing in Bethany; thereafter the two short pericopes of 15:40-41 and 47, which speak of the women present at Jesus' death and burial, are explored; and, to conclude the analysis, the evangelist's report of the empty tomb discovery in 16:1-8 is studied. A summary closes the chapter.

4.1 Introduction

In the latter part of the first century CE a new literary genre emerged in the world of writers and readers. What was at the time the form of a Roman imperial announcement giving news of the emperor's benevolence became a relatively lengthy document giving the good news of Jesus Christ to the world. This type of document, of which only four eventually became recognized by the Church as reliable witnesses of the Christ, eventually became known as a gospel and, because of the source of this genre of literature, the writers were called evangelists.⁸⁵

Each of these four evangelists mentions the presence and action of Mary Magdalene in some of the events surrounding Jesus' life, death and resurrection; never do they portray her as a chance encounter but always, as they reach the acme of their gospels, as a woman indispensable to a guaranteed reception of their individual announcements.

Each of the four evangelists adds different details to events which feature Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany and the unnamed perfume bearer (Hearon 2005:191). This they do in order to bring new elements, essential for the spiritual needs of their audience, to the narratives (:191).

⁸⁵ *Evangelion* and *evangelium* are, consecutively, the Greek and Latin words for 'announcement' (Augsburg Fortress (Publishers), 2013. Roman Imperial Texts).

In order to understand why the evangelists Mark, Luke and John deemed Mary's role in the Jesus' story to be vital, and in order to explore the meaning of the variety of details presented by them, it is necessary to carefully examine the gospel texts which mention her name. Since Mary Magdalene is today widely known as a reformed prostitute, the one who washed Jesus' feet with tears and dried them with her hair, it will also be necessary to study any text which refers to women, unnamed or given a different title to Mary of Magdala, who anointed Jesus at some time during his ministry. Since Mark was the first to write a gospel accepted into the canon of scripture,⁸⁶ the appropriate texts in his gospel will be examined in this chapter, the beginning of Part II of the thesis.

4.2 The anointing of Jesus

The first relevant text, Mark 14:3-9, refers to an anointing of Jesus by an unnamed woman at the house of Simon the leper in Bethany. The text is placed between the plot by the chief priests and scribes to kill Jesus and Judas' promise to them to deliver him into their hands.

Mark 14:3-9

3 When Jesus was in Bethany reclining at table in the house of Simon the leper, a woman entered carrying an alabaster jar of perfume made from expensive aromatic nard. Breaking the jar, she began to pour the perfume on his head. 4 Some were saying to themselves indignantly: "What is the point of this extravagant waste of perfume? 5 It could have been sold for over three hundred silver pieces and the money given to the poor." They were infuriated at her. 6 But Jesus said: "Let her alone. Why do you criticize her? She has done me a kindness. 7 The poor you will always have with you and you can be generous to them whenever you wish, but you will not always have me. 8 She has done what she could. By perfuming my body she is anticipating its preparation for burial. 9 I assure you, wherever the good news is proclaimed throughout the world, what she has done will be told in her memory."

⁸⁶ 'Gospels' outside the canon of scripture are not considered in this dissertation. Mary Magdalene is named and/or features in the following apocryphal documents: Gospel of Philip, Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Peter, Gospel of Mary, Dialogue of the Saviour and *Pistis Sophia* (Haskins 1993:37-38).

3a When ... leper

Mark tells his readers that the dinner host entertaining Jesus on this particular day in Bethany had been well-known during the oral transmission of his gospel as his ‘full name’, Simon the Leper, ‘served to distinguish him from other men of the same personal name’ (Lane 1974:563). Simon may have had a skin-disease at some stage or other in order to earn his nickname, but it is highly unlikely that there were any signs of the problem on this occasion as the disciples and the perfume bearer would not have entered his house (Evans 2001:360). Nevertheless, Simon’s present prognosis is, to Mark, not very crucial due to the fact that he intends to highlight actions of greater import as the story reaches its peak (Senior 1984:45). ‘Reclining at table’ indicates that the men are presently at dinner (Evans 2001:360).

3b a woman ... nard

Furthermore, as the guests were already eating their meal, it is clear that the woman was not invited. She enters carrying a jar moulded out of alabaster, a white translucent material made from a mineral quarried extensively in Egypt.⁸⁷ The alabaster jar indicates that its contents are extravagant as, at that time and for many centuries before, the mineral had been used to shape, among other things, small vessels with long necks in which to preserve precious oils and ointments.⁸⁸ The neck would be broken in order to release the fragrance. Mark reveals that the jar contains nard, an aromatic oil of the highest monetary value. Lane reasons that the ‘value of the perfume, and its identification as nard, suggests that it was a family heirloom that was passed on from one generation to another, from mother to daughter’ (1974:492).

3c Breaking ... head.

During Jesus’ time, anointing was a common ritual performed by many societies at celebratory functions and banquets (Lane 1974:492-493). This banquet, however, produces no aura of festivity since the reader remembers that, only a few lines earlier, a plot to put Jesus to death had commenced. As kings were inaugurated by the anointing

⁸⁷ Dictionary.com, 2014. Alabaster. 1. [Internet].

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, 2.

with oil on the head, the woman's action recalls that of a young man commanded by Elisha to anoint Jehu as king of Israel - 'From the flask you have, pour oil on his head, and say, "Thus says the Lord: I anoint you king over Israel"' (2Kings 9:3). Mark undoubtedly expects his readers to detect the 'messianic significance of [the woman's] actions' (Evans 2001:360).

4 Some ... perfume?

It is unlikely that Mark intends the word 'some' to mean anyone else but the twelve specially chosen disciples of 3:14 as the tone and subject matter of Jesus' words in 6-9 in this pericope correspond with previous situations where Jesus had to reprimand them for their inability to understand what is important (Evans 2001:360).⁸⁹ The pouring of the perfume would, indeed, seem to be an unnecessary extravagance to middle class working men who had probably never been entertained in homes where servants were instructed to wash the feet and anoint the head and facial hair of particular guests (Branscomb 1964:245). However, their outrage exposes their indifference to the meaning of the woman's action and their inability to discern Jesus' acceptance thereof.

5a It could ... poor.

Mark again stresses the woman's generosity by specifying the price one could get for the perfume. One wonders whether the men present were remembering the poor, as they were obligated to during the Passover season, or if their minds were occupied with concerns more pressing to their fantasies, for instance, the necessity of raising funds to organize the launch of a new regime with Jesus as the leader (Evans 2001:361). However Mark, expecting his readers to have the promised messiah in mind, is to once again show that Jesus is not the kind of messiah expected by the masses.

5b They ... her.

While the above text translates ἐνεβριμῶντο as 'were infuriated', Evans renders 'to reproach' and notices that Mark uses the same word when Jesus 'sternly charged the cleansed leper to show himself to the priest and to fulfil what Moses had commanded

⁸⁹ For example: Mk 8:18 and 10:14.

with respect to recovered lepers' in 1:43 (Evans 2001:361). Therefore Mark gives the impression that the men present are 'giving the woman orders, as it were' (:361). For the same verb Donahue and Harrington translate 'loudly berated', thereby conjuring up the sound of snorting horses (2002:387).

6a But ... criticize her?

Mark's Jesus, respecting the woman's courageous generosity, expresses unmistakable anger at the men who scorn and belittle her.

6b She ... kindness.

For 'kindness' Evans renders 'beautiful work' which, he believes, may be a 'technical term for charity'; however, charity to the underprivileged is not what is on the woman's mind (2001:391). The woman gives Jesus her prized possession in a most beautiful way because, Mark intimates, she is aware that Jesus is about to die. Jesus counters those who criticize her but Mark will later tell his readers that, in contrast, Jesus will remain silent when he faces his own critics. The woman extends an act of neighbourly love to a single person in need while Mark will soon reveal that, by dying, Jesus will perform an act of love that will encompass every human being, past, present and to come (Senior 1984:45-46).

Branscomb states that 'oral traditions usually' end with 'a simple striking saying' and believes that the spoken conclusion to this story would have been: 'Let her alone ... the poor you always have among you' (1964:246).

7a The poor ... wish

Jesus' words seem to juxtapose Deuteronomy 15:11 where God commands 'you to open your hand to your poor and needy kinsman'. Jesus certainly does not suggest 'that the needs of the poor are unimportant and can be attended to when it is convenient' (Evans 2001:361). In the final part of the sentence the meaning of his remark becomes clear (2001:361).

7b but ... me.

Mark's Jesus explains that 'opportunities to minister to [him] are very limited and soon will be gone' (Evans 2001:361). Mark wants his readers to understand that following Jesus includes making choices between what is the norm and what is required in divergent circumstances. The reader may recall that, at 2:18-20, Mark's Jesus had reacted to an objection about fasting with the rejoinder: 'So long as the groom stays with them, they cannot fast ... when the groom [is] taken away from them; on that day they will fast'.

8a She ... could.

Jesus recognizes that the woman has done all within her means for him, just as he had recognized and praised 'the widow's total commitment' at 12:44 when he saw her giving to the temple treasury 'from her want, all that she had to live on' (Senior 1984:46). Mark wants his readers to know that nothing less than absolute 'commitment' is true discipleship (1984:46).

8b By ... burial.

In Judaism it is customary to anoint a corpse in preparation for burial. Jesus' announcement reveals that he foresees dying a 'criminal's death, for only in' such circumstances 'would there be no anointing of the body' before burial (Lane 1974:494). But with the anointing taking place at this stage, while Jesus is still alive, Mark 'ties the anointing story firmly into the passion narrative' (Senior 1984:46).

9a I assure ... world

Some scholars believe that this sentence is a later gloss but Evans comments that 'the absence of the woman's name, a fact that stands somewhat in tension with the point of the saying [as seen in the next clause], argues against later pseudepigraphy' (Evans 2001:362).⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Evans names Bultmann, Klostermann, Johnson, Schweizer and Hooker (2001:362).

9b what ... memory.

Mark's closing sentence makes it clear that the unnamed woman's action of anointing Jesus' body for burial before his shameful death 'will always be part of the proclamation of the gospel' (Donahue and Harrington 2002:388).

Mark's message to his readers is disturbing and quite unambiguous. From the start of his passion, when Jesus' loneliness and sense of abandonment was augmented by his disciples' happy oblivion of the reality of his impending death, an anonymous woman braved a 'men only' dinner party in order to perform a profoundly thoughtful act of kindness to their leader.

4.3 Observing the death and burial of Jesus

Mary Magdalene is first mentioned at 15:40 after Mark completes details known to him of Jesus' death. He gives a distressing account of Jesus, abandoned and lonely, dying amid the jeers and sneers of passers-by, chief priests, scribes and, even, the two crucified victims hanging on either side of him. Only one person acknowledges his greatness – the Roman centurion in charge of killing him. Mark reveals the presence of women in the subsequent verse.

Mark 15:40-41, 47

40 There were also women present looking on from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and Joses, and Salome. 41 These women had followed Jesus when he was in Galilee and attended to his needs. There were also many others who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

47 Meanwhile, Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses observed where he had been laid.

40a There ... distance.

As he closes the section on Jesus' death, Mark adds a detail from the oral tradition which would surprise many of his readers simply because he has not mentioned it before - there were women present at the death and they were watching, albeit from a distance.

Branscomb believes that the women stood at a distance because they ‘feared to come within the circle of the brutal soldiers’ (1964:300). Nonetheless, set back somewhat from the gruesome scene, they were better able to view the proceedings with no interruption and, therefore, it can be deduced ‘that the Christian account of the crucifixion’ stems, most likely, from their personal evidence (:300). As France sees it, there ‘is nothing they can do but watch’; nonetheless, their focus will later prove to be the groundwork ‘of their role as witnesses of what is to follow’ (2002:663).

40b Among ... Salome.

Mark introduces by name three of the women present. When oral traditions involving a number of persons are repeatedly told the storytellers would name only those they remembered or personally knew. It is possible that, when Mark wrote his gospel, these were the only names recalled by the tradition which he used (Evans 2001:511).

The first Mary is surnamed Magdalene and it is presumed that she comes from the town of Magdala. However, since ‘there is no reference to such a town in sources contemporary with Jesus’, and since the town ‘at the site of present-day Mejdal/Migdal was called Tarichea’ by Josephus, Strabo, Pliny the Elder and others, the observant reader with a knowledge of history wonders at the origin of the title (Beavis 2012:287).

The second Mary may be remembered because her sons had been well-known members of the early Church, pointed out by Mark’s use of their names. A similar indication was made nineteen verses earlier when Alexander and Rufus are said to be the sons of Simon of Cyrene, the man who was made to carry Jesus’ cross up to Calvary (Lane 1974:577). Mark does not know more about Salome besides her name.

By placing the named women ‘among’ the ‘women present’ Mark plainly tells his readers that Jesus’ group of female supporters consists of more than the three now identified (France 2002:663).

41a These ... needs.

Would Mark, who has told his readers that Jesus had rated both service and generosity to be of the highest value, now diminish the women’s work to mere domestic service (Evans

2001:511)?⁹¹ This is unlikely as the entire sentence speaks of the women as being ‘closely associated with Jesus’ almost from the start of his movement in Galilee (Donahue and Harrington 2002:449). Evans notes that Mark used the imperfect tense of the same verb, ‘to follow’, when ‘Jesus called his male disciples to follow him’. Thus he believes that ἠκολούθουν αὐτῷ, which he translates as “‘were following him” ... implies discipleship’ (2001:511).⁹² France believes further that the use of ἀκολουθέω suggests that the women, ‘like the Twelve, were regular members of the group’ (2002:663). Moreover, ‘the fact that the group which Mark has so often described as “Jesus and his disciples” or “Jesus and the Twelve” was in fact the focus of a larger group of followers who included a good number of women’ (:663). Furthermore, Mark’s function of the imperfect tense in both the verbs ‘to follow’ and ‘to attend’ is to inform his readers that the women continued to carry out their mission from Galilee to Jerusalem (Donahue and Harrington 2002:449-450).

41b There ... Jerusalem.

Having informed his readers that some members of a sizable group of women who had been closely acquainted with Jesus in Galilee are standing some distance from Jesus, Mark further informs them that there was yet another category of women standing within the circle of watchers (France 2002:663). These France believes to be female pilgrims from Galilee who had joined Jesus’ convoy to Jerusalem, become ‘attached to the disciple group’ and, possibly, cried ‘Hosanna!’ as he rode into Jerusalem (:663).

Mark’s next exposé of the women at the cross lies between the account of Jesus’ burial by Joseph of Arimathea and the morning of the first day of the week.

47 Meanwhile ... laid.

Mark reports that Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Joseph, see and commit to memory the place where the body of Jesus is laid to rest. For no obvious reason, Mary’s other son is left out in this sentence. Neither does Mark mention Salome, nor any of the other female observers, at this stage. In the section that lies behind verse 47 the readers

⁹¹ Service – Mk 10:44-45; generosity – 10:21.

⁹² Mk 1:16-17.

detect that at no point did Mark place Joseph of Arimathea at the foot of the cross – he simply ‘comes out of nowhere’ in verse 43 (Donahue and Harrington 2002:456). The readers therefore cannot say that the two Marys see Joseph *returning* from somewhere with the linen cloth which Mark says he bought for the purpose of enshrouding Jesus. They can, however, *presume* that the women see Jesus being wrapped in the cloth. Furthermore, Mark does not mention Joseph (or his servants) washing or anointing the corpse with perfumes and spices – but the readers can *assume* that the two Marys have taken note of this. In addition, immediately before Mark reveals the tenacious observance of the two women, he gives details about the tomb, that it had been ‘cut out of rock’ and that a stone had been rolled to cover its entrance (Mk 15:46). The readers are unquestionably aware that the women know exactly where Jesus’ body was laid. In fact, by applying the imperfect ἐθεώρουν (were observing), Mark ‘suggests that these women took in everything from start to finish’ (Donahue and Harrington 2002:455).

The account of the burial is extremely important to Mark’s readers. Firstly, it emphasizes and proves Jesus’ death, in this way verifying the resurrection (Branscombe 1964:304).). Secondly, Mark’s readers need to know that the women who will visit the tomb in the next chapter have ‘accurate information concerning’ its whereabouts (:304). He therefore names two witnesses, most probably those who were very well-known during the early years of the Church.

Joanna Dewey states that, unlike the male disciples who took flight at the first sign of trouble, Mark has Jesus’ female disciples remaining ‘faithful in the face of possible persecution’ (1994:506). Brown finds this ‘implausible: Observing “from a distance” is scarcely an opening description designed to make readers think of bravery’ and faithfulness (1996:1335). If one wishes to compare the fleeing males to the observing women, Brown asks, ‘what evidence is there that Mark’s narrative would encourage readers to contrast male disciples whose fleeing was mentioned some sixty verses before with these women who are not said to have remained (precisely because we have been told nothing of their previous presence)’ (:1335)? If truth be told, since Mark has so far not spared family or friend from their ‘inadequacies ... it would be consistent for Mark to present the role of these women followers as inadequate’ (:1336). The women being ‘at a distance’ may parallel a scriptural theme in Psalm 38:12 where an afflicted man tells God

that friends and companions ‘stand back’ because of his affliction (:1336). So Mark may be saying that they too let Jesus down.

4.4 Visiting the Empty Tomb

Having witnessed Jesus’ death and burial, at least two of the women know exactly where his body lies entombed. Mark has succeeded in getting his readers to wait with bated breath for the next episode which, thankfully, begins after the last word written in 15:47.

Mark 16:1-8

1 When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought perfumed oils with which they intended to go and anoint Jesus. 2 Very early, just after sunrise, on the first day of the week they came to the tomb. 3 They were saying to one another, “Who will roll back the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” 4 When they looked, they found that the stone had been rolled back (It was a huge one.) 5 On entering the tomb they saw a young man sitting at the right, dressed in a white robe. 6 This frightened them thoroughly, but he reassured them: “You need not be amazed! You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, the one who was crucified. He has been raised up; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. 7 Go now and tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you to Galilee, where you will see him just as he told you.’” 8 They made their way out and fled from the tomb bewildered and trembling; and because of their great fear, they said nothing to anyone.

1 When ... Jesus.

The second Mary is identified this time by the name of only her younger son.

The merchants and sellers begin business as soon as the sun goes down on the Sabbath day and it is then, Mark tells his readers, that the women purchase the oils with which to anoint Jesus’ body. It is possible that Salome had disappeared from the burial scene in order to buy aromatic oils before the Jerusalem gates were closed twenty four hours earlier, but Mark would not know as the tradition would likely be blurred on minor details. Sweet-smelling oils are applied to corpses before burial as a mark of respect

(France 2002:677) as well as to neutralize the odours of decay (Lane 1974:585). Mark's readers know that to visit a 48 hour old corpse in Jerusalem's climate would demand a strong constitution as putrefaction happens fast: the women, therefore, are about to express deep devotion to Jesus' dead body (:585).

It is clear that Mark's female witnesses neither saw the anointing at Bethany nor heard of Jesus' statement that the unnamed woman had perfumed his body in anticipation of his burial (14:8).

France states that their very intention to anoint Jesus for burial indicates that the women, who had travelled with Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem and, therefore, heard his passion predictions, did not take 'seriously his expectation of rising again after three days' (France 2002:677).

2 Very ... tomb.

Mark makes it difficult for his readers to understand at what time the women set out for the tomb as the term 'very early' would, in fact, mean 'before sunrise' (Lane 1974:585). Donahue and Harrington believe that, 'since Mark is fond of duplicate expressions these two temporal indications are probably best taken as meaning the same thing; that is, about 6:00 on Sunday morning (2002:457). For Evans 'it is possible that an οὐπω, "not yet", has dropped out of the text', making the clause read 'the sun not yet having risen' (2001:534).

3 They ... tomb?

Mark makes it clear to his readers that it would be impossible for women, even three of them, to move the stone from the tomb entrance. If the tomb in which the body of Jesus was laid had been planned for someone well-to-do, a flat disc-like stone, perhaps 1.2 metres in diameter and weighing possibly 'hundreds of' kilograms, might have been cut and fashioned to block the entrance (Evans 2001:535). There would be a groove running from side to side before the tomb, cut out of the rock at a slant, the lowest point being at the entrance. Once the stone was rolled into place, it would need a number of strong men to move it upward (France 2002:581). Mark will tell his readers in the next verse that this particular stone is 'huge' and, therefore, exceptionally heavy. Readers may wonder why

this obstacle did not cross the women's minds earlier. According to France, their 'concern about the stone ... adds an almost humorous, homely touch to the scene: they had made their other preparations but had forgotten this elementary obstacle' (:678). Nonetheless, the women's very question prepares Mark's readers for the scene on arrival at the tomb (Donahue and Harrington 2002:457-458).

4 When ... huge one

Mark tells his readers that the women's concern is for nothing because the entrance to the tomb is already open. He is intent, however, on another agenda – alerting his readers to the most crucial message of his gospel. The reader notes that the women do not ask the next logical question which should be: Who *did* roll the stone back (Donahue and Harrington 2002:458)? Also, because Mark neglects to give further information about the tomb, the reader will wonder about the state of the body lying inside. To complete the alert signal Mark clumsily adds a supplementary clause describing the size of the stone. The clause, which is bracketed here, would have served better in the previous sentence when the women were wondering how the stone was to be moved, especially as the two Marys had, thirty six hours earlier, witnessed its size (Evans 2001:157). Placed here, however, the information may not be a clumsy afterthought but Mark's way of getting his readers to wonder whether a supernatural force may be at play (:535).

5a On ... tomb

Mark's opening clause substantiates his earlier description of the tomb, at 15:47, as being 'cut out of rock' (Donahue and Harrington 2002:458). After crossing the threshold the women move through a short tunnel to the burial chamber deeper within the rock and further from the early morning light (France 2002:678).

As the women's intention is to anoint Jesus' body with the perfumed oils recently purchased, they clearly expect to see or, rather, to make out Jesus' body in the dim light as they enter the tomb proper.

5b they ... robe.

Instead, they see a young man! If Mark's readers are familiar with the Jewish scriptures they will know that angels are often portrayed this way (Evans 2001:536). In 2Maccabees 3:26-30 'the Jews praised the Lord who ... had manifested himself' in the form of two 'young men, remarkably strong, strikingly beautiful, and splendidly attired' (:536). Mark is aware that, in the scriptures, God and angels are often interchangeable.

The white robe also suggests that the figure is angelic. The women find the young man deep within the tomb and yet his robe appears white, rather than grey as one would expect to see in the gloom (France 2002:678). The whiteness clearly expresses the supernatural and Mark's readers will remember that, in 9:3, he had presented the transfigured Jesus in 'dazzling white' clothing, 'whiter than the work of any bleacher could make them' (Evans 2001:536).

As being seated is 'the traditional posture for teaching or speaking with authority', Mark's readers will know that the figure, dressed in white and sitting down, is about to speak words not produced from a mere human being (France 2002:678). Furthermore Evans, who presumes that the figure is seated to the right of where Jesus' body had been, believes that occupying this position 'may suggest that authority to speak for the risen Christ has been delegated to this young man' (2001:536). Nonetheless, the feature which most strongly points to Mark's young man being an angel will be seen in the revelation contained in the next two verses (Lane 1974:587).

6a This ... them:

Donahue and Harrington translate ἐκθαμβήσθη as 'they were utterly amazed', a term which denotes 'intense emotion' (2002:458).

6b You ... amazed!

The young man *reassures* the women. In Old Testament scripture the standard reaction to a vision of God or God's messenger is fear and trembling such as is evident in Daniel 8:17-18 when Daniel 'fell prostrate in terror' at the sight of the angel Gabriel and, then, 'fell forward in a faint' when he spoke. While at 8:18 the heavenly figure encouraged

Daniel with a touch, at 10:12, during a later vision, he reassured the pale and trembling visionary with the words ‘Fear not, Daniel’.

6c You ... crucified.

The young man *knows* the women and the reason for their visit to the tomb but, significantly, he does not speak of the ‘corpse’ of Jesus. Mark’s readers are alerted to the fact that Jesus is spoken of as a living man.

This is the fourth time that Mark names Jesus ‘the Nazarene’. The title is given to Jesus during the cure of the demoniac at 1:23-28, the cure of blind Bartimaeus at 10:46-52 and during the course of Peter’s first denial at 14:66-68 (Donahue and Harrington 2002:458). The participle phrase gives the impression of ‘an early Christian confession of faith’ (Donahue and Harrington 2002:458) and therefore would have been used by the Marcan community during liturgical celebrations.⁹³

6d He ... him.

The young man *informs* the women of things that cannot be ascertained solely from the earthly evidence at hand. He points to the stone slab which holds neither corpse nor a resuscitated being recovering from severe injuries and announces Jesus’ resurrection. Mark’s messenger, clearly sent by God, does not describe ‘life after death ... for the dead in general’ but the ‘physical event’ of being raised up (France 2002:680). The women who had some thirty six hours earlier witnessed Jesus’ lifeless body being wrapped in a shroud, carried away and shut in by the weight of a large stone are told that he ‘is no longer dead but risen’ (:675).

7 Go ... told you.

Since first century Palestinian society would not assign major roles to women, the entrusting of the message to the women argues for historicity within the Marcan tradition (Evans 2001:537). In the message, which is to the male disciples, the young man mentions only Peter’s name, thereby appearing to rank him higher among the remaining

⁹³ See 1Cor 1:23; 2:2; Gal 3:1.

eleven disciples. Lane, however, sees this naming of Peter as an ‘assurance that Peter had not been rejected by the risen Lord’ (Lane: 1974:589).

At 14:28 Mark’s Jesus had prophesied: ‘But after I am raised up, I will go to Galilee ahead of you’ (Donahue and Harrington 2002:458). The young man’s knowledge of the prediction proves that he is a divine being cognisant of what Jesus had told them. The second person plural pronoun in ‘you will see’ lies within the message, here in inverted commas, and would therefore refer to the ‘disciples and Peter’ and not to the would-be female messengers. Mark leads his readers to look forward to ‘a report about an appearance of the risen Jesus to his’ male ‘disciples in Galilee’ (:458).

8a They ... trembling;

The women seem to be even more afraid after the initial shock of finding the stranger seated within the burial chamber of the open tomb empty of what they fully expected to see. As the message the angel gave was, in fact, good news the reader interprets their fear as ‘awe’ in the presence of God’s’ ... work (Donahue and Harrington 2002:459). In fact, Mark expertly gets his readers to feel the intensely emotional wonder of the women caught up in a situation ‘beyond human comprehension’ (France 2002:675).

8b and ... anyone.

The reader’s anticipation is thwarted – the speedy trip to find the frightened disciples and impart the angel’s message does not happen. The angel’s message is not delivered.

It is unlikely that Mark intended his gospel to end so abruptly, and on a negative note, since the title which he chose declares it to be the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (1:1). Nonetheless, any further examination of this mystery, however alluring, lies beyond the boundaries of the present dissertation.

4.5 Summary

Mark’s anointing story is an embellishment of the framework of what was a historical event during Jesus’ life (Hearon 2005:190-191). The framework of the event appears to be as follows: Jesus is at dinner as a guest. A woman, carrying perfumed oil,

approaches him. She anoints him. There is a protest by some or someone present. Jesus defends the woman and her action.

In the re-telling of the story familiar to the Marcan community, the evangelist adds new detail in order to invite his audience and readers ‘to hear the story in a particular way’ (Hearon 2005:191). He fills in the basis of the anointing scene with the life-giving data of his own response to the reception of the word and invites his community to open themselves to the same experience. His first added element, the name and title of the man hosting the dinner, brings a feeling of self-confidence to anyone who had recently suffered a bout of skin disease. As Mark’s story proceeds it awakens memories of the Jesus event and arouses a response of individual and commonly shared interpretation.

The action of anointing Jesus on the head reminds the readers that Peter had, at 8:29 identified ‘Jesus as “the Messiah”’ (Hearon 2005:191). As Messiah, Jesus is deserving of the best and most expensive oil being used. They also remember the teaching of Jesus’ ‘impending death’ that followed at 8:31-32, 9:31 and 10:33-34 (:191).

The Twelve’s indifference to the anointer’s action and their inability to understand the meaning thereof conveys to them that no disciple is perfect, not even those specifically chosen by Jesus during his life on earth. Both women and men note that the Twelve’s obvious contempt for the woman evokes Jesus’ anger. Prompted by Jesus’ defence of the woman, the readers perceive, not only her caring action, but that the action is inspired by the fact that she is the only person in the room sensitive to Jesus’ approaching death. They recall that, by dying, Jesus will perform an act of love that will embrace every human being, both inside and outside of their community.

The evangelist’s details of the story convey to his readers that following Jesus involves making choices of action between what is done in normal situations and what should be done in circumstances of an extraordinary nature. Being a true disciple, he intimates, involves absolute commitment.

With these elements added to the framework of the initial anointing story, Mark successfully invites his readers to experience Jesus as the suffering Messiah (Hearon 2005:195) who is about to ‘be put to death and rise three days later’ (8:31).

Once Jesus has died, and immediately after the centurion's declaration at 15:39 that 'this man was the Son of God',⁹⁴ Mark brings Mary Magdalene and two other women into the post-crucifixion scene. It is clear that, as the evidence of his good announcement reaches its peak, he needs to introduce credible witnesses from the crowds standing near the cross. Whose witness could be more trustworthy and reliable than that of three of the women who have been faithfully associated with Jesus since the beginning of his movement in Galilee?⁹⁵ That he places Mary Magdalene at the head of the list indicates that she is especially credible.

The women's looking on and focused observation at verses 40 and 47 are the finer points detailed by the evangelist to prove the women's credibility.

It has already been pointed out in the analysis that Mark does not intend his readers to regard Mary Magdalene as the woman who anointed Jesus in Bethany. His first sentence in the empty tomb story, in fact, indicates that Magdalene was not even present at the dinner that day. These specifics are, however, negligible to the evangelist as he reaches the crescendo of his gospel.

Having deliberately and effectively let his readers understand that the female disciples had not seriously expected him to rise from the dead Mark, with images of supernatural forces and the passionate amazement of the three women as they come to belief dramatically at play, assures his readers that initial failure to believe in the resurrection can be overcome.

Omitting the name of the anointer and overlooking to mention the female disciples until they were needed for his gospel, are trivial in comparison to proving that Jesus was the Son of God who had lived, died and been raised from the dead.

Although Mark has a high regard of Mary Magdalene, he does not paint her as a figure of perfection to be held up against his portrait of the exasperatingly inattentive, obtuse and cowardly male disciples. At the cross she stood back because of his affliction; going to the tomb to anoint the corpse shows that she did not seriously expect him to rise

⁹⁴ Mark continues to use the imagery and language of ancient Roman announcements. Roman emperors were deified after death. Each one's successor was called the 'son of god'.

⁹⁵ That Mark does not, in the absence of the eleven, invent two or more male witnesses, indicates the reliability of the source as well as the evangelist's indifference to patriarchal biases.

from the dead; and, lastly, after exiting the tomb she failed to deliver the message given her by the supernatural being.

Mark's high regard of Mary Magdalene rests upon her passionate, constant and tenacious discipleship as well as her credibility as a witness to the announcement of the good news which he has penned.

In the next chapter I shall endeavour, by means of a literary analysis of texts relating to Mary Magdalene and the unnamed woman who anointed Jesus, to discover who Mary Magdalene was in the eyes of the evangelist Luke.

CHAPTER 5

A woman known to be a sinner and Mary Magdalene in Luke's gospel

As in the foregoing, this chapter contains a literary analysis of Lucan texts which relate to the composite figure of Mary Magdalene in the tradition of the Western Church. The first analysis is of 7:36-50, where a sinner anoints Jesus' feet; the second examines 8:1-3, where Luke tells of female disciples in Jesus' entourage; the third, found at 23:49 and 55-56, encompasses the women at the crucifixion; and the fourth, at 24:1-12, examines the empty tomb scene. The chapter closes with a summary.

5.1 Introduction

During the years following the arrival of Mark's gospel about the 'Beginning of the good news of Jesus Messiah Son of God' (Mk 1:1)⁹⁶, two more accounts of the same literary genre which would eventually be accepted into the canon of Christian scripture were being developed, those of Matthew and Luke. With Mark's gospel and a now lost document in his possession,⁹⁷ as well as a number of oral traditions circulating within his region, Luke takes what he considers as fact and arranges them into a theological work constructed to demonstrate to one Theophilus, indicated as a man of political standing, that what he was taught about the Jesus event is sound, constant and reliable (1:1-4).⁹⁸

By the year 85 CE, about fifteen years after Mark's gospel appeared, readers begin reading, and audiences begin listening to and engaging with the stories contained in the evangelist's good announcement in a different part of the known world from that of Mark. Lucan texts presenting Mary Magdalene by name or implication, and texts referring to women who have been confused with her, will be examined in this chapter.

⁹⁶ Translation by Nicholas King: *The New Testament*.

⁹⁷ The document which is lost is believed to have contained the Sayings of Jesus and is termed 'Q'. It is believed that Matthew and Luke used this source in addition to Mark's gospel.

⁹⁸ Theophilus, which means 'God's friend' and was a common Greek name at the time, may either represent a historical person or be 'a literary figure signifying [the] Gentiles as such ... Luke sees him either as a person of influence favourably disposed toward Christian teaching and worthy of more information, or as a Christian seeking more knowledge concerning the practical implications of his faith' (*New American Bible* 1970: 65-66).

5.2 The anointing of Jesus

Luke's first relevant text, 7:36-50, relates to Jesus' being anointed by an unnamed woman while at dinner with a Pharisee named Simon. The text follows Jesus' statement that 'God's wisdom' is proved correct 'by all who accept' that he, Jesus, is 'a friend of tax collectors and sinners' (7:34-35)!

Luke 7:36-50

36 There was a certain Pharisee who invited Jesus to dine with him. Jesus went to the Pharisee's home and reclined to eat. 37 A woman known in the town to be a sinner learned that he was dining in the Pharisee's home. She brought in a vase of perfumed oil 38 and stood behind him at his feet, weeping so that her tears fell upon his feet. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissing them and perfuming them with the oil. 39 When his host, the Pharisee saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who and what sort of woman this is that touches him – that she is a sinner." 40 In answer to his thoughts, Jesus said to him, "Simon, I have something to propose to you." "Teacher," he said, "speak."

41 "Two men owed money to a certain money-lender; one owed a total of five hundred coins, the other fifty. 42 Since neither was able to repay, he wrote off both debts. Which of them was more grateful to him?" 43 Simon answered, "He, I presume, to whom he remitted the larger sum." Jesus said to him, "You are right."

44 Turning then to the woman, he said to Simon: "You see this woman? I came to your home and you provided me with no water for my feet. She has washed my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You gave me no kiss, but she has not ceased kissing my feet since I entered. 46 You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with perfume. 47 I tell you, that is why her many sins are forgiven – because of her great love. Little is forgiven the one whose love is small." 48 He said to her then, "Your sins are forgiven"; 49 at which his fellow guests began to ask among themselves, "Who is this that he even forgives sins?"

50 Meanwhile he said to the woman, "Your faith has been your salvation. Now go in peace."

36 There was ... reclined to eat

By introducing a Pharisee (which he will name later) Luke links this story to the previous pericope (Johnson 1991:126) when Jesus had laid blame on the Pharisees and lawyers for rejecting John's baptism and, thereby, 'defeating God's plan in their regard' (Lk 7:30).

Throughout his gospel, Luke deliberately has Jesus attending a number of dinner parties which he uses as a setting for discussion, this arrangement being a 'Greek literary genre' (Nolland 1989:353).⁹⁹ Nolland does not believe this to be the case in the present pericope as 'the meal setting here is too integral to the episode to have been created merely for the sake of a literary convention' (:353).

These first sentences of the anointing scene provide an aura of distance and unfriendliness within the Pharisee's dining room. They are short and to the point, the unsaid words pointing to a lack of warmth on the part of the host (Green 1997:308).

Luke has Jesus reclining at table in Hellenistic fashion, which was to lounge to one side with 'feet pointing away from the table' (Johnson.1991:127). The Jewish people usually leaned over to the left since the right hand was used for eating.

37 A woman known ... perfumed oil

By introducing a sinner Luke again links this story to the one that went before. This sinner, whose sin is not known, tallies with the tax collectors and sinners of 7:35 (Johnson 1991:127).

The Greek words ἐν τῇ πόλει ἁμαρτωλός, directly translated, would render 'sinner in the city' and, like this translation, indicates that the woman is publically known and defined by her sin. The label conjures up secret whispering, clandestine discussion, malevolent gossip, neighbours dodging out of sight to avoid her and, perhaps worst of all, the desertion of family and friends. The resultant picture is that of a woman who is deeply lonely. Luke's early readers may, as did those in later years, presume that the woman's sin was prostitution. Even so, whatever her sin may be is of little consequence because the fact remains that she is a sinner and her sin is well-known by the community. Having informed the reader that Jesus is also well-known, not as a sinner, but 'as a *friend*

⁹⁹ Other meals at which Luke presents discussions between Jesus and Pharisees and lawyers: 5:27-32; 11:37-54 and 14:1-24.

of sinners' (Green 1997:309), Luke has already planted the seed that now successfully generates anticipation and suspense within his second banquet story. Furthermore, by holding back the Pharisee's and the female sinner's names 'at this point in the story [Luke] keeps [the reader's] attention focused on their status' (Hearon 2005:192).

Nolland believes that it is not improbable that a woman would walk 'in on a banquet' uninvited: 'life in general was much more public' in Jesus' time and culture (1989:354). Nonetheless, even though the culture of the time allowed uninvited guests to enter the scene of a banquet, listen to the conversation of the guests and eat what scraps came their way (Bock 1999:694), for a prostitute to dare place herself among them would be 'particularly objectionable in the eyes of people in general' (Marshall 1998:308). Getty-Sullivan, on the other hand, surmises that 'a banquet might be a likely setting for prostitutes to come' but goes on to say that nothing in 'the language used to describe her ... suggests that she is sexually promiscuous' (2001:109). Indeed, Luke's readers are here introduced to a woman both brave and determined. She is generous, too, as she intends to anoint Jesus, not with any run-of-the-mill oil but with *μύρον*, an oil perfumed and expensive (Bock 1999:696).

Should any readers have interpreted her body language so far as sensual, the tears that are about to fall from her will wipe from their minds any sense of erotic love (Fitzmyer 1985:689).

38a and stood ... his feet

Having been informed that the meal was being celebrated in Hellenistic style Luke's readers can easily understand how the woman can be at Jesus' feet and behind him at the same time. Since she weeps tears that fall onto Jesus' feet, the reader visualizes the woman standing in a bent-over position with the possible intention of stooping down to the floor. The reader therefore anticipates that she is about to kneel down beside his feet.

As tears cannot be randomly produced at will, it is clear to Luke's readers that the woman is overcome with emotion. Her tears do not speak of anguish and distress; they are more a fusion of quiet lament and 'grateful affection' (Nolland 1989:354). On the other hand, since *βρέχω* (to wet), 'also used to describe rain showers', is used here for 'weeping', Bock feels that Luke is depicting 'more than light whimpering' (1999:696).

Luke's readers wonder how such emotion can come from a woman who, at the same time, possesses an aura of peace. She may have been a public sinner in the recent past but now, it seems to them, she has responded in 'humble, loving gratitude' to a divine 'offer of forgiveness' (Bock 1999:704).

38b Then she wiped ... with the oil

Luke details almost every move the woman makes (Bock 1999:696). At first, the reader visualizes her kneeling at Jesus' feet and loosening her braids before making use of her long hair to wipe off the saline drops. The very act of undoing her hair in a public place may be, to some, redolent of immoral behaviour (:696). However, since there were no basins or towels at hand and, eager to make good the mishap of dripping tears onto Jesus, she sees no other option but to 'let down her hair and [wipe] Jesus' feet dry' (Marshall 1998:308).

In their mind's eye Luke's readers now see the woman's long, damp hair spread over the floor as she kisses the feet of Jesus. 'The intimate proximity' to him has led 'to a release of affectionate gratitude expressed' by her repeated kisses (Nolland 1989:354). The kissing of the feet in this scene is, therefore, not an action of a person seeking forgiveness. Akin to her falling tears, it is a manifestation of deep appreciation for mercy already obtained (:354).

Since the pouring of oil only on the head 'has a place in Jewish custom', performing such ritual on Jesus' head is most likely her objective (Nolland 1989:354-355). However, the contents of the jar are 'spent upon that part of Jesus' body with which the woman has already made intimate contact' (:355).

39 When his ... she is a sinner

With the Pharisee's silent soliloquy Luke heightens the dramatic tone of the story (Bock 1999:697). His use of the present tense, ἅπτεται (she is touching), indicates 'continuous contact with Jesus' and, consequently, Luke gets his readers to appreciate the Pharisee's displeasure and shame as he observes the woman constantly stroking and caressing Jesus' feet (:697). According to Hearon, the story at this moment 'positively reeks with

sensuality' as a result of the Pharisee's unvoiced inference of the woman's character (2005:192-193).

The Pharisee's discomfort leads him to mistrust any impressions he may have had about Jesus being a prophet. Furthermore, the host's silent conjecture clearly suggests that, as he himself would, 'a prophet' would surely distance himself from 'a notorious sinner' (Nolland 1989:355).

40 In answer ... he said, 'speak'

With tongue-in-cheek Luke informs his readers that not only does Jesus discern the woman's heart but, also, he reads his host's mind (Johnson 1991:127). The readers remember the old adage that any prophet worth his salt is capable of seeing the deepest part of one's inner self (:127).

Jesus initiates dialogue between the Pharisee and himself, calling him by his given name (Nolland 1989:355). As Simon was a common name in the Palestine of Jesus' day and there is no further information about his life, it would be rash to hastily conclude that he was the same Simon as the dinner host in Mark 14:3-9, particularly since the latter had been known as a leper (Marshall 1998:310).

By addressing Jesus as 'teacher', Simon does not necessarily 'indicate a positive response' to him (Johnson 1991:127). The title describes a social standing and is detached from any private viewpoint held by a person talking to Jesus (Nolland 1989:355).

41 'Two men owed ... other fifty'

Luke has Jesus begin his parable as soon as the Pharisee has given permission for him to speak. Jesus' story is uncomplicated, easily understandable to Luke's readers and 'serves the classic function of clarifying [the] real-life situation' which has arisen within the Pharisee's dining room (Johnson 1991:127). The notion of forgiving being used by Luke's Jesus for both 'debt and ... sin' provides 'the link between analogy and life' (:127).

The denarius, a Roman 'coin' as translated here, would be familiar to Luke's readers especially as it was the daily wage of a labourer (Marshall 1998:310). If fifty

days' wages seemed a large amount to a labourer, five hundred days' (roughly seventeen months') pay would be akin to opulence. The amounts Jesus mentions are substantial for his regular audience but not necessarily for the Pharisee who was obviously wealthy enough 'to host a formal banquet with a number of guests' (Green 1997:311).

42 Since neither ... grateful to him

The short, rather colourless parable, stirs Luke's readers to the realization that 'the focus of interest is in what is yet to come' (Nolland 1989:356). It certainly is abnormally 'kind behaviour' for a moneylender to 'release a debt simply because of an inability to pay' (Johnson 1991:127), yet Bock recognises that 'the unmerited character of the act ... is the basis for the [resulting] gratitude' (1999:699). The readers rightly see that Jesus' subsequent question is central to the allegoric tale (Nolland 1989:356).

43 Simon answered ... are right

Simon's reply is half-hearted. Luke's readers hear the first person present indicative active as a muttered 'I suppose ...' but, nonetheless, they note that 'Jesus commends his answer' (Nolland 1989:356). To Marshall it is doubtful that Simon's response can be 'understood as supercilious indifference'; 'caution', perhaps but, more likely, the Pharisee 'realizes that he has been caught in a trap' (1998:311).

44 Turning then ... her hair

Luke's Jesus brings focus back to the woman by commanding Simon, 'in the form of a question', to pay 'attention to her' (Marshall 1998:311). He then begins to compare three facets of the woman's giving action to three examples of hospitality not given by Simon (:311). Luke carefully arranges his pronouns (:311) as Jesus addresses Simon three times with a 'you did not give me' followed by a '[but], she gave me' (:44-46).

The first example of Simon's failed hospitality is the lack of water sometimes provided for a guest so that the dust of his journey may be removed. In Jewish hospitality water is provided usually for guests who have travelled some distance. Although the dust of a long journey does not apply to Jesus on this occasion, Luke's Jesus shows that 'extra thoughtfulness' and consideration would go a long way to demonstrate a host's gratitude

and respect for his guest (Nolland 1989:357). It is clear that the woman, who approached Jesus with her gift immediately she entered the room, has shown ‘more courtesy and interest in [him] than Simon did’ (Bock 1999:701).

45 You gave ... since I entered

A kiss on the face, not obligatory but, certainly, a time-honoured practice of greeting (Nolland 1989:357), would indicate the graciousness and good manners of a host who wishes to put his guest at ease. There was no kiss on the face from Simon but, from the woman, there are kisses in abundance on Jesus’ feet. While the Jewish kiss of greeting shows ‘respect and friendship’, the wealth of kisses placed on Jesus’ feet by the Jewish woman who is given no name to identify her, expresses ‘humility, appreciation’ and much more (Bock 1999:702).

Again, a little more attentiveness on Simon’s part had been called for when the guest he himself had invited crossed the threshold of his home.

46 You did ... with perfume

Getty-Sullivan recognizes that the oil is an important ‘element of Luke’s emphasis on hospitality’ (2001:110). Luke’s readers are cognizant of the fact that oil was at times used for the comfort of guests at feasts, to both soothe the skin ‘and as a perfumed way of dispelling unpleasant odors’ (:110).

The oil would ‘in all probability [be] inexpensive olive oil ... produced in abundance in the region’ (Bock 1999:702) and, therefore, this simple act of courtesy would not entail much more than bringing the oil from its storing place and instructing a slave to do the necessary. In the storage room would be numerous aromatic spices, as well as locally harvested herbs, made ready for such occasions and easily added to the oil.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Although most spices were imported, numerous fragrant herbs grew abundantly in the Palestine of Jesus’ day. For example: ‘Calamus ... a tall reed-like grass [and] indeed a very sweet-smelling plant’; ‘hyssop ... a sweet-smelling plant of the mint family’; and, ‘wild mint, [perhaps] one of the “bitter herbs” [eaten] with the Passover lamb’ (Angelfire, 2013. Plants of the Bible. Marked G, Q and S). [Internet].

47 I tell you, that is why ... whose love is small.

Luke's readers come to the heart of Jesus' parable: the woman has already received forgiveness of her '*many sins*' and because of that a *great* abundance of love embodies her action. It is apparent that, through Jesus' preaching, she had recognized her sin to be great and had sought forgiveness. The very desire for God's mercy, newly understood, had set her free, the result being that she was filled with love. However Simon, like the rest of the Pharisees, refused to 'dance' to the 'tune' played by Jesus (Lk 7:33): the sight of Jesus willingly addressing 'tax collectors and sinners' left him deaf to God's all-embracing invitation of forgiveness (7:34).

48 He said ... forgiven

Luke's readers remember that Jesus had cured a paralyzed man whose friends had let him downward, through the roof-tiles and 'into the middle of the crowd before Jesus' (5:19). Because of the friends' faith, he had forgiven the man's sins (:20). In this text, however, Jesus' address to the woman is 'a confirmation of the woman's forgiveness, on the basis of [his] own authority' (Nolland 1989:359), since he has already told Simon that her love is great as a result of having already been forgiven.

At verse 50 below the readers will be made aware that the woman's openness to forgiveness, and faith in God's mercy, is one and the same.

49 at which ... forgives sins

Luke has so far kept the readers' attention focussed on Jesus, the Pharisee and the woman and it is only now that he lets them turn their mind's eye to other table guests. He gives no indication that any of Jesus' disciples are present, a detail which adds to the initial aura of unfriendliness felt at the beginning of the pericope. As Simon's other guests voice their astonishment at Jesus' statement to the woman, the readers now recall the Pharisees and scribes at the scene with the paralyzed man, how they had insinuated that Jesus was a blasphemer and that only God could forgive sins (:21). They remember only too well how Jesus had, that day, proved he was quite capable of forgiving sins when he got the man to pick up his mat and carry it out through the door of the crowded room (:25).

50 Meanwhile ... in peace

In contrast to the story of the paralyzed man, Luke's Jesus 'chooses to ignore' the hostile dialogue going on around him and once again 'confirms the woman's response' to God's offer of salvation (Bock 1999:707).

5.3 Jesus journeys with men and women

Immediately after the anointing scene Luke introduces some individuals, other than the Twelve, who are now part of Jesus' travelling entourage. It is surprising, especially to early readers not acquainted with the Lucan tradition, to hear that these individuals are women.

The scene of this part of Jesus' journeying is in Galilee where Jesus has been since his return from the desert in 4:14.

Luke 8:1-3

1 After this he journeyed through towns and villages preaching and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve accompanied him, 2 and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and maladies: Mary called the Magdalene, from whom seven devils had gone out, 3 Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, Susanna, and many others who were assisting them out of their means.

1a After this ... kingdom of God

By the use of the third person singular imperfect tense of *διοδεύω* (to journey), Luke 'conveys' to his readers 'the idea of a continuing wandering ministry' of preaching and proclaiming (Marshall 1998:316). The personal pronoun makes it clear that, at this stage, only Jesus is engaged in announcing and preaching the good news. As this is the third time in his gospel that these two actions of Jesus are linked together, it is evident that, to Luke, preaching and proclaiming are what define 'Jesus' prophetic mission' on earth (Johnson 1991:131).¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Lk 4:18-19, 43-44.

1b The Twelve accompanied him

The reader was, at 6:12-16, introduced to twelve disciples selected to be apostles. Luke only now presents them as ‘the Twelve’, a title initiated by Mark in 3:13-19 (Nolland 1989:365).¹⁰²

2a and also ... and maladies

Besides employing Jesus’ mandate to the twelve from Mark, Luke has his own, equally important, agenda to follow. Having made it evident that the twelve were not yet preaching and proclaiming, Luke gives attention to the first part of the mandate, that of ‘being with Jesus’, a significant motif in his gospel. His readers subsequently discover that there are also women in the equation of keeping company with Jesus and learning from him (Green 1997:317).

Not only does Jesus have female company, informs Luke; these women had at some time been possessed and sickly but, having been cured, they were now in good health. Luke gives no indication whether or not the tradition speaks of who had healed the women. However, at this stage of the pericope, the reader presumes that it had been Jesus (Fitzmyer 1981:697-698). Luke also gives no indication of what type of maladies they had suffered but his early readers are mindful of the fact that in their culture and time evil spirits, also known as demons, are believed to prowl the emptiness looking for opportunities to enter and take possession of a person. Once occupation had taken place, the demons determined to destroy the host-person by ‘causing grief and sickness, either by way of physical pain, mental and spiritual torment and/or antisocial behaviour’ (D’Oliveira 2009:28). The more demons to take control of a person, the more severe the suffering.

2b Mary ... gone out

The first woman on the list of three is Mary, a name particularly common in the Palestine of the day. Luke gets her cognominal name, Magdalene, from Mark’s gospel (15:40). By

¹⁰² By informing his readers that the Twelve are with Jesus as he preaches and proclaims, Luke uses the Marcan understanding of Jesus’ instruction found at 3:14 which has Jesus name twelve men, firstly, to be companions to him (Johnson 1991:131) and, secondly, for him to send out and preach (Nolland 1989:365). Mark had also added that ‘they were likewise to have authority to expel demons’ (3:15).

introducing her as ‘Mary called the Magdalene’ it is likely that the evangelist is aware that, earlier in the century, the town was commonly known as Tarichea and that Μαγδαληνή could therefore be ‘a nickname or title from the Aramaic *magdala*’, meaning ‘the tower’ (Beavis 2012:287).¹⁰³ Furthermore and unlike Mark, he introduces her immediately after the passage describing the unnamed woman, the public sinner, who anoints Jesus feet. Do the readers automatically link ‘Mary called the Magdalene’ with the anointer or do they reason that the anointer was a sinner who was forgiven and that Mary was a demoniac who was healed?

The sum of seven in Jesus’ culture means the perfect number. It signifies wholeness, completeness, totality, extensiveness and, in a context such as this, seriousness. Demon control over Mary Magdalene’s life had thus been severely brutal.

3a Joanna ... Susanna

Luke names two women in the Galilean group not mentioned by Mark. Joanna and Susanna are clearly persons recalled to memory and repeated by the Lucan tradition, Joanna being easily remembered because she had been married to an employee of the client king. Luke, however, obtains no further information about Susanna from his source.

Noted by the reader is that both Mary Magdalene and Susanna are single women while Joanna’s presence indicates that Jesus’ preaching has been heard in ‘high places’ (Nolland 1989:366).

3b and many ... their means

Luke adds that not only had several women been healed and exorcised but that they had stayed with Jesus to support him and his twelve male companions out of their own resources. To the reader it is now perfectly clear that it was Jesus who had restored all these women to health and that they continued to express ‘their gratitude’ by providing financial support (Fitzmyer 1981:698). By using the third person plural imperfect tense of the verb διακονέω (to assist) Luke makes it clear that the women’s assistance is ‘not ... restricted to table service’ (:698).

¹⁰³ ‘Magdala-Taricheae’ is usually taken to mean “Tower of [salted] fish” (Strange 1992:463).

This report reminds the reader that Jesus' perception of women differs 'radically from the usual understanding of [their] role in contemporary Judaism' (Fitzmyer 1981:696).

5.4 Observing the death and burial of Jesus

Jesus' journeying comes to an end at 23:46 as he cries out, commending his spirit into his Father's hands. Thereafter the centurion in charge of the executions gives glory to God by professing Jesus' innocence and, when the crowd sees all this, they return home at 23:48, heavy of heart.

Luke 23:49, 55-56

49 All his friends and the women who had accompanied him from Galilee were standing at a distance watching everything. 55 The women who had come with him from Galilee followed along behind. They saw the tomb and how his body was buried. 56 Then they went home to prepare spices and perfumes. They observed the Sabbath as a day of rest, in accordance with the law.

49a All his friends ... from Galilee

Luke has all Jesus' friends present at the crucifixion while Mark, before him, has the remaining eleven close friends taking flight at Jesus' arrest (Mk 14:50). In fact, Mark has neither the eleven nor any other male disciple at the crucifixion site. Does Luke mean his readers to understand that '*all his friends*' constitutes both the group of eleven as well as another group of male disciples? Green believes that the evangelist is referring 'to the disciples and likely includes the apostles themselves, whose whereabouts have been unknown since the arrest' (Green 1997:828).¹⁰⁴

Like Mark, Luke has the women present at the crucifixion. The definite article refers to 'some women ... and many others' mentioned at 8:1-3. Although Luke distinguishes them from the Twelve at 8:1-2, according to Johnson he makes no distinction here between the women and the disciples (1991:383). The reader, by the arrangement of the sentence and the information about Galilee, senses that 'Luke draws

¹⁰⁴ Lk 22:47-53.

particular attention only to the presence of women disciples' (Green 1997:828). Since they have known Jesus and followed him from Galilee they have, so far, first-hand witness of Jesus' travelling ministry as well as his death on the cross (Johnson 1991:383).

Luke's separation of the words 'friends' from 'women' is not discrimination of any kind given that, in a patriarchal society such as the one Luke was born into, it is unlikely that a woman would be classed as a man's friend. To the contrary, in this translation 'friends' and 'women' seem to be standing together, indicating some vestige of unity.

49b were standing ... everything

Luke portrays both male and female groups negatively by distancing them from the cross, indicating that they do not want to be 'too closely [involved] with Jesus in his humiliation and death' (Green 1997:828). If indeed, the men and women are showing a certain unity by standing together, their 'geographical remoteness [somehow] indicates a weakened discipleship' (:828). Nonetheless, Luke's readers are reassured by the fact that they have not abandoned Jesus entirely.

The physical distance placed by the disciples between themselves and the cross is seen by Geldenhuys to be the result 'of their unutterable grief and inability to comprehend what had occurred' (1965:612-613).

With every detail of the crucifixion and death being observed, Luke alerts his readers to an essential event in the Jesus' story which he will shortly reveal during the final sentence of verse 55.

The absent verses sandwiched between 49 and 55 inform the reader that a Sanhedrin member named Joseph from the town of Arimathea, who was involved in neither the 'plan' nor the 'action' of killing Jesus, had requested the body from Pilate. The request had evidently been granted as Joseph now takes it down, wraps it in quality linen and places it in a brand new tomb chiselled out of the rocky terrain. The final verse in this section tells that sundown, the beginning of the Sabbath, is about to happen.

55a The women ... behind

Luke repeats the women's history not only because five verses have passed but, also, because he needs the reader to keep their past actions in mind. Although the male disciples are present at Jesus' death in this tradition, it is only the women who go to see the place where Jesus is laid; this action logically points to the women being the first to meet the risen Jesus. Unlike Mark, Luke does not mention the women's names at this stage (Bock 1998:1877), neither at verse 49 nor here, for the probable reason that he had already introduced them by name at 8:2-3 (Marshall 1998:877).

55b They saw ... was buried

The women, determined to see whatever concerns Jesus to the end, loyally follow the path taken by the man carrying his corpse. They are not only 'authentic eyewitnesses to Jesus as he was [in Galilee] and as he now is' (Johnson 1991:383), but can also give testimony regarding the burial. Luke expressly reports that the women observe the *manner* in which the body was buried; nonetheless, it is logical to assume that they have also noted the *whereabouts* of the tomb – crucial evidence for what lies on the horizon of Luke's gospel. Luke's ὡς (how) expresses the women's concern about the Jewish traditions of respect that should be given to the deceased.

56a Then they ... perfume

Only after taking note of the burial site do the women go home, which indicates that light has not yet faded into the birth of a new Sabbath. Having noted that Jesus' corpse has not been anointed with aromatic oils to reduce the odour of death, the women clearly intend to return as soon as they are able.

Luke condenses Mark's account of spice and perfume preparation, giving the reader the impression that whatever they need is already at their lodgings in or near the city.¹⁰⁵ Nonetheless, if the sun has not yet gone down, there may still be opportunities to make a few rushed purchases from vendors wrapping up for the day.

¹⁰⁵ Citizens of Jerusalem let out rooms, balconies and all available space to pilgrims attending Jewish festivals (D'Oliveira 2009:27).

56b They observed ... the law

This is Luke's second 'reference to the approaching Sabbath', the first having been at verse 54 (Green 1997:831). These insertions are to 'avoid any hint that these disciples of Jesus were engaged in Sabbath-breaking; and', also, to furnish a link between Jesus' death 'and resurrection appearance by mandating the return of these women following the Sabbath' (:831).

5.5 Visiting the Empty Tomb

Luke 24:1-12

1 On the first day of the week, at dawn, the women came to the tomb bringing the spices they had prepared. 2 They found the stone rolled back from the tomb; 3 but when they entered the tomb, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 While they were still at a loss over what to think of this, two men in dazzling garments stood beside them. 5 Terrified, the women bowed to the ground. The men said to them: "Why do you search for the Living One among the dead? 6 He is not here; he has been raised up. Remember what he said to you while he was still in Galilee – 7 that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." 8 With this reminder, his words came back to them. 9 On their return from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and the others. 10 The women were Mary of Magdala, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James. The other women with them also told the apostles, 11 but the story seemed like nonsense and they refused to believe them. 12 Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. He stooped down but could see nothing but the wrappings. So he went away full of amazement at what had occurred.

1 On the first ... had prepared

While Mark had the women arriving 'very early, just after sunrise' (16:2), Luke tells that they reach the tomb as the light of the first day of the week begins to emerge. In any event, both descriptions of time suggest an urgency 'to complete Jesus' ... burial', thus far honourable, with the necessary aromatic spices (Green 1997:837).

2 They found the stone rolled back from the tomb

Unlike Mark's narrative which has the women first establishing the presence of the stone by their discussion (16:3), Luke draws the reader's attention without preamble towards the first telling detail of his resurrection account (Johnson 1991:386) – the stone no longer covers the entrance to the tomb. Indeed, Luke's group of female would-be anointers has come upon a tomb from which the body seems to have been snatched (Nolland 1993:1189).

3 but when ... Lord Jesus

Luke has the women going in and looking for Jesus' body while Mark had them receive information of his being raised up immediately upon entering, making any kind of search superfluous (Nolland 1993:1189). Luke heightens the drama of finding the stone rolled away by disclosing, with a second, contrasting use of εὑρον (they found), that the body is not there (Bock 1998:1888-1889). Here Luke's reader receives the second telling detail of the resurrection (Marshall 1998:884).

This is the only time in his gospel that Luke speaks of 'the Lord Jesus' while in Acts the terminology will occur as much as 'seventeen times' (Nolland 1993:1189).

4a While ... of this

Luke uses the verb ἀπορέω which strongly suggests 'mental confusion or perplexity' (Johnson 1991:387). Their bewilderment will soon reach a crescendo of fear as the supernatural blazingly enters their earthly space within the gloom of the rocks.

4b two men ... beside them

Even with Mark's gospel narratives at hand, Luke chooses to increase the angelic young man from one to two. His readers understand that they are 'supernatural figures, as the participle of ἀσπράττω (to dazzle), infers (Johnson 1991:387). Noticeable is the fact that the same word source had described Jesus' clothes at the transfiguration and also, during the same scene when Jesus 'was "in glory"', two men had been present talking to him 'of

his passage, which he was about to fulfil in Jerusalem' (:387).¹⁰⁶ Perhaps Luke wants 'the reader to make this connection' (:387). Marshall, however, finds this 'unlikely' since the 'doubling of the figure may be meant to provide two witnesses to the important fact about to be described' (1998:885).

5a Terrified ... ground

Luke's early readers could be Jews with knowledge of the Torah and, therefore, would understand that the expected reaction to the visible presence of God or a messenger from God would be fear. They may remember that, when Moses learned that the God of his fathers was speaking to him from the burning bush, he 'hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God' (Ex 3:4-7). Like Moses, the women were not able to face the magnificence before them.

5b The men ... among the dead

Luke's angelic figures are not as kind as the Marcan angel who reassures the women before revealing the reason for the open tomb and missing body. Their attitude seems 'rather accusing' and is reminiscent of the 'ill-advised search ... for the ascended Elijah' in the second book of Kings (Nolland 1993:1189).¹⁰⁷ At this point the reader may either wonder at the rebuke or side with the angelic men against the women's failure to heed Jesus' 'teaching about his suffering and exaltation' (Bock 1998:1891).¹⁰⁸

6a He is not here; he has been raised up

These two short clauses come from Mark's gospel but Luke reverses their order (Johnson 1991:387), thus creating a chiasm with the angels' opening question (Nolland 1993:1189). The reversal enables the reader to understand that Jesus is not here *because* he has been raised up. Furthermore, since the women have already explored the inner tomb, he leaves out Mark's 'additional phrase, "see the place where they laid him"' (Johnson 1991:387).

¹⁰⁶ Lk 9:29-31.

¹⁰⁷ 2 Kgs 2:17-18.

¹⁰⁸ Lk 9:22, 44: 13:33; 17:25; 22:37. Since the rebuke is unique to Luke, it can be deduced that he 'has drawn on additional material or summarized the conversation [in the tradition] in more detail' (Bock 1998:1891).

6b Remember ... in Galilee

Whereas Mark's angel, looking forward, commands the women to inform 'Peter and the disciples' that they are to follow Jesus who had already left for Galilee, Luke's angelic men remind the women, and the readers, what Jesus had spoken about while they were with him in Galilee. It is clear that Luke likes to 'show how Jesus' words had been fulfilled' (Johnson 1991:387) and 'that it was people from Galilee who heard Jesus there and then bore witness to the resurrection (Acts 1:22; 10:37-41)' (Marshall 1998:886). What is further apparent here is that he intends his readers to understand 'that the women were recipients of the passion predictions' (Nolland 1993:1190).¹⁰⁹

7 that the Son ... rise again

The angelic beings seem to insinuate that, it now being the third day, 'the women should [be] expecting Jesus to be alive again' (Nolland 1993:1190).

The adjective ἁματωλός (sinful) is exclusive to Luke's gospel and to his passion narrative (Johnson 1991:387).¹¹⁰ 'Rather than naming the "elders, chief priests and scribes",' Luke gives a 'moral evaluation: people who are sinners' did this deed (1991:387)!

The specific word σταυρωθῆναι (be crucified) is also distinctive within this section as Luke refers to Jesus being 'scourged and put to death' at 18:32-33,¹¹¹ being 'put to death' at 9:22 and being 'delivered into the hands of' at 9:44 (Bock 1998:1894). Luke's angels, by using the word 'crucified', encompass the full fatal treatment from Judas' betrayal to the moment that Jesus breathed his last (1998:1894).

8 With this ... to them

Urged by the angels' command at verse 6, 'the women remember' the words that Jesus' had spoken (Nolland 1993:1190). Although Fitzmyer does not believe that their 'testimony [can] engender faith' (1985:1543), Bock believes that 'three factors are against [the] general approach' that 'it is only the Lord's teaching that is remembered'

¹⁰⁹ In Luke 9:22, 44; 17:25 and 22:37 Jesus speaks to disciples; in 13:33 he speaks to Pharisees in the company of those listening to his parables; it is only in 18:32-33 that he speaks to the twelve alone.

¹¹⁰ Luke also uses the adjective 'sinful' in 5:8 when Peter, overwhelmed at the great number of fish caught, says to Jesus: 'Leave me, Lord. I am a sinful man.'

¹¹¹ The New American Bible renders 'will scourge him and put him to death' (Lk 18:33).

and that ‘resurrection is hidden from them’ owing to the twelve’s incomprehension at 18:31-34 (1998:1895).

Firstly, the angelic teaching is ‘given before an empty tomb’, making ‘Jesus’ earlier remarks ... clear (Bock 1998:1895). Secondly, ‘the teaching that they recall is specifically about resurrection, the key point in this context’ as established by the angels’ question above (:1895). Bock’s third factor is that, on their return from the tomb which occurs in the next sentence, the women will obviously discuss the episode at length. The fact that their story will be judged as nonsense will indicate that they were not discussing only the vision and the angels’ prompting to remember ‘Jesus’ teaching’ but, indeed, that the angels’ message had showed them that Jesus had kept his promise (:1895).

So, ‘with memory thus restored’ and a deeper understanding thus awakened, ‘the women are now ready to explain the empty tomb in terms of the gospel message of the resurrection’ (Nolland 1993:1190).

9 On their return ... the others

The women leave behind their fear and return from the graveyard to the place of the living where what they will tell can be heard: ‘it is the angels’ appearance, not their message, that is terrifying’ (Nolland 1993:1191). Luke’s ‘return’ displaces Mark’s ‘fled’ and ‘answers to “came” in v 1’ (:1191).

In place of the women’s silence in Mark and, in spite of not being ‘ordered to do so’ (Johnson 1991:388), Luke has them telling the entire open/empty tomb episode to the remaining eleven and the other disciples (Nolland 1993:1191). Luke thus draws attention to ‘the faithfulness of their testimony’ – ‘all these things’ includes ‘what they had observed, what they had been told, and the new significance they attributed to Jesus’ passion and the absence of his corpse’ (Green 1997:838-839).

10 The women ... told the apostles

With ‘traditional material’ (Bock 1998:1896), as well as Mark’s empty tomb account open before him, Luke comes to some sort of compromise between their individual lists of female disciples: as in Luke 8:2-3, Mary Magdalene still heads the group and Joanna takes second place. Mark’s second name, ‘Mary the mother of James the younger and

Joses,' becomes 'Mary the mother of James' in third place (Nolland 1993:1191). Luke leaves out Mark's Salome and his own, Susanna, but masks these exclusions by mentioning that there were other women with them (:1191).

For the readers the crux of the matter is that Luke has the women who had begun 'their role' at 8:1 in Galilee, now bringing it to fulfilment in Jerusalem (Nolland 1993:1191). 'These [women, named and unnamed] are the first witnesses' to the divine message regarding what had happened to the body of Jesus (Johnson 1991:388).

Marshall notes that Luke's third person plural imperfect tense of λέγω (to tell) 'perhaps' indicates that the women 'tried repeatedly to get their story across to the' Eleven (1998:888).

11 but the story ... believe them

Luke alone relates the Eleven's response to the women's story (Nolland 1993:1191). His early readers would not notice what could be an example of 'sexist scepticism' shown by their 'first audience' (Hearon 2005:27-28) since the cultural restrictions of the day would see them as "only women," not to be believed in matters of deep importance' (Nolland 1993:1193). Johnson notes that the designation λήρος (nonsense) 'could scarcely be more condescending' and displays 'a definite air of male superiority' (1991:388). He observes that at 9:45 the disciples, who 'could not grasp the fact that Jesus had to suffer', feared to question him 'about "his word" [τὸ ῥῆμα τοῦτο], just as now they refuse to hear "these words" [τὰ ῥήματα ταῦτα]' (:388).

By reporting the disbelief of the men who were with Jesus since the beginning of his movement, Luke plainly 'shows that the women were way ahead of the disciples' (Bock 1998:1896).

12 Peter ... what had occurred

Although the men disregard 'all these things ... as nonsense', the women's report prompts Peter to carry out 'his own investigation of the tomb' (Nolland 1993:1193). Like the women, Luke's Peter discovers that the tomb is empty. Nonetheless, Peter's glimpse of the corpse wrappings gives rise to a significant detail which should generate a small

start to belief in the resurrection: ‘anyone who wanted to [steal and] remove the body would have kept it wrapped’ for concealment and easy transport (Nolland 1993:1192).

Thankfully Peter was moved, albeit from curiosity, to see for himself (Fitzmyer 1985:1543). What he saw left him ‘wondering about what had happened’, certainly, but he did ‘not yet’ believe the nucleus of the story told by the group of female disciples – that Jesus had truly been raised from the dead (:1543).

5.6 Summary

With themes and portraits of Jesus other than those of Mark in mind, Luke’s expansion and filling in of the anointing event’s framework leads his readers in new and different directions. He introduces the woman directly as a notorious sinner of the town, effectively calling the readers’ imagination to play. Luke deliberately intends her to be viewed through the eyes of the dinner host, a Pharisee ‘scrupulous in his behavior and interactions with others’, so that he may challenge that view and force his readers ‘to reinterpret ... her character’ (Hearon 2005:193). The readers experience a tension between the immediate picture generated by Luke and their recollection of Jesus being a friend of sinners.

When he begins the action of the woman Luke makes no mention of the cost of the perfumed oil because, unlike in Mark, the value thereof plays no part in his version of the little narrative. Furthermore, while Mark has the woman anoint Jesus’ head, Luke has her weeping, drying, kissing and then anointing his feet. By this dramatic display the evangelist intends to impress upon his audience that the woman has had all her sins forgiven and, for that, she is exceedingly grateful to Jesus. In further contrast to Mark, the complaint is made not by some of the guests at table, but by means of the Pharisee’s silent soliloquy which protests both the presence of the woman and the likelihood of Jesus’ call to prophecy. Having ‘automatically and spontaneously [responded] to the narrative with imagination’ (Mlilo 2007:63), some readers cringe in sympathy with the embarrassed host while others begin to reproach themselves for lack of repentance and gratitude.

Placed here, Jesus’ parable draws the reader into the centre of the tripartite action of remorse, forgiveness and gratitude and effectively urges the Lucan community to

juxtapose the Pharisee's indifference to God's invitation of forgiveness, through Jesus, against the woman's responsiveness and, thus, evaluate their own status. The evangelist's portrait of a woman 'living in joyful response to the gift of forgiveness' invites his readers to lift themselves out of similar attitudes of dispiritedness and apathy and respond to Jesus' word in the same way (Hearon 2005:193).

When Luke arranges Mark's information of the women in 15:40-41 into a short narrative, the reader is effectively informed, firstly, that Jesus had begun an itinerant ministry of preaching and proclaiming which still continues and, secondly, that Jesus was accompanied by women as well as men. The evangelist further conveys that the women, now cured, had once suffered either physically, mentally or spiritually under demon possession, emphasizing at the same time that Mary Magdalene's affliction had been particularly brutal. Fourthly, the reader discovers that the women accompanying Jesus gave him financial support.

There is a gap in Luke's narrative which the readers respond to by supplying details accessed from both knowledge and imagination. An educated guess is all it takes for the evangelist's lacuna to effectively convey to them that Jesus himself had effected a cure for each individual woman. Moreover, the skilful exclusion leads them to believe that the women in the narrative stay with, and support, Jesus out of gratitude for what he has done for them. As a result, the readers spontaneously engage in the story with personal images of spiritually being with Jesus every minute of their own journey through life.

A puzzling aspect of the narrative is that Luke joins the passage, where he introduces the female disciples, to the end of the anointing story. All things considered it is quite conceivable that the anointer, deeply lonely in her home environment but publicly praised, forgiven and accepted by Jesus, would now join his wandering group. Is the evangelist suggesting that Mary Magdalene, mentioned first, should be identified with her? The reader who ponders this probability would reason as follows: The woman in the anointing narrative is a public sinner; none of the women in the adjoining narrative is presented as a public sinner; and, would the evangelist not have pointed out if the nameless one, and the first one named, is one and the same person? Since Luke does not

identify Mary Magdalene as the anointer, the reader's conclusion is that they are not the same person.

Luke's account of the women near the cross follows Mark 15:40-41; 47 except for the following variances: all Jesus' friends and the women are present while Mark has only the centurion with the women (Mk 15:39); the crowd in Mark is antagonistic while the one in Luke is sympathetic (Mk 15: 29-32; Lk 23: 48); Luke names three women but repeats that of Mary Magdalene only; he has the women observe how Jesus is laid while Mark has them observe the exact place; he has the women prepare spices while Mark has them buying them; and, while Mark tells his audience that the women attended his needs, Luke finds it unnecessary to repeat what he had said in 8:3.

By the arrangement of his sentence in the first half of verse 49 Luke impresses upon his audience the presence of the women disciples and indicates a hint of solidarity amongst the members of the two groups of 'friends' and 'women' (23:49).

In tandem with Mark, the evangelist successfully emphasizes the fact that the women are reliable witnesses to Jesus' life and actions as well as his death and burial.

Some of the differences between Mark and Luke's account of the empty tomb are occasioned, in all probability, by the latter's remarkable and imaginative skills in language and rhetoric. The wearing of white garments in Mark may be equal in meaning to the dazzling garments in Luke, but the latter description invokes among the readers a light too intense to be held by human eyes. Mark's angelic young man found sitting in the tomb frightens the women in the narrative but the sudden appearance of Luke's two young men in the midst of the bewildered women has them fall, dramatically, onto their knees. Doubling Mark's angelic personage shows how meticulous Luke is about every aspect of his narrative which may be questioned.¹¹² The evangelist is satisfied that Mary Magdalene and the other women can give authentic human witness concerning the empty tomb but an extra messenger from on high will go a long way in corroborating such testimony.

While Mark's young man reassures the women, Luke's angelic figures remonstrate their failure to remember what Jesus had told them in Galilee about his being

¹¹² Scripture scholars have found an indication of apologetics within both Luke's gospel and Acts (New American Bible 1970:66).

handed over to sinful men, being crucified and rising again on the third day. Here the evangelist reiterates his statement in 8:3 which suggests that the ‘many women’ who had assisted Jesus were, indeed, disciples who sat at his feet and listened to him speak. He again emphasizes their discipleship when ‘Mary of Magdala, Joanna and Mary the mother of James’ recall Jesus’ words (24:8, 10).

Besides giving his readers, or audience, factual information about Jesus’ disciples, Luke’s vivid picture of angelic beings remonstrating with the three women about their neglect to remember Jesus’ words, move those guilty of indifference and hardheartedness to the beginning, at least, of a full response to God’s word. The evangelist’s additions to the Jesus story invite Theophilus, or all human beings, to be ‘fruitful recipient[s] of God’s word’ (*New American Bible* 1970:66) so that each person may, like the female anointer, live ‘in joyful response to the gift of forgiveness’ (Hearon 2005:193).

Like Mark before him, Luke’s portrait of Mary Magdalene is not that of a perfect disciple. She had not ventured close to the cross and, by going to the tomb to anoint the body, proved that she did not expect him to actually rise from the dead. In addition, she did not remember what Jesus had told the disciple group in Galilee about being handed over to sinful men, being crucified and rising again. The last-named failure by a disciple was so grave that Luke had the supernatural beings chastise her over the matter.

On the other hand, Luke finds in Mary Magdalene not only a true disciple who had followed and financially supported Jesus from virtually the beginning of his journey to Jerusalem but, indeed, a disciple who wished to be with Jesus every moment of her life.

The female followers, with Magdalene the leader, are to Luke the first witnesses of the resurrection. Since they assume responsibility without any command from the angels and, because of their tenacity in persuading Peter to hear them, Luke sees them as far closer than the latter in coming to a true understanding of Jesus’ death and resurrection (Bock 1998:1896).

Satisfied that Luke's Mary Magdalene is generous, dependable, determined, close to Jesus and one of the first disciples to see and hear evidence of the resurrection, I shall proceed to the next chapter and attempt, by means of further literary analyses of relevant texts, to discover who Mary Magdalene was in the eyes of the evangelist John.

CHAPTER 6

Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene in John's gospel

This, the sixth chapter, is comprised of a literary analysis of texts from the gospel of John which relate to the Western Church's traditional composite figure named Mary Magdalene. Firstly, John's presentation of Lazarus and his two sisters in 11:1-2 is examined; secondly the first eight verses in chapter 12, which describe the anointing scene, are analyzed; the third pericope to be examined is the scene near the cross in 19:25-27. The final analysis of this chapter encompasses the Johannine version of human activity at the empty tomb in 20:1-18. A summary closes the chapter.

6.1 Introduction

At some point near the turn of the first century CE a written gospel, different but not contradictory to those of Mark, Matthew and Luke, materialized someplace on or near the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea.¹¹³ This gospel, the fourth and last gospel received into the canon of Christian scripture as the Gospel according to John, is believed to have been written by a disciple of the disciple whom Jesus loved (*The New American Bible* 1970:102). The evangelist put together and modelled the tradition of the beloved disciple's community into an arrangement which speaks of history as well as the community's development and understanding of the divinity of Jesus.

The numerous 'asides' in the fourth gospel indicate that John wrote it, not only to document the result of sixty to seventy years of the community's recollection, recitation and reflection upon the stories of Jesus 'the Messiah, the Son of God' but, also, to record it for readers outside the Johannine community 'so that through this faith you may have life in his name' (20:31). The evangelist's arrangement, in effect, 'records the Jesus-story of a community in transition' so that other audiences and readers may be led to conversion (Moloney 1998:22). The artistry of this gospel, with its irony, subtleties and innuendos, is found to be both appealing and convincing as John effectively gets his readers to inhabit his rendering of Jesus' world. His presentation of Mary of Bethany, the

¹¹³ 'Ephesus is still favoured by most scholars as the place of composition ...' (*The New American Bible* 1970:102).

anointing scene, those who stood at the cross and the discovery of the empty tomb by Mary of Magdala will mark the final biblical literary analysis of this dissertation.

6.2 Mary of Bethany is introduced

The first relevant text concerns Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus, who is said to be ‘the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and dried his feet with her hair’ (11:2). This text, which is where John introduces Lazarus to his readers, follows Jesus’ return to the Jordan region after the Judaeans in Jerusalem tried to arrest him (10:39).¹¹⁴ It is where Jesus is when he hears news of Lazarus’ illness. Only after the introduction do the readers learn that ‘Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus very much’ (11:5).

John 11:1-2

1 There was a certain man named Lazarus who was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.
2 (This Mary whose brother Lazarus was sick was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and dried his feet with her hair.)

1 There was a certain ... sister Martha

John introduces Lazarus, Mary and Martha, three siblings who lived in Bethany, a village within easy walking distance from Jerusalem’s city gates. Readers imagine the man and both women to be unmarried simply because John does not indicate otherwise. Likewise, for the same reason, they presume that the siblings share one household.

Since John identifies Bethany as the sisters’ village, this ‘may indicate that’ his early readers have already met the two female players in one or other oral tradition known to both John and his community (Brown 1987:422-423). One may presume, therefore, that John believes his readers to be ignorant of the existence of Lazarus (1987:423).

¹¹⁴ The Judaeans, or “Jews”, are not the Jewish people as such. They are the hostile authorities, the Pharisees and Sadducees, particularly those in Jerusalem, who refuse to believe in Jesus. The use of the term [‘Jews’] reflects the atmosphere at the end of the first century, when polemics expressed the hostility between the synagogue and the church’ (*The New American Bible* 1970:104. Note on John 1:19).

2 (*This Mary ... her hair*)

The parenthesis, which ‘refers to a scene ... not yet ... narrated in this gospel’ (Brown 1987:422-423), suggests that John’s readers are already familiar with the anointing story (Coakley 1988:245). Beasley-Murray is of the same opinion in that he considers that Mary is mentioned before the ‘account of the anointing on the assumption that all [the] Christians [of the time knew] of that event’ (1987:187).¹¹⁵

There follows Jesus’ return to the outskirts of Jerusalem and the resuscitation of the dead Lazarus. When many came to believe in him after they saw what he did, a meeting of the religious hierarchy was called to discuss what should be done (11:45-46). Their concern that their Temple and its sanctuary would lose significance and power, and therewith their own sway over the people, led to the final and defining decision made by Caiaphas the high priest: ‘Can you not see that it is better for you to have one man die [for the people] than to have the whole nation destroyed’ (11:48-50)?

With Jerusalem’s hierarchy now conspiring to kill him, Jesus once again ‘withdrew’, this time ‘to a town called Ephraim ... where he stayed with his disciples’ (11:54). In the meantime, the Feast of Passover began its approach.

6.3 The anointing of Jesus

John 12:1-8

1 Six days before Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the village of Lazarus whom Jesus had raised from the dead. 2 There they gave him a banquet, at which Martha served. Lazarus was one of those at table with him. 3 Mary brought a pound of costly perfume made from genuine aromatic nard, with which she anointed Jesus’ feet. Then she dried his feet with her hair, and the house was filled with the ointment’s fragrance. 4 Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one about to hand him over), protested: 5 “Why was not this perfume sold? It could have brought three hundred silver pieces, and the money have been given to the poor.” 6 (He did not say this out of concern for the poor, but because he was a thief. He held the purse, and used to help himself to what was

¹¹⁵ It is a trait within this gospel to introduce players already ‘known by some special deed in the community, by referring to that deed when they first appear in’ a specific scene (Haenchen 1984:57). See John 7:50 and 19:39 re Nicodemus; 11:59f and 18:14 re Caiaphas (:57).

deposited there.) 7 To this Jesus replied: "Leave her alone. Let her keep it against the day they prepare me for burial. 8 The poor you always have with you, but me you will not always have."

1 Six days ... from the dead.

Having informed his readers at 11:55 that 'the Jewish Passover was near', John brings Jesus back to Bethany, the village within easy walking distance from Jerusalem and where the entombed Lazarus had been brought back to life. By identifying Bethany again the evangelist brings the readers' attention back to the family that was closely bound in friendship with Jesus.¹¹⁶ Remembering Caiaphas' words at 11:50 the readers' concern for Jesus' safety increases considerably.

According to Moloney, the number of days John provides before the Passover celebrations begin have 'no ... significance' other than making available enough days for certain events to take place before Jesus' death and burial on the eve of Passover (1998:356).

2 There they gave ... at table with him

John immediately launches into a banquet story without identifying the name of the dinner host. Readers presume that it was given by Lazarus and his sisters since Martha is doing the serving (Moloney 1998:356). The comment about Lazarus, on the other hand, would be 'more natural if the meal were in another house than Lazarus's own' (Morris 1995:511). Readers fleetingly wonder if Martha has her own house which she shares with Mary while their brother, possibly the owner of another house in the same village is, on this occasion, a guest in his sisters' dining room. It is unlikely that early readers would come to the same conclusion as does Schnackenburg – the dinner party not being held in the home 'of the family with which Jesus is friendly [is] an indication that the evangelist is bound by a tradition' (Schnackenburg 1980:366).

¹¹⁶ Brown sees the repetition as a gloss that had been necessary at a time when the resuscitation story was 'separate from the story of the anointing' before being 'brought into its present chronological sequence' (1987:447-448).

In any event, the present word arrangement lays emphasis on the fact that Lazarus, once dead and buried, is now alive and partaking in actions performed only by the living.

3a Mary brought ... aromatic nard

Martha's sister, Mary, enters the scene, carrying a container holding what Haenchen estimates to be 'a "Roman" liter (327 grams)' of perfume (1984:84). John's description makes it clear that what Mary brought with her was an excellent and expensive aromatic product, most probably imported from the East. 'The Greek word' *μύρον* may either refer to a product of myrrh, a gum resin secreted by the *Commiphora myrrha* plant species, or may be used 'in the general sense of [a] "perfume"' made from any essential oil (Brown 1987:448).¹¹⁷ Here John uses the word in the latter sense, conveying to his readers that the perfume was produced from nard, indeed expensive, aromatic and from as far away as 'the mountains of northern India' (:448).

How Mary came to be in possession of this precious product 'is not explored by the narrator' (Haenchen 1984:84).

3b with which she anointed ... ointment's fragrance

The readers get their various audiences' fixed attention when they hear that Mary anoints Jesus' feet – this is not normal procedure, they are thinking, especially 'not during a meal' (Schnackenburg 1980:367). They are even more astonished when she proceeds to dry the costly product off with her hair (:367).¹¹⁸

John's focal point being on Jesus' feet is seen by Moloney 'as a gesture of humility, pointing forward to the footwashing of ch. 13' (1998:357) but Schnackenburg understands that the entire event, 'the precious oil, the anointing of the feet and the fragrance' filling the entire house, 'emphasises Jesus' dignity:' for John 'it is right that (Jesus) receives this veneration before his death' (1980:367).

¹¹⁷ Kooperation Phytopharmaka 2013. Myrrh. [Internet].

¹¹⁸ Since these aspects materialize in Luke's anointing story only, (albeit that Luke's anointer wipes off tears and not an expensive fragrance), Schnackenburg reasons that there is no question that a 'connection' exists within each evangelist's tradition (1980:367).

That behind Mary's 'extravagant act of anointing' may lay gratitude for bringing Lazarus back to life, is not mentioned (Coakley 1988:246).

4 Judas Iscariot ... protested

John reminds his readers that Judas son of Simon, one of the Twelve handpicked by Jesus himself, has already been pointed out as the scheming 'devil' who will 'hand Jesus over' to be killed (6:70-71). The prompt creates a 'contrast between [Mary's] actions and' those of Judas, both his present protest and the betrayal that the reader now understands to be imminent (Moloney 1998:357).

5 'Why was not this perfume ... to the poor'

A silver piece, the Roman denarius coin familiar to all Luke's early readers within the empire, is immediately recognized as remuneration for a full day's labour. To purchase perfume at the price of a year's work, even excluding Sabbath and festival days, 'makes the ointment very expensive indeed' (Moloney 1998:357).

In any event, some readers would like to ask Judas who, in fact, owns this perfume that he so piously wants to sell for the poor (Haenchen 1984:84). Others wonder if John's Judas sees Mary of Bethany as a disciple of Jesus who generally contributes money for the common cause of the group.¹¹⁹

6 (He did not say ... was deposited there)¹²⁰

This addition may mean that John wants his readers to recall the hired shepherd who leaves his post because 'he works for pay [and therefore] has no concern for the sheep' (10:12-13).¹²¹

It is clear to the reader that Judas is a man whose motives for joining the Jesus' group and administering care to the poor are, indeed, questionable.

¹¹⁹ John 'had access to a source' where Judas' protest is predetermined by the tradition since 'it leads to Jesus' reply and so to the point of the story' (Schnackenburg 1980:368).

¹²⁰ John's parenthesis here probably originates from a 'later interpretation' of the tradition in the preceding verse and is an accusation which is loudly suggestive of what Schnackenburg calls 'legendary excrescence' (1980:367).

¹²¹ *not ... concerned for the poor*. 'The same expression was used in x 13 to describe the hireling who "has no concern for the sheep"' (Brown 1987:448).

7 To this Jesus ... me for burial

Brown judges that τηρήσῃ, if translated ‘she has kept’, would ‘probably [render] the correct *interpretation*’ although not necessarily the best translation (1987:449). The notion is ‘not that [Mary] is to keep the perfume for some future use, but that [unknowingly] she was keeping it until now to embalm Jesus’ (:449).

8 The poor ... not always have

The readers do not spend moments wondering whether Mary consciously kept the valuable perfume for this purpose or if Jesus attributes a higher motive to what ‘she could have intended’ (Beasley-Murray 1987:209). Instead, John effectively brings them to the point of the narrative and has them pondering on Mary of Bethany’s recognition of ‘the dignity and greatness of Jesus and, [how] in an exemplary action, [she shows] the others who they have in their midst’ (Schnackenburg 1980:370).¹²²

6.4 Standing near the cross

The following text to be considered is sandwiched between the scene of soldiers dealing out and throwing dice for Jesus’ clothing, and the final scene of the crucifixion when Jesus breathes his last (19:23-24; 28-30).

John 19:25-27

25 Near the cross of Jesus there stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 Seeing his mother there with the disciple whom he loved, Jesus said to his mother, ‘Woman, there is your son.’ 27 In turn he said to the disciple, ‘There is your mother.’ From that hour onward, the disciple took her into his care.

25 Near the cross ... and Mary Magdalene

John chooses to reveal the presence of women at this stage in order ‘to introduce the ... scene’ of the next two verses (Beasley-Murray 1987:348). His readers immediately note

¹²² Schnackenburg is of the opinion that the ‘last remark ... is almost certainly taken from the source’ (1980:370).

John's contrast between the callous, scrounging actions of the soldiers in the preceding two verses and the gently quiet and compassionate presence of the women in the same setting (:348).

The only readers who may notice that these women are placed in close proximity to the dying Jesus, in contrast to standing some distance from him, are those who have read the works of the earlier evangelists. According to Schnackenburg, John's positioning of the women beneath the cross is the result of a deliberate reshuffling of the players in order to set 'this group of persons ... over against the soldiers' and, thereby, giving him the opportunity 'to say theologically through Jesus' words to his mother and to the disciple, his "testament" from the cross' (1982:275-276).¹²³

The mother of Jesus appears at the cross only in this gospel and neither her sister nor Mary of Clopas are placed there, or anywhere else, in the synoptics. Mention of Mary Magdalene's presence at the cross remains constant in all the traditions used by the writers of the canonical gospels. As is the case with Mark, the crucifixion is John's first scene which includes the Magdalen but, unlike in the synoptic gospels, she 'appears without introduction' to the part she played in Jesus' life in Galilee (Beavis 2012:284). Also, John's list is the only one where Mary Magdalene's name is present but has no special function in this little narrative.

John names neither Jesus' mother nor her sister. Indeed, nowhere in his gospel is Jesus' mother given a name. Mark names her at 6:3¹²⁴ and, in Luke's infancy narrative, the mother of Jesus is identified as 'Mary' eleven times (1:1-2:52). The remaining women on the list are both called Mary. This does not surprise the readers since Mariam (Greek) and Miriam (Hebrew) were popular names given to female children at the time (McKenzie 1965:551). It must be added that the arrangement of verse 25 in this translation is speculative. Without the punctuation marks 'John's list may be understood as denoting' the presence of three women, not four, and they would be 'Jesus' mother, her sister Mary of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene' (Beasley-Murray 1987:348). Although the word 'sister' may designate an aunt, cousin or niece in the culture of the time, it is less complicated to read four women (:348), especially since there is an 'almost total lack

¹²³ With regard to the list of women at the cross, particularly Jesus' mother, John is clearly using a different tradition from that to which Mark and Luke had access (Schnackenburg 1982:277).

¹²⁴ An amazed audience asked one another: 'Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary ...?'

of genuine information concerning the ... person [and family] of Mary' (McKenzie 1965:552).

26 Seeing his mother ... there is your son

John seems to expect his readers to know of this disciple's presence close to the cross – the evangelist has not mentioned him since the latter brought Simon Peter through the high priest's courtyard gate (18:15-16) – because he has him materialize out of nowhere and with no explanation.

When Jesus speaks he becomes part of the contrast which the readers noticed at verse 25 (Beasley-Murray 1987:348). In their mind's eye they see the soldiers distributing Jesus' garments amongst each other on the one hand and Jesus directing 'the relations of those he loves' on the other hand (:348).

John delivers Jesus' address to his mother and the disciple in 'formula-like language' which indicates the declaration of a last will and testament (Beasley-Murray 1987:349). Living in an era and culture where a widow without a son to take care of her is doomed to loneliness and poverty, the reader may understand that the disciple is to provide for Jesus' mother after his death. On the other hand, the reader living in the same era and culture, and having a similar understanding of symbolism as the evangelist, may interpret Jesus' instructions from the cross as pointing towards a deeper meaning. Bultmann, for example, sees Jesus' mother as she 'tarries by the cross', as the representative of 'Jewish Christianity' which 'overcomes the offence of the cross' (1971:673). The beloved disciple he sees as the representative of 'Gentile Christianity' now being instructed 'to honour the former as its mother from whom it has come (:673). Bultmann further believes that, from the cross, Jesus commands 'Jewish Christianity ... to recognise itself as "at home" within Gentile Christianity' just as, in his prayer beginning at 17:20, he prayed that 'all may be one' (:673).

27 In turn he said ... her into his care

This understanding (that the disciple is to provide for Jesus' mother after his death) seems to be confirmed when John remarks that the disciple thereupon accepted responsibility for the wellbeing of Jesus' mother. However, Schnackenburg finds a meaning which goes

beyond the natural lives of mother and surrogate son and which is hinted at by a number of details within the gospel (Schnackenburg 1982:277-279). These are as follows:

- 1 John's statement which reads: 'From that hour onward';
- 2 John's statement in the upcoming verse which reads: 'Jesus realizing that everything was now finished';
- 3 John's deliberate reference to the wedding feast in Cana (2:1-11), the only 'time up till now' that Jesus' mother appears in his gospel, where Jesus addresses her as 'Woman'; and,
- 4 John's portrayal of the relationship between Jesus and 'the disciple whom [he] loved' at 13:23-26 (:277-279).

Schnackenburg points out that numbers 3 and 4 have 'to be kept in mind for the purposes of interpretation' (:277-278). Jesus' mother, confident at Cana, speaks on behalf of host, guests and servants when she approaches her son at 2:3 with the statement: 'They have no more wine' (:278). The disciple, 'Jesus' confidant' at the group's final meal together, listens to what Jesus has to say about the identity of his betrayer at 13:26: 'The one to whom I give the bit of food I dip in the dish' (:278). Simon Peter's signalling to the disciple to ask a question on behalf of the group, the softly spoken dialogue which ensues between the disciple and Jesus, and Jesus' easy reply to him, indicate that a close sharing of 'inner thoughts' between Jesus and the disciple whom he loved was customary (:278). The disciple will also be the 'one who believes' at 20:8 and, at 21:7, will, 'in his belief', come to a certain kind of understanding not made explicit by the writer (:279).

Although his hour had not yet come when in Cana Jesus, through his mother's veiled request, enabled a dying celebration to come to life as bridegroom and guests savoured a wine which surpassed the host's entire stock in excellence. Jesus, now that his hour has come, bequeaths to her all 'those who expect salvation' from him, to speak for them when they ask for his gift of new life, just as she had spoken for those who needed his intervention back at the wedding feast (Schnackenburg 1982:278).

In the second part of his deposition Jesus' bestows upon his close confidant 'responsibility for [his] mother' (Schnackenburg 1982:279). Therefore the disciple who

Jesus loved, as ‘interpreter of Jesus’ message ... is to take care of and adopt into his circle the one seeking salvation’ (:279).

It is clear, then, that with his final deposition, Jesus ‘completes his work on earth’ and ‘ensures that his revelation is passed on and made to bear fruit’ (Schnackenburg 1982:279).

The witnesses to Jesus’ final bequest are three women: ‘his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene’ (19:25).

6.5 Mary Magdalene gives witness

John 20:1-18

1 Early in the morning on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb. She saw that the stone had been moved away, 2 so she ran off to Simon Peter and the other disciple (the one Jesus loved) and told them, “The Lord has been taken from the tomb! We don’t know where they have put him!” 3 At that, Peter and the other disciple started out on their way toward the tomb. 4 They were running side by side, but then the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He did not enter but bent down to peer in, and saw the wrappings lying on the ground. 6 Presently, Simon Peter came along behind him and entered the tomb. He observed the wrappings on the ground 7 and saw the piece of cloth which had covered the head not lying with the wrappings, but rolled up in a place by itself. 8 Then the disciple who had arrived first at the tomb went in. He saw and believed. 9 (Remember, as yet they did not understand the Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) 10 With this, the disciples went back home.

11 Meanwhile, Mary stood weeping beside the tomb. Even as she wept, she stooped to peer inside, 12 and there she saw two angels in dazzling robes. One was seated at the head and the other at the foot of the place where Jesus’ body had lain. 13 “Woman,” they asked her, “why are you weeping?” She answered them, “Because the Lord has been taken away, and I do not know where they have put him.” 14 She had no sooner said this than she turned around and caught sight of Jesus standing there. But she did not know him. 15 “Woman,” he asked her, “why are you weeping? Who is it you are looking for?” She supposed he was the gardener, so she said, “Sir, if you are the one who carried him off, tell me

where you have laid him and I will take him away.” 16 Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned to him and said [in Hebrew], “*Rabbouni!*” (meaning ‘Teacher’). 17 Jesus then said: “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Rather, go to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God!’” 18 Mary Magdalene went to the disciples. “I have seen the Lord!” she announced. Then she reported what he had said to her.

1a Early in the morning ... still dark

Even though ‘the third-day symbolism’ would have emerged early within the various Christian traditions John, like Mark and Luke before him, chooses to give the date as the ‘first day’ rather than ‘on the third day’ (Beasley-Murray 1987:370-371). The reason for this may be that ‘the time of finding the tomb empty was fixed in Christian memory’ (:370).

Consistent with the tradition which ‘knew only of a very early hour’ and nothing more precise, John chooses the dark hours for the tomb visit to symbolize those ‘in whom faith in [Jesus’] resurrection is not yet awakened’ (Schnackenburg 1982:308).

1b Mary Magdalene ... tomb

Although Schnackenburg finds ‘a visit to the tomb when it really was dark [to be] improbable’ (:308), John’s readers experience a fleeting vision of Mary rising from her bed in the black of the night and moving quietly and carefully so as not to awaken the household where she is overnighing during the Passover festivities. In their minds’ eye they see her picking her way in the darkness, navigating stones, brush and the debris of the day previous to the Sabbath, before reaching the tomb. She is a lone woman with a mission - one that cannot even wait for daybreak.

Unlike Mark and Luke, John mentions no other women accompanying Mary Magdalene. He also gives no reason for Mary’s visit to the tomb.

1c She saw ... moved away

Given that all burials involve the cordoning off or covering up of a corpse, the readers will most likely not notice that this is the first time that John mentions that a stone had

sealed the entrance of Jesus' tomb (Brown 1986:982). Mary's shocking discovery has them wondering whether the body had been tampered with.

2a so she ran ... the other disciple,

Without looking into the tomb, Mary Magdalene departs the scene in haste. Her objective is to tell, not just anyone but two specific people, what she has seen. John's Jesus had asked his arresters to 'let [his] men go' at 18:8 and, although they do not flee as in Mark and Luke, it is presumed that the disciples had been granted permission to leave. That the majority of them did leave the scene is understood because John thereafter mentions only 'Simon Peter [and] another disciple ... following Jesus closely' (18:15) at the time when Jesus was being interrogated 'by the Jewish authorities' (Brown 1986:983). The reader senses that, of the followers of Jesus, the whereabouts of only Simon Peter and the unnamed disciple are known to the Magdalen.

2b (the one Jesus loved)

In case the reader has failed to make the connection between 'another disciple' following Jesus along with Simon Peter at 18:15 and 'the disciple whom [Jesus/he] loved' at 13:23 and 19:26, John now confirms them to be the same person (Moloney 1998:521).

2c and told them ... have put him!

Mary appears to find the two men at the same location. The early readers who have read the other three canonical gospels notice that John does what no other evangelist does – he gives Mary Magdalene a voice! Her impulsive conclusion that the open tomb indicates the removal of the body to another place implies that John is aware 'of the legend about the theft of the body which ... was current among Jews at that time (AD 80-90)' (Schnackenburg 1982:308-309).

Readers from the Johannine community do not find it extraordinary when Mary names Jesus τὸν κύριον since 'the use of "the Lord" [here] is a sign that this verse came down to the evangelist from tradition' (Brown 1986:984).¹²⁵ Since Mary has not yet seen the light, her description 'of Jesus ... is to be read as a respectful title, not a high

¹²⁵ See '(also vss. 18, 20, and 25)' (Brown 1986:984).

Christological confession' (Moloney 1998:521). John's use of οἶδμεν (we know) is also worth consideration. To place the plural on the lips of a woman on her own may suggest that she is not alone or, as Moloney thinks, it may be 'a Semitic turn of phrase' (:522).¹²⁶

3 At that, Peter ... toward the tomb

John's readers sense that Peter is 'understood as an authority and a spokesperson' by the other members of the Jesus group (Moloney 1998:522), especially now that their leader has died. They remember that when Andrew had brought him to meet Jesus, Jesus had directly changed his name from Σίμων to Κηφᾶς, ὃ ἐρμηνεύεται Πέτρος (1:42).¹²⁷

In keeping with his recognized authority Peter, mentioned first, seems to initiate the hasty departure from their lodgings (Morris 1995:734). At the same time, though, John also intimates that Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved set out in unison. There may be, in this statement, the beginning of an inkling of competitiveness between the two disciples.

4a They were ... side

There is a sense of urgency here, set off by the word ἔτρεχον (running). John, in spite of hinting at a measure of rivalry, has Peter and the other disciple single-mindedly, and in tandem, rushing towards the scene of the Magdalene's disturbing message.

4b but then ... tomb first.

The evangelist seems to suggest that the other disciple is more eager than Peter to get to the tomb. The disciple could, however, have reached their destination sooner because he was the younger and fitter of the two. Since the evangelist gives no one's age, this would be pure conjecture on the part of the readers unless the other disciple's comparative youth came from the tradition and they, in turn, were as familiar with its stories as was John.

¹²⁶ Mary's 'we' may be indicative 'of an earlier tradition associating other women with the discovery of the empty tomb' (Moloney 1998:522).

¹²⁷ 'The original name was the Aramaic *kēpā*', "rock"; this is used in the Grecized form of *kēphas* in Jn 1:42'. *Petros* is a 'masculine name formed from the feminine noun *petra* (meaning) "rock"' (McKenzie 1965:663).

5 He did not enter ... the ground.

The speaker for the Johannine community, though proud of the beloved disciple's closeness to Jesus, shows respect for Peter's authority when he gets the disciple to wait for Peter to reach the tomb. However, Schnackenburg wonders if 'this conclusion goes too far' (1982:308-310). Rather, it would appear that John orchestrates the scene in this way so that it is Peter who ultimately views the site and its important evidence. In point of fact, 'that the narrative is so concerned about this careful inspection of the tomb by Peter, confirms its apologetic intention' (:312).

While waiting, the beloved disciple ventures a glance through the opening and notices that the cloths that had covered the corpse are lying on the floor of the tomb. It appears that Jesus' place of rest was a single cavity with no inner burial chamber cut further into the rock. Furthermore, there is no mention of a stone slab on which the corpse could have been placed but Brown pictures 'a shelf' or shallow groove dug out of a recess inside the burial chamber (1986:985).

The other disciple makes no remark about what he sees. This, perhaps, indicates that Peter is still some distance behind him.

6-7 Presently, Simon Peter came ... He observed ... in a place by itself

Peter wastes no time entering the tomb (Morris 1995:735). He sees not only the body cloths on the ground but, also, the 'headcloth (which is), presumably, not visible from where' the other disciple is standing (:735). John is describing an alert Simon Peter who surveys the scene with a caution that suggests passionate interest, recognition of the severity of the matter and, perhaps, the dawning of a new understanding of Jesus. Peter detects that 'the headcloth (is neatly) folded up' and positioned apart from the rest of the burial garments (:735). This clue appeases Peter's fear that 'grave robbers' might have taken the body because, had that been the case, the tomb would not be 'an orderly scene (but) one of wild confusion' (:735).

This determining of the 'situation in the tomb ... is extremely important (Schnackenburg 1982:310). That which is verified by Peter, sanctions 'the conclusion that Jesus is risen' (:310).

8 Then the disciple ... saw and believed.

While some scholars maintain the latter sentence to mean that the disciple now believes Mary to have spoken ‘the truth when she said that the body was no longer there’, Brown argues that ‘the evangelist certainly did not introduce the Beloved Disciple into the scene only to have him reach such a trite conclusion’ (1986:987). John means, states Brown, that the disciple ‘is [indeed] the first to believe in the risen Jesus’ (:987).

Schnackenburg is of the same mind. For him ‘the point of the story lies in the clear and strong faith of the beloved disciple’ (1982:312). This is proved when the beloved disciple, ‘because of the plentiful catch of fish, says to Peter: “It is the Lord”.¹²⁸ He can ... read the tracks and signs of his Lord ... he is the ideal disciple with an exemplary faith’ (:312).

It is interesting that the beloved disciple does not share ‘this faith with Magdalene or the other disciples’ (Brown 1986:987). However, it is even more interesting that the outcome of Jesus’ sign at the wedding feast at Cana had also brought faith: ‘Thus did he reveal his glory, and his disciples believed in him’ (3:11).

9 (Remember ... rise from the dead)

It is further interesting to note that the plural subject ‘they’ does not correspond with the singular subject ‘he’ in the previous sentence (Brown 1986:987). It is clear that, by using the plural ‘they’, the evangelist wishes to turn the attention of the readers away from the other disciple so as not to include him in the negative mind-set of the disciple group as a whole.

10 With this ... back home

Continuing with his version of the narrative, the evangelist has Simon Peter and the other disciple leaving the graveyard at this point because he needs to clear ‘the scene and give the stage to [Mary] Magdalene’ (Brown 1986:988). He thus announces the disciples’ departure to their lodgings in Jerusalem and brings to an end the first section of the narrative.

¹²⁸ Jn 21:1-7.

*11 Meanwhile, Mary ... to peer inside,*¹²⁹

The evangelist has detailed the two men's journey to the tomb but gives no explanation whatsoever of Mary's return. She simply reappears. It is strange that neither male disciple has acknowledged her presence, especially since she had dutifully reported the empty tomb to them. The early reader would expect that the other disciple, at least, would share with her his new 'insight and faith' (Brown 1986:988) but, as Schnackenburg and Brown have pointed out above, 'the disciple who comes to believe on account of the tomb, is foreign to the original story' (Schnackenburg 1982:313).

John's Mary Magdalene is not, at this stage, weeping on account of Jesus' death but 'because she [thinks] that Jesus' body [has been] stolen' (Brown 1986:988).

12a and there ... dazzling robes

Further to her presence not being acknowledged, it is puzzling that, 'when [Mary] looks into the tomb, she sees angels and not the burial clothes' (Brown 1986:988). The early readers, however, surmise that her encounter with the blazing presence of the two spiritual beings renders anything else in the tomb quite obscure, if not negligible.¹³⁰

Unlike in Mark and Luke, the vision of angelic beings fails to arouse any 'fear, amazement [or] prostration' in John's Mary Magdalene (Brown 1986:988).

12b One was seated ... body had lain

John's angels serve the purpose of indicating 'the precise place where Jesus' body had lain: head and feet' (Schnackenburg 1982:315). The sentence structure resembles John's composition of 6b-7 above and invites Mary to come to the same conclusion that Peter could have come to – 'that Jesus is risen' (:315).

¹²⁹ The section from the time that 'Mary stood weeping beside the tomb' until the penultimate verse of this pericope is seen by scholars to have undergone a considerable measure of editing. According to Schnackenburg, the original Johannine tradition spoke only of Mary's direct encounter with Jesus and none with angels (1982:316). Her encounter with angelic beings, obtained from the synoptic source, was later added by an editor (:316). Because the evangelist's original story has Jesus making his risen-self known to Mary, the angels cannot perform the function given them in the synoptic tradition which was, essentially, to proclaim the resurrection to the women (:316).

¹³⁰ Although this assumption is understandable, it is more feasible that 'an editorial joining of once independent episodes' has taken place here (Brown 1986:988).

For the readers ‘of that period, angelic appearances were [as] real’ as solid evidence would be in a modern court of law (Schnackenburg 1982:315). This offers the assumption of a ‘high degree of reflection (from an apologetic viewpoint)’ on the part of the writer (:315).

13 ‘Woman,’ ... have put him

The readers note that, in reply to the angels’ question, Mary repeats what she said at 2c above.¹³¹ In this position ‘Mary’s statement reproduces that of vs. 2, with “my Lord” instead of “the Lord”, and “I” instead of “we”’ (Brown 1986:989). The personal pronoun is not in evidence here since this translation, the New American Bible, incorrectly renders ‘the Lord’ from τὸν κύριόν μου (my Lord).

14 She had no sooner ... not know him

Mary’s conversation with the angels is interrupted and not taken up again.¹³² The audience’s attention is automatically drawn to the zenith of the narrative: the corpse has not been taken away because it is no longer a dead body but the living Jesus in the upright position of standing. The evangelist has successfully led his audience to recognise the risen Jesus and get them to wait, with bated breath, for Mary to do the same.

At 21:4 the reader’s audience will hear that the disciples did not know it was Jesus ‘standing on the shore’. Similarly, at Luke 24:16, two disciples ‘were restrained from recognizing him’. There is no doubt that, ‘widely current in the primitive Church’, there existed a recognition genre ‘of story-telling ... for the appearances of the risen one’ (Schnackenburg 1982:316). In these ‘recognition scenes ... failure to recognize the risen Jesus ... [emphasizes a] transformation’ from the ‘physical’ to the ‘spiritual’ (Brown 1986:989; 1009).

¹³¹ The repetition points to the work of an editor.

¹³² Schnackenburg finds this to be noticeable proof of clumsy editing of the original narrative (1982:316). Since the editor had Mary stooping ‘to peer inside’ at 11 above, he now has to change her position in order for her to connect with Jesus and fit into the original scene (:316).

15 *'Woman,' he asked her ... will take him away.'*

The audience hears Jesus repeat the angels' question. That he addresses Mary Magdalene as 'Woman' suggests nothing of significance since Jesus is using the normal form of address made to an adult female in the Palestine of the day. However, since Jesus had addressed his mother likewise at Cana and beneath the cross (2:4, 19:26), Getty-Sullivan considers that 'this address', also used by the angels two verses back, as well as 'Mary Magdalene's own presence at the cross ... link her to his mother' suggesting them 'both ... to be exemplary disciples' (2001:188).

The added question tells them that he knows exactly why she is so tearful. If Jesus did not know, or if he were a stranger, the question might have been, 'What has happened to make you cry so?' According to Schnackenburg, it is a question which has a specific 'function in ... a recognition scene,' the function being to concentrate the conversation 'on the person of the one who then makes himself known' (1982:316-317). When Mary, surprisingly, does not give the same reply as in 2 and 13 above, the evangelist 'increases the tension' (:317), and the audience waits with bated breath for the penny to drop.

At 19:41 information not found in the synoptic gospels had been presented: the tomb in which Jesus was buried 'was close at hand, situated in a garden' (Schnackenburg 1982:298). This material clearly comes from the Johannine source which, in turn, would be the initiator of the notion of the presence of a gardener on the burial site (:298; 317).

With this entire verse the evangelist produces the realization that Mary is fervently seeking 'her Lord' and that her emotional state and failure to find him has blinded her to such an extent that she cannot see 'the one who stands before her' (Schnackenburg 1982:317). Furthermore, John makes it clear that, when Mary left her lodgings earlier this morning, she did not anticipate an encounter with the risen Jesus.¹³³

16 *Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' ... 'Rabbouni!' (meaning 'Teacher').*

Mary turns a second time. Speaking to whom she believes to be the gardener, should she not already be facing Jesus? It is possible that her head is turned *away* in sorrow, not an

¹³³ Witherington III, 2012. *Mary, Mary Extraordinary*. Beliefnet. 3. [Webpage].

abnormal posture for a woman speaking while in distress. She then turns *toward* him in recognition of his voice and manner of address (Schnackenburg 1982:317).

Although *rabbouni* has ‘been described as ... a form of endearment’, equating to ‘my dear rabbi’, the evangelist himself translates the meaning for the reader as ‘teacher’ (Brown 1986:991-992). *Rabbouni* is, rather, a way of saying *rabbi*, meaning ‘my master’, with strong emphasis (McKenzie 1965:718).¹³⁴

17 Jesus then said ... to my God and your God

In this translation of *μή μου ἄπτον* ‘John stresses that [Mary can] no longer cling to the old Jesus’ – life as it had been cannot be resumed.¹³⁵ John’s readers understand that Jesus is now transformed and that holding ‘on to the Jesus of the past’ would be futile.¹³⁶ A fruitful exercise, on the other hand, would be ‘to go forward [and proclaim] Jesus as risen’.¹³⁷ The harshness of Jesus’ words, however, is strongly reminiscent of his words to his mother at Cana when he at first refused to perform her unspoken request ‘to perform a miracle’ (Bultmann 1971:116): ‘Woman, how does this concern of yours involve me? My hour has not yet come’ (John 2:4). Just as Jesus’ address to his mother ‘sets a peculiar distance between [them]’ (:116), so does his rejection of Mary Magdalene’s touch. His statement to her, in fact, indicates that ‘human ties and obligations in no way influence Jesus’ action; [he] is bound to his own law and [listens] to another voice’ (:117).

Jesus’ message to his brothers, with its deliberate focus on and repetition of the words ‘my’ and ‘your’, will tell his ‘disciples [that they] are now part of the family of God’ (Getty-Sullivan 2001:189).

18 Mary Magdalene ... had said to her.

The ‘change from direct speech ... to indirect speech [is John’s way] of highlighting the significant words and putting emphasis on Mary’s experience’ (Morris 1995:744), although Moloney feels that it may be ‘an attempt to avoid the need to repeat Jesus’ words’ from the previous verse (1998:529). It is also possible that ‘Mary’s haste’ to

¹³⁴ ‘(Aramaic *rab*, “master” + first person pronominal suffix, “my master”), Aramaic *Rabboni* (*rabban*) is an emphatic form of *rabbi*’ (McKenzie 1965:718).

¹³⁵ Witherington III, 2012. *Mary, Mary Extraordinary*. Beliefnet. 3. [Webpage].

¹³⁶ *ibid.*, 3.

¹³⁷ *ibid.*, 3.

deliver the joyful message may have carried ‘over into the writer’s style’ (Brown 1986:994).

6.6 Summary

The first text which mentions the anointing of Jesus serves to introduce the Johannine story of the raising of Lazarus from the dead. With Lazarus being described as Mary’s ‘brother’ and Martha as ‘her sister’, John seems to portray Mary as the main character in this story (Kitzberger 1995:578). Before the evangelist begins the anointing story he will shift ‘the focus from one sister to the other, making one the main character ... and then the other’, thereby influencing his readers ‘to evaluate them equally’ (:578).

The anointing scene in this gospel invokes an ambience entirely different from those of Mark and Luke. John first of all calls the reader’s attention to the time of the episode, which was ‘six days before Passover’ (Hearon 2005:193). He then stages no mediocre meal, but a banquet arranged especially for Jesus. Jesus is more than a guest; he is the guest of honour. The venue is in Bethany, as in Mark, but the hosts are Lazarus and his sisters, Martha and Mary. Lazarus, alive after Jesus’ intervention, is being treated more as a guest than as a host, simply ‘one of those at table with’ Jesus (12:2). John strengthens the readers’ impression of both sisters being equal by having both organize the banquet and both ‘serve Jesus as their guest’; Martha by serving him food and drinks and Mary by anointing his feet (Kitzberger 1995:579).

The complainant is Judas, whose past criminal actions and future betrayal is brought to the reader’s attention by means of two explanatory interjections. As in Mark, the protest concerns the price of the perfume, and as in Luke, Jesus is anointed upon the feet.

Mary has no tears falling over Jesus’ feet, as does the female anointer in Luke, because John wishes to emphasize aspects of the Jesus’ story not told by the other evangelist. Therefore, when she wipes the expensive perfume off with her hair, the action seems illogical. However when the reader, as it were, senses the fragrance as it permeates the atmosphere within the house and pauses to ponder the solemnity and significance of the anointing occurrence, all thoughts of wasted perfume evaporate.

The ambience created by the evangelist and recognised by the reader as an amalgam of gratitude, reverence and tenderness is effectively broken by Judas' remonstrance and the writer's asides concerning the betrayer. As a result concern for Jesus' life, which John had effectively planted in the reader's mind at 2:19-22, begins to escalate when Jesus speaks of his burial in the penultimate sentence of this pericope.

The details which John weaves into the framework of the anointing story impresses upon the reader more than one concept of the Jesus story. Passover is the time when Jesus sacrifices his life 'which, like the Passover lamb, marks those who shall receive life' (Hearon 2005:194). Bethany is home to Lazarus and his sisters, the family whom Jesus loves (:194). Bethany 'is also the place where [Jesus was identified] as the resurrection and the life' in John's dramatic narration of the raising of Lazarus whose presence, it has been noted in the analysis, speaks of life as well as actions performed only by the living (:194). John's detailing of the anointing story, according to Hearon, invites his readers to recognise Jesus as 'the beloved in whom we experience love and life' (Hearon 2005:195).

Having successfully drawn his readers to remember Jesus being identified as the resurrection and the life, the more alert reader would recall an incident which occurred a little while after the wedding at Cana episode. Jesus had gone to the Passover festival at Jerusalem where, asked for a sign 'authorizing' his angry actions towards the 'money-changers' at the temple, he had declared that should the Judaeans destroy the temple he would 'raise it up ... in three days' (2:13-22). The alert reader would also remember that the disciples came to understand that Jesus 'was talking about the temple of his body' only after he 'had been raised from the dead' (2:21-22).

Beneath the cross the evangelist paints a portrait of the players which is not, in any way, like that presented by Mark or Luke. In their mind's eye the readers see the family intimacy of Jesus' mother and her sister standing close to him as he hangs on the cross, dying; they see the older women's friend, Mary of Clopas, supporting them in their sorrow; and, looking at the recently introduced Mary Magdalene standing close by, they conclude that she and the other Mary both fall into the category, as it were, of 'family and close friends'. Their visualization of the beloved disciple in the same category fits in with everything John has told them about Jesus' love for him.

John's atmosphere at the cross also differs from that of Mark and Luke. Mark depicts a scene of aggression when he has Mary Magdalene and two other women observe Jesus amidst the jeers of passers-by, chief priests, scribes and the two criminals beside him (Mark 15:29-32). Luke's picture has forgiveness, assurance and sorrow mingling with mockery, goading and blasphemy (Luke 23:32-49). The evangelist of the fourth gospel, however, has the quiet, compassionate presence of women and beloved disciple contrasting to the cruel and scavenging actions of the nearby soldiers (19:23-24). With this bold juxtaposition John leads the reader to choose the shelter of the cross along with the family of Jesus.

Although she does not seem to have any special function in this short narrative other than being a witness to Jesus' final bequest, the reader senses John's intimation that Mary Magdalene, as well as the beloved, are disciples who are special to Jesus.

Unlike Mark and Luke, John has no one accompanying Mary Magdalene to the tomb. In this way he forces his readers to focus on the woman so recently introduced as being close to and supportive of Jesus, his mother and her sister. Once he has highlighted her importance in this scene, he brings in two more players who are equally as important: Simon Peter, known by the Johannine community as the disciple mandated to tend and feed Jesus' sheep (21:15-17), and 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' (21:20). He brings the two male disciples onto the stage with a sense of urgency that has Mary running one way and the men, with no hesitation, sprinting in the opposite direction towards the tomb. The pace slows down when the other disciple reaches the tomb and stands there, waiting for Simon Peter's arrival. By the sequence of the story from the third to the end of the eighth verse John compels his readers to recognize that the beloved disciple, the Johannine community's 'father in faith' so to speak, enjoys a true, vibrant and resilient faith.

Once he has manoeuvred the two male disciples off the stage, the evangelist compels the reader to focus wholly on the first player and the momentous event about to be proclaimed. He paints a picture of Magdalene standing beside the tomb and weeping. He has her move to the entrance to peer inside, still weeping. When the angels and Mary see one another, the heavenly beings remark about nothing else but her weeping. It is only when she gives her explanation, which voices her concern for the missing body and does not incorporate the anointing of the corpse, or any other planned action, that the

readers understand her early visit to the tomb to be in order to weep. Thereby John leads them to remember Mary of Bethany, Lazarus' sister, whom he had represented as a loving, passionate and sensitive person likely to spend time, weeping, at her brother's grave (Kitzberger 1995:576). With this parallelism it is clear that the evangelist's portrayal of the main player in the second half of this narrative is that of a woman who has great love for Jesus.

John introduces dramatic irony into the scene when Jesus appears and Mary mistakes him for the gardener (Kitzberger 1995:582). With the gardener (in Mary's perception) also wanting to know why she is weeping, the evangelist once again points to Mary's great love. At the beginning of the second half of the narrative John's two angels asked why Mary is weeping while Mark and Luke's spoke of searching. Only after showing concern for her emotional state does Jesus (still seen by Mary as the gardener) ask her whom she is seeking. Mary's response suggesting that Jesus had carried the body off, should tell her where he has laid him, and her intention to retrieve same, intensifies both the 'ironical dimension' of the story and the suspense of the reader (:582-583).

Having reached the climax of his good announcement that Jesus is risen in the first half of the narrative, John guides the reader to an understanding of a further dimension of the resurrection, that of recognition. At 10:3 Jesus tells Jewish authorities and others that 'he calls his own by name'. In this narrative the risen Jesus calls Mary by name. At 10:4 Jesus informs his listeners that his own 'follow him because they recognize his voice'. In this narrative Mary recognizes Jesus' voice. While some readers pause to ruminate on how, when and where they themselves can recognize Jesus, others pause to acknowledge the fact that Mary is indeed one of Jesus' own, a disciple who recognizes her teacher (Kitzberger 1995:582-583).

Jesus' instruction that she take his message to his brothers is further food for thought: the readers can, in a manner of speaking, clearly hear John saying that Mary Magdalene is the first missionary of the resurrection of 'the Lord'.

John's picture of Mary Magdalene differs considerably from those of Mark and Luke. He sees her, firstly, as a woman who is quiet, compassionate and supportive of Jesus' relatives; secondly, as a disciple who is passionate, sensitive and fervently devoted to her teacher; finally, he calls attention to the fact that, indeed, Mary Magdalene belongs

to Jesus. His Magdalene is on a par with the beloved disciple, therefore a follower of Jesus not to be faulted and he shows this by grouping her with the closest member of Jesus' family, his mother, as well as with the one called the beloved.

The evangelist's 'distinction between' Mary Magdalene and Martha's sister, however, 'is not clearly drawn' (Beavis 2012:284).¹³⁸ Beavis observes that Μαγδαληνή could be a cognomen 'from the Aramaic *magdala*' and that Mary was called "Mary the Tower" or "Mary the Great" (:287). If John's audience understood Μαγδαληνή as a nickname and not a 'gentilic differentiating her from' Martha and Lazarus' sister, 'it is conceivable that, irrespective of authorial intent ... they would have associated the Mary at the cross with the Mary' of whom Jesus had said: 'Let her keep [the perfume] against the day they prepare me for burial' (:287).¹³⁹ However, the evangelist's objective is not to suggest that the Mary who anointed Jesus in 12:1-8 was known by a cognomen, either gentilic or characteristic. Had this been the case, he would have mentioned it somewhere during his eleventh chapter and 12:1-8 where the Bethanian Mary had played such prominent roles.

The literary analyses of John's texts regarding Mary Magdalene and Mary of Bethany's anointing of Jesus having been completed I shall, in the seventh chapter, the only chapter in Part III which precedes the conclusion of this dissertation, view the Western Church's liturgies which honoured Mary Magdalene's sanctity in the Tridentine Mass and during the Vatican II era.

¹³⁸ A later article by Beavis again refers to a 'blurring of the two figures' (2013:745).

¹³⁹ John 12:7.

PART III

CHAPTER 7

The Western Catholic Church gives honour to Mary Magdalene

After a brief overview of the evangelists' presentations of Mary Magdalene this chapter has two main themes. First of all, the pre-Vatican II liturgy with its scripture texts and prayers is examined; this is followed by an examination of the post-Vatican II liturgy which is experienced today. The second theme involves assessing and comparing the value of the old liturgy with the new.

7.1 Introduction

In this, the final chapter of this dissertation, an overview of Mark, Luke and John's presentation of Mary Magdalene in their gospels will confirm that she is not the woman of multiple characters previously honoured by the Western Church. However, it is equally clear that the images presented by the conflated figure, in particular the one of penitent, were beneficial in giving hope to the souls of sinners throughout the mediaeval age which began with Gregory the Great's pontificate.

An examination of the Western liturgical celebration of her sainthood, which came into being during the seventh century (Henderson 2006:1), would give an idea of the Church's 'official' standpoint on the nature and qualities of Mary Magdalene. Furthermore, it will be useful to examine the Western Church's present liturgical celebration of her sainthood in a world which relates more easily to pictures formed by gospel narratives of the historical Magdalene than to the images and their symbols which were prevalent in the mind-set of mediaeval society. Any values and drawbacks of the two liturgies should emerge from such exploration.

7.2 Mark, Luke and John's Mary Magdalene

In the telling of their good announcements of the Lord Jesus Christ the evangelists portray Mary Magdalene as a woman unlike the eternally penitent prostitute but,

nevertheless, closely resembling the changed woman of the legend who loved Jesus passionately.

Mark, ardently desiring his audience and readers to believe that Jesus was the Son of God, conveys to them the fact that Mary Magdalene had been a devoted and steadfast disciple and, therefore, her credibility as a witness to the resurrection was absolute. Luke, the conscientious and skilled orator, invites all of humanity to receive his gospel into their lives as the spoken word of God and, together with Mark, he wishes them to know that the testimony of Mary Magdalene is indisputably accurate and acceptable and that, therefore, her character is a perfect model of discipleship. The aim of John's gospel is to reach readers outside the Johannine community so that they may have life through faith in Jesus, 'Messiah' and 'Son of God' (20:31). He portrays Mary Magdalene beneath the cross as a close friend of Jesus and equal to the beloved disciple. By revealing her actions at the empty tomb the evangelist of the fourth gospel makes it clear that Mary is a disciple, the disciple who recognizes the voice of her teacher. Mary Magdalene is without doubt the first missionary of the resurrection, the pinnacle of his good news.

Nowhere do the evangelists studied in this dissertation physically link the three women as one composite character: Mark in no way indicates that the unnamed woman in his anointing story, with its messianic undertones, is Mary Magdalene; Luke does not identify Mary Magdalene as the public sinner who wept upon, dried and anointed Jesus feet; and John, in spite of the blurring of the two Marys as pointed out by Beavis (2012:282-288), makes no suggestion that they are, in the flesh, the same person.

What each evangelist in his own literary style effectively accomplishes is to portray Mary Magdalene as a Very Important Person. She not only has 'firsthand knowledge' of 'God's transformation of Jesus after his death to a new and glorified state' but her testimony, in comparison to witnesses of other gospel post-resurrection appearances, is of paramount importance (O'Collins and Kendall 1987:644). Indeed, the evangelists understood that Jesus' post-resurrection appearance to Mary Magdalene outside the empty tomb was, and would be to their readers, 'the primary historical *catalyst*' of the 'Easter faith' (:645).

7.3 The Western Church's Mary Magdalene until Vatican II

The mediaeval church found her no less important in the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, even though her character had undergone radical changes once Pope Gregory the Great had presented her as the composite figure made up of Luke's unnamed female anointer, Martha's sister, Mary, and Mary the Magdalene from whom seven demons had been exorcised. This amalgam of characters which became accepted by the Western Church continued until the liturgical calendar was reformed in 1969 (Cunningham 2001:33-34).

Besides being Apostle to the Apostles, a title she inherited through the early church's reception of the resurrection narratives, she was also 'a symbol of ... the repentant sinner ... [and] the contemplative life' (Cunningham 2001:33-34). These symbols find their origin not in the mediaeval legends of Europe and the Near East, as one would imagine, but in gospel characters themselves. While the repentant sinner and the Apostle to the Apostles title speak for themselves, the contemplative Mary Magdalene originates from Luke 10:38-42 where Martha's sister, Mary (now surnamed Magdalene), 'seated herself at the Lord's feet and listened to his words'.

The Mary Magdalene of the tradition was honoured especially in the Mass where, during the Liturgy of the Word as well as other sections of the celebration, nuptial imagery was expressed to demonstrate the Church's esteem for her. These elements conveyed to priest and congregation that the relationship between Mary Magdalene and Jesus is metaphorically nuptial and that they are joined as bride and bridegroom in a spiritual way (Henderson 2006:6).

The mediaeval Church was not the first to make use of nuptial imagery to demonstrate the spiritual union between God and human beings. Between the years 800 and 600 BCE the Old Testament prophets Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah symbolized 'the covenantal love that Israel's God had for the people' with often passionately descriptive bride and groom metaphors (Bergant 2001:56).¹⁴⁰ The Song of Songs, read in Judaism with the same symbolic picture in mind, came to be interpreted within Christianity, as early as the beginning of the third century, as a writing that figuratively portrayed 'the

¹⁴⁰ Bergant cites: Hosea 2:14-16, Isaiah 54:4-8 and 62:1-5, and Jeremiah 31:31-34.

Church as bride and Christ as the bridegroom' (Murphy 1990:11).¹⁴¹ As the Church progressed into the Middle Ages and beyond, celibate monks and virgins continued to employ the tool of allegory in order to divest the Song's image of any sexual meaning and transform it into 'a hymn of spiritual ... love' experienced by the individual soul and the bridegroom, Christ (Murphy 1990:16).¹⁴² Texts taken from and alluding to this biblical book featured strongly in the mediaeval liturgy for the feast of St Mary Magdalene on 22 July up until the remodelling of the calendar mentioned above.

7.3.1 The Tridentine liturgy for the feastday of Mary Magdalene

The liturgical book at hand is *The Roman Missal* dated 1951. It is worth mentioning that in 1570, subsequent to the Council of Trent, some changes to the liturgy of the seventh century had been made (Henderson 2006:1).¹⁴³ 'The basic message' presented by the older liturgy was, nonetheless, 'not much affected' (:1).

The scripture texts¹⁴⁴ in the Western Church's Tridentine liturgy for the 'Feast of Saint Mary Magdalene the Penitent', as it was officially entitled, were as follows:

Introit: Psalm 118:95-96

The wicked have waited for me to destroy me
but I have understood Thy testimonies, O Lord.
I have seen an end of all perfection
Thy commandment is exceeding broad.
Blessed are the undefiled in the way
who walk in the law of the Lord.

Lesson: Song of Songs 3:2-5; 8:6-7

I will rise, and will go about the city;
In the streets and the broad ways
I will seek Him whom my soul loveth.
I sought Him, and I found Him not.

¹⁴¹ Hippolytus of Rome (d. 235) and Origen (ca. 185-254) 'read the erotic lyrics ... as a prophetic vision of the love that united God and the Church through Christ' (Murphy 1990:16).

¹⁴² 'Gregory the Great ... [himself] a Benedictine monk ... played a major part in shaping medieval Christian interpretation of the Song along Origenist lines' (Murphy 1990:22).

¹⁴³ Council of Trent: 13 December 1545 to 4 December 1563 (Council of Trent 2014:1).

¹⁴⁴ The scripture texts in *The Roman Missal* were translated from the Vulgate.

The watchmen who keep the city, found me.
Have you seen Him, whom my soul loveth?
When I had a little passed by them,
I found Him whom my soul loveth.
I held Him and I will not let Him go
till I bring Him into my mother's house,
And into the chamber of her that bore me.
I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
by the roes and the harts of the fields,
that you stir not up, nor awake my beloved, till she please.
Put me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thy arm,
for love is strong as death,
jealousy as hard as hell;
the lamps thereof are fire and flames.
Many waters cannot quench charity,
neither can the floods drown it;
if a man should give all the substance of his house for love,
he shall despise it as nothing.

Gradual: Psalm 44:8

Thou hast loved justice and hated iniquity.
Therefore God, thy God,
hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness.
Grace is poured abroad in thy lips;
therefore hath God blessed thee for ever.

Gospel: Luke 7:36-50

At that time: One of the Pharisees desired Him to eat with him. And he went into the house of the Pharisee, and sat down to meat. And behold a woman that was in the city, a sinner, when she knew that He sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment; and standing behind at His feet she began to wash His feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment. And the Pharisee, who had invited Him, seeing it, spoke within himself, saying: This man, if He were a prophet, would know surely who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth Him, that she is a sinner. And Jesus answering, said to Him: Simon, I have somewhat to say to thee. But he said: Master, say it. A certain creditor had two debtors, the one owed five hundred pence and the other fifty. And whereas they had not wherewith to

pay, he forgave them both. Which therefore of the two loveth him most? Simon answering, said: I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And He said to him: Thou hast judged rightly. And turning to the woman, He said unto Simon: Dost Thou see this woman? I entered into thy house, thou gavest Me no water for My feet; but she with tears hath washed My feet, and with her hairs hath wiped them. Thou gavest Me no kiss; but she, since she came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint; but she with ointment hath anointed My feet. Wherefore I say to thee: Many sins are forgiven her, because she hath loved much. But to whom less is forgiven, he loveth less. And He said to her: Thy sins are forgiven thee. And they that sat at meat with Him began to say within themselves: Who is this that forgiveth sins also? And He said to the woman: Thy faith hath made thee safe: go in peace.

Offertory: Psalm 44:10

The daughters of kings in thy honor;
The queen stood on thy right hand in gilded clothing,
surrounded with variety.

Communion: Psalm 118:121a, 122b and 128

I have done judgment and justice, O Lord;
Let not the proud calumniate me.
I was directed to all Thy commandments,
I have hated all wicked ways.

7.3.2 Reflection on Mary Magdalene's feastday scripture texts

The opening of Mary Magdalene's feastday liturgical celebration was the Introit found in the second choice of the 'Mass of a Virgin Martyr' in the 'Common of Virgins'. The Missal described that 'the *sung portions* of [the] Mass' taught the faithful of 'the trials and torments which the Virgin Martyr had to endure to preserve her virtue and her faith' (Roman Missal 1951:916).¹⁴⁵ For the conflated Mary Magdalene 'the wicked' were

¹⁴⁵ Virgin: Mary of Bethany's part in the conflated character of Mary Magdalene is dominant here since Lazarus' two sisters were not known to be married. Martyr: The gospel's Mary Magdalene is dominant here since, by standing beneath the cross, she shared in Jesus' sufferings.

symbolic of her past sexual sin and ‘the undefiled ... who walk in the law of the Lord’ were symbolic of her repentance and subsequent penitence.

The Lesson comprising Song of Songs 3:2-5 describes a woman ‘yearning for the man she loves, her search for him, and her eventual discovery and union with him’ (Bergant 2001:52). This text was seen as being applicable to Mary Magdalene as she lovingly searched for Jesus’ body in the garden. In fact, Jesus’ question ‘Who is it you are looking for?’ (Jn 20:15), was understood as calling to mind this passage from Song of Songs. Furthermore, the Tridentine liturgy was here drawing on the Christian anagogy of the text where, and from early Christian times, the individual believer, or the Church, became known as the bride and ‘Christ, the Word or Son of God’, as the bridegroom (Norris 2003:1).

In Gregory of Elvira’s spiritual allegory of the text, for example, the woman is the bride and the bed from which she rises is her heart with its initial longing for things of the earth (Norris 2003:137). The city that she searches is the Pentateuch which contains the ‘divine Law’, the avenues are the books of the prophets, the streets are all ‘the divine Scriptures’ and the watchmen are the scribes and the Pharisees (:137-138). The one for whom she searches is Christ and, when she finds him ‘at the point when he had risen from the dead after his revered passion’, she will not let him go because, in reality, it is his love that possesses her (:138). She brings him to her mother’s chamber which, Gregory of Elvira continues, is the chamber of the heavenly Jerusalem which ‘gave birth to this Church “by water and the Spirit” (John 3:5)’ (:138-139).

For Honorius of Autun the seal in Song of Songs 8:6 represents the humanity of Christ (Norris 2003:285). In his allegory, when Christ asks a person to set ‘the seal of Christ upon his arm’, he is in fact asking that person to imitate his action (:285). Death is ‘mightier than all ... because it overpowers all the mighty’, explains Honorius, but love is also ‘mightier than all’ because it ‘overpowered [Christ who is] the mightiest, and brought him to death for [our] sake’ (:285). Christ is jealous of his bride, Honorius allegorizes, and wants her to ‘inwardly burn with love and outwardly shine with good actions’ (:286). The waters and floods that cannot quench or drown charity suggest that ‘neither flattery, nor threats, nor persecutions, nor terrors [can] overcome the lover so as to keep him from fulfilling [Christ’s] will’ (:286). The final spiritual allegory that this lesson gives is that if

someone gives everything he owns to feed the poor before handing himself over to martyrdom, but lacks love, it is as if he had given up nothing.

The nuptial connotations found in the text taken from the third chapter of Song of Songs, in short, advised priest and congregation to tenaciously seek the risen Lord by following the example of Mary Magdalene. They also informed them that the redeeming love of Christ can be found in the bosom of the Church. The final verses from the eighth chapter urged the faithful to love God with an intensity that no power could destroy.

The Gradual, taken from a royal wedding song celebrating the marriage of, perhaps, an Israelite king, symbolized ‘the marriage of the Messianic King with Israel’ which, in turn, symbolized Jesus as the bridegroom of the Church (JB 1966:827 n45a).¹⁴⁶ In this psalm the poet praises the bridegroom king at his marriage feast.

Because Mary Magdalene’s visit to the tomb and meeting with Jesus had already been alluded to in the lesson, the gospel reading was chosen in order to lead the faithful into a visualization of the saint’s penitent character, thereby inviting them to repent of their sins and contemplate God’s forgiveness with both gratitude and, especially, love. Mary’s penitence was connected to the symbols implied by the Introit psalm.

After the Gospel had been heard, the congregation celebrating Mary’s feastday recited the Creed.¹⁴⁷ The recitation thereof alluded to the ‘Apostle to the Apostles’ title which Mary had earned by accepting and carrying out the risen Lord’s mandate to notify the male disciples of his impending return to the Father.

The imagery from the royal wedding song continued in the Offertory psalm with Mary Magdalene standing at the bridegroom’s right hand. By clothing her in gold the psalmist implies Mary’s ‘inner worth’ (Henderson 2006:10). The Communion psalm, which is from a numbered psalm praising the divine Law,¹⁴⁸ symbolized the composite Mary Magdalene who hated the wicked ways of her past and now lived under the commandments of the Lord. Throughout this lengthy song the psalmist constantly speaks of being taught (:12, :68, :102, :124, :135 and :171), learning (:73), studying (:94 and

¹⁴⁶ This Psalm is numbered 45 in the Jerusalem Bible.

¹⁴⁷ Following the Gospel in the Ordinary of the Mass, the Missal states that the ‘Creed is said on all Sundays and other feasts of Our Lord, Our Lady, the Angels, Apostles, Doctors and of the Patron Saint of the parish’ (Roman Missal 1951:93). After notification of which gospel to read in Feasts of the Saints, ‘July 22nd – St. Mary-Magdalen’, the Missal indicates that the Credo be recited (Roman Missal 1951:1322).

¹⁴⁸ This Psalm is numbered 119 in the Jerusalem Bible.

:155), meditating (:15, :23, :27, :78, :97, :99 and :148) and concentrating (:15 and :18). The liturgy therefore brought to mind the contemplative Mary Magdalene who sat at Jesus' feet, choosing to listen rather than to serve.

7.3.3 Mary Magdalene's feastday prayers

The prayers for Mary Magdalene's feastday in the Western Church's Tridentine liturgy were as follows:

Collect

May we be assisted, we beseech Thee, O Lord, by the prayers of blessed Mary-Magdalen: for moved by her entreaties Thou didst raise her brother Lazarus to life after being four days in the tomb.

Secret

We beseech Thee, O Lord, that the merits of the blessed Mary- Magdalen may render our gifts pleasing to Thee: since her homage and service were graciously accepted by Thine only begotten Son.

Postcommunion

Having been nourished, O Lord, with the sole remedy of salvation, Thy precious Body and Blood, we beseech Thee that we may be delivered through the patronage of Saint Mary-Magdalen from every evil.

7.3.4 Reflection on Mary Magdalene's feastday prayers

Before the reading of the Lesson the priest prayed that God would be moved, just as Jesus had been moved by Mary's weeping, to answer the saint as she interceded for salvation on their behalf. The Secret, marking the end of the Offertory prayers, acknowledged Mary Magdalene's reverence to Jesus in the anointing and the service she gave him as he journeyed from Galilee to Jerusalem. The Postcommunion repeats the Church's request in the Collect for salvation through the saint's prayers.

The Collect, the Secret and the Postcommunion prayers include neither the nuptial theme nor Mary's role as Apostle to the Apostles.

7.4 The Post-Vatican II Liturgy for the *memoria* of Mary Magdalene

The liturgical celebration of Mary Magdalene's sanctity today reflects a trend to review the images of saints by remaining close to what historical research can establish. This tendency does not reduce findings to mere facts of the past but seeks to apply them in such a way that they inspire the present.

The changes to the liturgical calendar made after Vatican II, therefore, express 'a different appreciation of Mary Magdalene and her relationship with Jesus' (Henderson 2006:1). The liturgy of Post-Vatican II has revised the image of the tradition and, now, gives high praise to the Mary Magdalene found on the gospel pages, especially those of the evangelist John. While Mary's apostleship was only implied by the pronouncement of the Creed in the Tridentine Mass, it is made clear in the text chosen as the Gospel reading in her present *Memoria* liturgy.¹⁴⁹

7.4.1 Mary Magdalene's *memoria* scripture texts

The scripture texts in the post-Vatican II liturgy, which appear below, are taken from the 'Jerusalem Bible version of scripture' and 'The Psalms, A New Translation' (The Weekday Missal 1994:vii.).¹⁵⁰ They are as follows:

Entrance Antiphon: John 20:17-18

The Lord said to Mary Magdalene: Go and tell my brothers
that I shall ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God
and to your God.

First Reading: Song of Songs 3:1-4

On my bed, at night, I sought him
whom my heart loves.

¹⁴⁹ Since the Creed is now said only on Sundays and Solemnities, and the liturgy celebrating Mary Magdalene falls under the category of *Memoria*, it is no longer declared during Mass on 22 July.

¹⁵⁰ The New English Translation of the Roman Missal 2010 uses the *Revised Standard Version Bible* and the Psalms are from *The Revised Grail Psalms* 2010 (*The Sunday Missal* 2011:6).

I sought but did not find him.
So I will rise and go through the City;
in the streets and the squares
I will seek him whom my heart loves.
I sought but did not find him.
The watchmen came upon me
on their rounds in the City:
“Have you seen him whom my heart loves?”
Scarcely had I passed them
than I found him whom my heart loves.

Alternate First Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:14-17

The love of Christ overwhelms us when we reflect that if one man has died for all, then all men should be dead; and the reason he died for all was so that living men should live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised to life for them.

From now onwards, therefore, we do not judge anyone by the standards of the flesh. Even if we did once know Christ in the flesh, that is not how we know him now. And for anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old creation has gone, and now the new one is here.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 62:2-6 and 8-9

O God, you are my God, for you I long;
for you my soul is thirsting.
My body pines for you
like a dry, weary land without water.

So I gaze on you in the sanctuary
to see your strength and your glory.
For your love is better than life,
my lips will speak your praise.

So I will bless you all my life,
in your name I will lift up my hands.
My soul shall be filled as with a banquet,
my mouth shall praise you with joy.

For you have been my help;
in the shadow of your wings I rejoice.
My soul clings to you;

your right hand holds me fast.

Gospel: John 20:1-2 and 11-18

It was very early on the first day of the week and still dark, when Mary of Magdala came to the tomb. She saw that the stone had been moved away from the tomb and came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved. “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb” she said “and we don’t know where they have put him.”

Mary stayed outside near the tomb, weeping. Then, still weeping, she stooped to look inside, and saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head, the other at the feet. They said, “Woman, why are you weeping?” “They have taken my Lord away” she replied “and I don’t know where they have put him.” As she said this she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, though she did not recognise him. Jesus said, “Woman why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and remove him.” “Jesus said, ‘Mary!’” She knew him then and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbuni!” – which means Master. Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, because I have not yet ascended to my Father. But go and find the brothers, and tell them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” So Mary of Magdala went and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord and that he had said these things to her.

Communion Antiphon

The love of Christ compels us to live not for ourselves but for him who died and rose for us.

7.4.2 Reflection on Mary Magdalene’s *memoria* scripture texts

The entrance antiphon places Mary Magdalene directly on the gospel page where Jesus entrusts her with the message of eternal life. She is the first to know that he was raised from the dead and would be returning to God, his Father in heaven. She is also the first to know that the disciples will no longer be only his disciples but that, through his

death and resurrection, they will be his brothers and sisters with God as the head of the new family (Maloney 1998:526).

The First Reading continues with the nuptial imagery from Mary Magdalene's Tridentine feastday celebration, but the architects of the new liturgy have removed 3:5 and 8:6-7 from the Songs of Songs' text. Furthermore, the reader's response to the text now differs vastly from its reception during the mediaeval era. The instructed member of the faithful would today receive an image of a woman going into the city which, it is known, was not a place for women in ancient times (Bergant 2001:53). The woman sets out during the darkness of the night, alone, a course of action which would invite episodes of extreme danger (:53). Moreover, she initiates 'conversation with men', something severely frowned upon 'in patriarchal societies' (:53). However, she is determined to find him, a fact made clear by the 'strongly assertive' phrases 'I will rise', '[I] will go about' and 'I will seek' (Garrett, 2004:171), and despite the risk of danger, detection and societal condemnation, she sets forth to find him and bring him home (Bergant 2001:54). The woman's decision, strength of mind and commitment are clearly seen when, once she has found him, she holds onto him and determines not to let him go (Garrett and House 2004:172).

With its nuptial connotations, the First Reading is reminiscent of Mary Magdalene's return to the tomb after notifying Peter and the beloved disciple of Jesus' missing body. It reminds the faithful of her meeting with, and subsequent recognition of, the teacher she so greatly loved. The reading also clearly depicts Mary reaching out to touch Jesus. In short, what remains of the Tridentine Lesson of 22 July is a picture of a woman so committed to Jesus, the bridegroom, that she will forego all safety and social approval in order to find and hold on to him.

Should the alternate first reading be chosen instead of Song of Songs 3:1-4, the nuptial image would not be brought into play and Mary Magdalene would remain on the gospel page where she recognises Jesus by his voice and stretches out to embrace him. The first half of the reading speaks of 'Jesus' death and the love it creates in his people' (Martin 1986:118). The love of Christ is a compelling and 'positive force' and, therefore, the individual 'cannot but' be selflessly devoted 'to God and his (*sic*) fellow human

beings' (:128). The remainder of the alternate reading indicates that sin and death no longer govern the world because, through Christ, creation has become new (:152).

Listening to this reading in the context of the celebration of Mary Magdalene's sainthood, the faithful may remember how, after Jesus had freed her and a number of other women of demon possession, they had felt compelled to support Jesus and his disciples out of their resources. The faithful would also remember the risen Jesus' directive that she, who had known 'Christ in the flesh', should not cling to him 'by the standards of the flesh' because circumstances are changing. The liturgy invites priest and congregation to make the connection to the entrance antiphon which has already announced the new 'creation'.

The responsorial psalm has Mary Magdalene praising God in the words of the psalmist who longs for God body and soul. Mary's thirsting and pining for God is reminiscent of the bride seeking her beloved in the reading from the Song of Songs. Having found God in the sanctuary, she remains there contemplating God's strength and glory and undertakes to bless and praise God with joy throughout her life. Mary's soul, which 'clings' to God, is held fast by his right hand, indicating God's approval. This is the right kind of clinging as opposed to the clinging implied by Jesus' words in verses 16-17 of the gospel about to be read. Another frame of reference would be that of Origen who, by the words 'my soul clings to you', understood that they signified what will happen at the resurrection of the dead when the world comes to an end:

the flesh will cleave to the soul and will become a soul which ...
will cleave to the Lord and become "one spirit with him" ... and
become a "spiritual body" (Decock 2012:510).

In contrast to the Tridentine liturgy's use of Luke 7:36-50 as the gospel reading, the designers of the new liturgy have chosen John's description of the empty tomb and subsequent appearance of the risen Lord to take its place. The text focuses directly on Mary Magdalene, summoning the faithful to view her journey to the tomb, her distress at finding it open, her sorrowful weeping and, finally, her dramatic interaction with the man she called 'Rabbuni'.

The Communion Antiphon is a reworking of the first half of the Alternate First Reading and is reminiscent of Mary Magdalene's great love for, and determined search of, the Lord Jesus Christ.

7.4.3 Mary Magdalene's *memoria* prayers

Opening Prayer

Father, your Son first entrusted to Mary Magdalene the joyful news of his resurrection. By her prayers and example may we proclaim Christ as our living Lord and one day see him in glory.

Gospel Acclamation

Alleluia, alleluia! Tell us, Mary: say
what thou didst see upon the way.
The tomb the Living did enclose;
I saw Christ's glory as he rose! Alleluia!

Prayer over the Gifts

Lord, accept the gifts we present in memory of Saint Mary Magdalene; her loving worship was accepted by your Son, who is Lord for ever and ever.

Prayer after Communion

Father, may the sacrament we have received fill us with the same faithful love that kept Mary Magdalene close to Christ, who is Lord for ever and ever.

7.4.4 Reflection on Mary Magdalene's *memoria* prayers

The Opening Prayer, previously called the Collect, expresses the theme of the day's celebration.¹⁵¹ In the first sentence the Church acknowledges that Mary Magdalene was the first missionary of the risen Lord and, by the word 'entrusted', affirms that heaven holds her in the highest esteem. In the second sentence the faithful are encouraged to join the saint in proclaiming Christ as our living Lord.

The Gospel Acclamation is obviously taken from a hymn where the poetry speaks of Mary's visit to the tomb and her meeting with the risen Christ.

In the prayer at the end of the Offertory Mary's love of Jesus is remembered as the congregation asks the Father to accept the gifts offered in this Mass. The words 'her loving worship' is reminiscent of part of *The Divine Office's* reading for the saint's memorial which, notably, is taken from a homily on the gospels by Pope Gregory the Great and reads as follows:

We should reflect on Mary's attitude and the great love she felt for Christ; for though the disciples had left the tomb, she remained. She was still seeking the one she had not found, and while she sought she wept; burning with the fire of love, she longed for him who she thought had been taken away. And so it happened that the woman who stayed behind to seek Christ was the only one to see him. For perseverance is essential to any good deed, as the voice of truth tells us: *Whoever perseveres to the end will be saved* (*The Divine Office* 2009:1398).

However, compared to the selection from this homily as it appears in the pre-Vatican II liturgy the dramatic allusions to her sinful life have been omitted. These lines read as follows:

The one who before remained frigid in her sinful performance afterwards was ardently on fire in her love.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ The 1570 Roman Missal describes the Collect as gathering 'up into one brief form the desires of all the faithful' and contains 'the purpose of the special grace to be asked for that day' (1951:91 The Ordinary of the Mass).

¹⁵² *Quae enim prius frígida peccándo remánserat, póstmodum amándo fórtiter ardébat* (*Breviarium Romanum* 1961:422 [Die iulii – S. Mariae Magdalenae Poenit]).

It is nevertheless clear that the Church once again, and through the words of Pope St Gregory the Great, holds up Mary Magdalene as a model of love and discipleship.

The Prayer after Communion once more acknowledges Mary Magdalene's deep love and fidelity for Christ. That she kept close to him indicates that she was, indeed, his disciple.

7.5 Value of the mediaeval feastday liturgy honouring Mary Magdalene

Mary Magdalene's feastday liturgy of the Western Church which was celebrated prior to the changes inspired by the Second Vatican Council were clearly evoked by legends and folktales engendered and circulated by the Christians of Europe and the Near East during the first millennium. The above literary analyses of the three gospels, together with this dissertation's glimpse of the legends, have revealed that Mary Magdalene had, somewhere between the writing of the good announcements of the Lord Jesus Christ and the start of the Middle Ages, slipped from the gospel pages and become the repentant sinner who loved so much. The Church's image of the saint developed along with 'the penitential Magdalen' of the legendary figure and became 'a message of liberation and hope' so that 'even the most wayward of sinners – through penance – could hope to earn salvation' (Jansen 1995:413-416). This positive image was at first achieved through preaching and, then, by integrating into Mary's feastday liturgy specially chosen biblical texts which symbolized not only her penitential character but, also, her contemplative and apostolic natures. The main thread joining the saint's qualities was the nuptial symbol of the bride of Christ.

The biblical texts thus inspired the faithful to choose the conflated Mary Magdalene's way of life in order that they, individually and as a whole, may remain the true bride of Christ. Some texts in the liturgy imply that past sins had been committed, that repentance of those sins had taken place, and that penance had been performed after receiving forgiveness. Other texts point to Mary's determination, loyalty and immense love for Jesus while one of the Psalms presents her as a woman listening to and contemplating the word of God. Most of all, the biblical texts celebrate the saint as the bride of Christ. Although the saying of the Creed metaphorically indicates Mary Magdalene's apostleship, it is clear that nuptial symbolism was of major importance.

It is evident that the mediaeval liturgy of the saint's feastday, celebrated in a world 'sophisticated in [the] interpretation of the symbolic meanings clustered around the figure' of Mary Magdalene, was worthwhile and beneficial to the Christian faithful (Jansen 1995:413-416).

7.6 Value of the present *memoria* liturgy honouring Mary Magdalene

An overview of the texts and prayers of the present memorial liturgy honouring Mary Magdalene demonstrates that the liturgical architects of the post-Vatican II era gave more consideration to the New Testament scriptures than to the legends which the Church had accepted for more than a millennium. What the post-Vatican II liturgists did in fact do was to return Mary Magdalene to the pages of the fourth gospel where Jesus' post-resurrection appearance to her became the major historical facilitator of the Christian faith.

The picture which the present memorial liturgy paints of the saint, therefore, is harmonious with those painted by Mark, Luke and John and it shows that the Church sees Mary as the first ambassador for Christianity, appointed to this position by Jesus Christ himself at the time when she was awarded sight and sound of him after her determined and loyal search. The liturgy invites the faithful to search with determination for God and, when God is found, to commit self to him with the same great love that Mary Magdalene had. The nuptial symbolism of pre-Vatican II is retained but it is clear that, in the new liturgy, the icon of Mary Magdalene as the first missionary of the risen Lord is of primary significance.

7.7 Summary

Although the traditional conflated figure known as Mary Magdalene has been removed from the liturgy of the post-Vatican II Church, this does not mean that she has been removed from memory, either Christian or secular. Paintings of the penitent and contemplative saint remain on display throughout the churches of Europe and surrounding countries and theatre composers will always be cognizant of the drawing power of this image of Mary Magdalene. This may be a drawback to those wanting to eradicate fiction and search for only the historical Magdalene of the scriptures but, to

others, the former prostitute may just be the newest icon needed in a world where marriage and conjugal commitment are frequently disregarded for the sake of more stimulating and tantalizing sexual encounters. This icon is to be found in the rock concert *Jesus Christ Superstar* where Mary Magdalene desires sex for love rather than for money or anything else with little or no meaning. Future theatre and film productions, as well as musical CDs, will keep the new version of Pope Gregory's icon alive for many decades to come and, with a little prompting, audiences and viewers may come to realize that the deeper the love and commitment in a marriage relationship, the more intense will be the joy in their sexual unions.

A further drawback for those who yearn for the historical Mary Magdalene is that little or nothing is done at grass roots level to educate members of the Western Church about her gospel identity. Firstly, her memorial is celebrated on a weekday when the presider is not obliged to preach. If the presider should give a reflection or a brief homily after the gospel reading, it is unlikely that the congregation would be more than a handful. Secondly John 20:11-18, where the evangelist describes Mary's meeting with the Lord and his mandate to her, is read on Easter Tuesday, once again a weekday which draws a minority of churchgoers. To compensate for this shortcoming women's groups in the United States have composed prayer services outside the Eucharistic celebration of the saint's July 22 *memoria* in order to bring attention to her importance and leadership within the Jesus story. FutureChurch in Cleveland, for example, began in 1997 with a newly compiled service which was celebrated on Mary Magdalene's feastday at twenty three different venues.¹⁵³ By July 2010 'at least 374 prayer services and programs' had taken place, thirty seven having been celebrated outside the United States; one of them was an event held in South Africa.¹⁵⁴

Added to and perpetuating this shortcoming is the omission of, and/or the optional reading about, key biblical women from the Western Church's lectionary, for example: the deacon Phoebe (Rom 16:1), the prophet, judge and mother of Israel, Deborah (Jgs 4:4; 5:7), and the prophet Huldah (2 Kgs 22:14).¹⁵⁵ The texts regarding Miriam being a prophet and 'where she led a song of thanksgiving ... after the crossing of the sea' (Ex

¹⁵³ FutureChurch 2014:4 (Mary of Magdala).

¹⁵⁴ FutureChurch 2014:1 (Fall 2010 Newsletter).

¹⁵⁵ Free Library, The 2014:1-3.

15:20) are omitted and the ‘verses about the prophet Anna are indicated as merely optional’ (Lk 2:36-38).¹⁵⁶ More apposite in this dissertation is the omission of the introduction, ‘the anointing of Jesus on the head by a woman’ (Mt 26:6-13), to the Passion reading on Palm Sunday of Year A.¹⁵⁷ In ‘this same reading ... the mention of the faithful women who had followed Jesus to Jerusalem from Galilee’ is optional (27:55-56).¹⁵⁸ For the Passion reading on Palm Sunday of Year B the texts regarding the anointing woman and the faithful female witnesses are again indicated as optional.¹⁵⁹ John’s ‘version of the anointing story’, which admittedly appears six chapters before the commencement of his account of the Passion, ‘is read only on a weekday, Monday of Holy week’.¹⁶⁰

What the designers of the post-Vatican II liturgy have, in actual fact, done by their reluctance to substantiate the actions of the anointer(s) is to render Jesus’ prophecy in Matthew and Mark a lie: ‘I assure you, wherever the Good News is proclaimed throughout the world, what she has done will be told in her memory’ (Mk 14:9).¹⁶¹ This is, indeed, a serious allegation which it pains me to make since my research in this chapter has, until now, yielded such positive observations of the post-Vatican II liturgical renewal.

A second serious allegation which has to be made concerns the principal character in this dissertation: By not making a greater effort to give clear edification to the faithful with regard to Mary Magdalene’s gospel identity, the Church withholds the profundity of Jesus’ action when he chose her, a woman, to proclaim the acme of the Easter faith to his male disciples. In short, the Church honours Mary Magdalene highly, but not as highly as did the risen Lord on that Easter day two thousand years ago.

Pope St Gregory the Great, by means of a single, exhortative homily, was able to establish Mary Magdalene as an icon of hope, conversion and penitence which served the Western Church and gave comfort to its members for as much as fourteen centuries.

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*, 2014:2.

¹⁵⁷ ‘Sunday scripture readings are arranged in a three-year cycle. The Gospel of Matthew is read in Year A, Mark in Year B and Luke in Year C; John is used for seasonal readings every year’ (Free Library,, The 2014:3).

¹⁵⁸ Free Library, The 2014:3.

¹⁵⁹ *ibid.*, 3.

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*, 3.

¹⁶¹ *ibid.*, 3-4.

However it is clear that, in order to return Mary Magdalene to the gospel pages from where she can be revered for her acceptance of the position given her by the risen Jesus, a considerable amount of edifying, homiletic ingenuity and theological writing will be required. Although the re-establishing of Mary Magdalene as she had been presented in the gospels is today being carried out by women theologians from many branches of the Church, the content of theological works seldom, if ever, reach the faithful in the pews.

What the Church needs today are preachers of the same calibre, sincerity and influence as Gregory the Great to proclaim from the pulpits around the globe that Mary Magdalene was, indeed, the first missionary of the resurrected Lord.

In conclusion I shall, in the final chapter to come, give a brief summation of my contribution towards returning Mary Magdalene to the New Testament gospel pages.

CHAPTER 8

The Conclusion

In the introduction of my dissertation the reader was informed that I wished to explore a portrait of Mary Magdalene more in keeping with the gospel presentation of her than with the composite figure which arose out of the legends and folklore of Europe and the Near East during the first millennium.

My dissertation proper commenced with a close examination of the lyrics of the songs from the rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar* which were sung about Mary Magdalene, by her alone, or by her along with other members of cast. My intention was to gain an understanding of Mary's character as portrayed by the lyricist, Tim Rice, and received by audiences and auditors throughout the globe over the decades following the release of the opera's music album, as well as the presentation of the subsequent stage productions which followed in its wake. A careful examination of the relevant lyrics showed me that Mary Magdalene was depicted in the concert as a former prostitute and female partner of Jesus who, in spite of her love and longing for him, had not experienced sex in their relationship. Of arresting significance was that a new picture of the penitent prostitute has emerged since Rice's response to the gospels, and to Sheen's *Life of Christ*, was merged with Andrew Lloyd Webber's music. The new image of Mary Magdalene is that of a former prostitute who would rather have sex as an expression of love than as a form of earning a living.

Once the parallels between this new image and the penitent image received by my generation more than fifty years ago had led me to search for the latter's beginnings, I discovered that Mary Magdalene had indeed been confused with one or other female New Testament character at the time when the Church fathers were attempting to harmonize the four canonical gospels. Towards the end of the sixth century Pope Gregory the Great fortified the conflation of the woman in Luke's anointing scene with Mary of Bethany by enhancing the merged figure with Mary Magdalene, the woman entrusted by Jesus with the message of new life. Once I had examined the pope's Sermons 25 and 33, and also read up on the over-all history of the time, I came to the conclusion that Gregory the Great did not, as Haskins speculates, willfully misinterpret the gospel texts relating to the three anointers

in order ‘to suit the purposes of an ascetic Church’ (1993:97). What his creative but necessary misinterpretation of certain relevant gospel texts did, in fact, accomplish was to give sinners and victims of war and plague an icon of hope to counteract despair, and an understandable model of discipleship and penitence to imitate.

By the end of the third chapter I was able to answer a number of the questions in the introduction hypothetically asked by members of the Western Church who do not have easy access to the findings of theologians and scripture scholars. Mary Magdalene’s retirement to Ephesus was part of a legend which developed in the Near East while her journey to, and residency, in the south of France was part of many folktales that were born and embroidered upon by Christians living in Gaul and the rest of the continent known today as Europe. Since the legend of her martyrdom emerged from the East at a time when Christians were being killed for their faith it is conceivable that, to counteract despair and fear, the early Church set Mary Magdalene up as a model of hope and courage for the faithful. That she had been a preacher in Gaul and a teacher in Ephesus were parts of the two legends which, one can also deduce, developed according to the needs of the people within their particular contexts. Since the era and its circumstances on the Italian peninsula were pertinent to the birth of the penitential Mary Magdalene, it can therefore be deduced that, when the eremitic legend developed, the context had called for prayer and asceticism. I therefore disagree with FutureChurch’s website remark that ‘Mary of Magdala is perhaps the most maligned and misunderstood figure in early Christianity’.¹⁶² Mary Magdalene has, in death, served the members of the Body of Christ, just as, in life, she had accompanied and assisted Jesus and the Twelve out of her means (Luke 8:3). For this she has always been highly appreciated by the Church and its members.

In the three chapters of Part II of this dissertation, literary analyses of texts relating to Mary Magdalene and the women who anointed Jesus during his ministry were made in order to explore Mark, Luke and John’s understanding of Mary’s role in Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. In this research I discovered that nowhere do the evangelists merge the woman who was a sinner, Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene into a single composite figure. I can therefore reply to more of the questions hypothetically raised in the introduction and, with confidence, say that Mary Magdalene was not the ‘prostitute’

¹⁶² FutureChurch 2014:2.

mentioned in Luke 7:36-50 and, therefore, did not weep on, dry or anoint Jesus' feet. I would also add that there is, moreover, no clear evidence to support the assumption that the female anointer in Luke had been known for sins of a sexual nature. With slightly less confidence I can also reply that Mary Magdalene was not the sister of Martha and Lazarus who are introduced in John 11:1-2. The blurring of Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene which occurs in John's gospel should be examined more closely than what I can do within the scope of this dissertation. Finally I can positively say that the literary analysis of Luke 8:2 has revealed that Jesus had healed Mary Magdalene of a severely brutal case of demon possession but that there is no indication of what the demons had done to her while in her body.

Once I had established that the gospels' Magdalene did not resemble the composite figure which was given her name and, also, confirmed that the latter is undeniably a portrait which grew out of centuries of diverse human contexts, I focused on the honour given to the saint within the liturgy of the Western Church. There I discovered that the biblical texts integrated into the Tridentine liturgy celebrating Mary Magdalene's feastday had provided meaningful symbols beneficial to all the faithful, clergy and monastics included. Their message had been one of liberation and hope as well as an inspiration to prayer, repentance, loyalty and a deep love for Jesus. My study of the biblical texts in the present liturgy celebrating the saint's *memoria* found that the post-Vatican II Catholic Church has been influenced by a more historical-critical approach to the scriptures and has corrected the image of Mary Magdalene, the Penitent, into Mary Magdalene the first ambassador for Christianity. The chosen texts invite the faithful to be determined in their search for God and inspire them to commit themselves to him with the same love shown to Jesus by Mary Magdalene.

However, the summary of my penultimate chapter reveals that two obstacles exist to the saint being firmly returned to the pages of the canonical gospels. Firstly, *Jesus Christ Superstar's* reformed prostitute is likely to be behind the microphone and on stage for many years to come; and, secondly, it is unlikely that the post-Vatican II liturgy will change in order to guarantee the education of the faithful with regard to the gospel presentation of a single saint, especially if the saint was the woman who had put Peter to shame by her action of loyalty and love.

There are many studies that I would like to do which could not be done within the perimeters of this dissertation. As mentioned above, I would like to look more closely at the blurring of the two Marys which occurs in John's gospel. I would also like to pay attention to Mary of Bethany alone after her removal from the composite figure.

It would also be of benefit if a historical study was done to investigate the contexts that gave rise to the various characters of the traditional Mary Magdalene.

Finally, I cannot help wondering if an examination of Mary Magdalene as a reformed prostitute wanting love rather than money for sex would be a worthwhile study.

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