

“WHO IS MARY MAGDALENE (MARY OF MAGDALA)?”
BIBLICAL SCHOLAR STATEMENT
Key Facts DRAFT – July 11, 2019 V. 37 DRAFT

On June 3, 2016 the Vatican elevated St. Mary Magdalene’s Memorial to a Feast. In his letter accompanying the decree, Archbishop Roche stated that Mary Magdalene: “... is the witness to the risen Christ and announces the message of the Lord’s resurrection just like the rest of the Apostles.” He concludes, “... it is right that the liturgical celebration of this woman should have the same rank of Feast as that given to the celebration of the Apostles.”

Introduction

The “ReclaimMagdalene” project brings biblical scholarship on the identity and role of Mary Magdalene into the public sphere. Scholars consistently identify Mary Magdalene (aka Mary of Magdala) as the disciple/apostle Jesus chose to be his Resurrection witness and not the “unnamed sinner” (Luke 7.36-50) or Mary of Bethany (John 12. 1-8). The goals of this project are to publicize her “ministry of witness” (“Encountering the Risen Jesus: Mary Magdalene as Prototype”, BC Lecture, 07-19-2013, S. Schneiders, I.H.M.) – her true role in scripture, inspire new art (paintings, films, books, poems, plays, songs, etc.), relabel art and correct other works that misrepresent her. This will bring the full Gospel out of the shadows and repair at least some of the damage caused by medieval legends and artistic portrayals of her as the mournful, or lascivious penitent prostitute.

The “Mary Magdalene Scholar Statement” and the Mary Magdalene Scripture Texts file will be sent to authors, filmmakers, visual artists, art critics, songwriters, publishers, media organizations, etc. with a request that they create new works that present Mary Magdalene’s witness, faith, and leadership as presented in the gospels and correct or relabel works that misrepresent her.

The Scholar Statement and Scripture Texts will also be sent to museums, universities, churches, etc. with requests that they identify and relabel art that misrepresents Mary Magdalene to alert viewers that the image or writings do not reflect the actual scripture text. A sample label is provided in the appendix. We will publicize the new art, books, etc., and corrections.

The Scholar Statement’s “Key Facts” section is designed to help readers envision Mary Magdalene’s role in scripture, along with the history of misrepresentations, and an estimate of the value of corrections in one concise read. **If you are short on time please read the questions that introduce each section and the text in bold - they convey the essential information.**

We have lost much through the distortions of Mary Magdalene and have much to gain in reclaiming her full gospel role. Join us; share this document and advocate for new art, books, songs, plays, teaching and preaching that present the Mary Magdalene of scripture to all.

www.reclaimmagdalene.org #ReclaimMagdalene

Key Facts

Contrary to medieval legends and popular belief, scripture scholars have concluded that Mary Magdalene was not the unnamed, penitent prostitute¹ of Luke 7.36-50, not a reclusive hermit and not Mary of Bethany who prophetically anointed Jesus' feet in anticipation of his death (Jn 12.1-8) (Ricci, 37-38).² Rather, the only scripture texts that refer to Mary Magdalene reveal she was a disciple who came up from Galilee with Jesus as a member of his inner circle (Mt 27.55-56, Mk 15.41, Lk 8.3); was healed of seven demons (Lk 8:2); remained at the cross, a faithful presence to the dying Jesus (Mt 27.55-56, Mk 15.40-41, Jn 19.25); brought myrrh to his tomb to pay homage (Mk 16.1, Lk 24.1); was the first, or one of the first apostles to receive the Resurrection news (Mt 28.2-8, Mk 16.9); was commissioned by Jesus to proclaim the great news (Mt 28.9-10, Jn 20.16-17); and proclaimed Resurrection (Mk. 16.10, Lk 24.10, Jn 20.18) (Ricci, 59 and de Boer, 36-38).³

A. Why did 20th century scholars conclude that Mary Magdalene was not Luke's unnamed "sinner from the city" (7:36-50) or Mary of Bethany.⁴ Three core reasons:

1. **Mary Magdalene's name is so prominent that it is unlikely she would appear as an unnamed woman in a gospel story. Therefore, only scripture texts that name Mary Magdalene describe her and her actions (Thompson, 32).⁵**
 - a. **Her name is unique and rare:** It was rare for a 1st century woman to be named in writing, if she were named it was usually in relation to a man (husband, brother, son, etc.) not by an attribute or city. "Magdalene" may be an epithet, "fortress of towers", for her strength and faith, as Jerome noted. (Haskins, 58).⁶ Or she may be named in reference to "Migdal" or "Magdala", the Hebrew name for a city on the western shore of the lake of Galilee. (DeBoer 1997, 21).⁷
 - b. **Her full name is cited frequently and consistently:** She is named 14 times in the canonical gospels, more than most of the male apostles - 12 times in full and 2 times as only "Mary" (Wright, 53).⁸ Her name appears in the same format in canonical and non-canonical texts written for widely dispersed communities over a period of 300 years (70-350 CE) (Schaberg and Johnson-DeBaufre, 69-72).⁹
 - c. **She is usually named first in lists of women disciples indicating she was a leader of the women apostles and disciples.** There are just two exceptions where she is called only "Mary" (John 20:11, 16); in both it is clear she is the only woman in the scene.
2. **The earliest artistic and written traditions (1st-6th c.) honored Mary Magdalene as a witness of the resurrection, not as Luke's unnamed sinner, "penitent prostitute."¹⁰**
 - a. For the first nine centuries CE, the symbol of the Resurrection was Mary Magdalene with one or two other women at Jesus' tomb or meeting him in the garden (Haskins, 61).¹⁰ These images decorate religious items such as church doors, medals, tabernacles, vestments, and pyx (Haskins 58-67).¹¹
 - b. In the 3rd century she was given the epithet "Apostle of the Apostles"¹² and praised as the "new Eve", "the bringers of truth" in a hyperbolic commentary on the "Song of Songs" attributed to a bishop of Rome, Hippolytus (c. 170 – 235) (Haskins, 67). Later this

imagined redemption of Eve grew into identification with Eve's sin to devastating effect (Haskins 136-137).¹³

- c. 4th – 6th century commentators praised her but also began to question her authority. Jerome (347-420) described her as “fortified with towers because of her earnestness and strength of faith” (Haskins, 58).¹⁴ Augustine (354-430) saw her as the personification of the church that first believed in the Resurrection (Haskins, 94).¹⁵ Yet, as will be examined later, Augustine also asked if she was Mary of Bethany and Jerome speculated she could be Luke's sinner/prostitute; neither concluded she was either of these other women.

3. The Eastern churches did not conflate Mary Magdalene with Mary of Bethany or Luke's unnamed penitent prostitute.¹⁶

- a. Multiple Eastern Church leaders praised Mary Magdalene as a teacher and apostle (Haskins, 91-92).¹⁷ In an exuberant, poetic reflection on the Myrrh Bearers of Matthew's resurrection (28.1-10), Gregory, Bishop of Antioch (d. 594) envisioned the resurrected Jesus commissioning Mary Magdalene and the other Mary in the garden: “*Go tell my disciples the mysteries you have seen. Be the first teachers of the teachers. Let Peter, who has denied me, learn that I can also ordain women to be apostles.*” (De Boer 1997, 12).¹⁸
- b. Starting around the 6th century the eastern church celebrated Mary Magdalene (usually on July 22) and Mary of Bethany (June 4) on separate days (Haskins, 26).¹⁹ In the west, Bede, Abbot of Jarrow also listed Mary Magdalene's feast as July 22nd in his Martyrology of c. 720. Bede's “... source appears to have been an earlier Greek or Byzantine calendar. It was to pass thence into all subsequent liturgical books. ... The earliest Magdalenian cult, at Ephesus, therefore precedes that of Vezelay by nearly five hundred years.” (Haskins, 108).²⁰

B. How was Mary Magdalene transformed from the 3rd century “Apostle of the Apostles” to the 6th century “penitent prostitute”?

As Christianity spread and integrated into Roman society a number of **social and theological trends contributed to this denigration. Nine are listed below:**

1. **Greco-Roman social and political beliefs prepared early male commentators to see a woman speaking with authority in public as sexually sinful.** Two are highlighted below:
 - a. **Honor/Shame system and Gender Roles in 1st - 3rd century Roman society:** Some upper class women were active politically and philanthropically. However, in the honor/shame system (Osiek and Macdonald, 398-399).²¹ **If they spoke in public even these women were open to severe criticism. In the case of Christian Women leaders, their communities were also criticized (Haskins, 85).**²²
 - b. **Accusing a woman of sexual impropriety or gossip was a way to silence her** (Torjesen, 135-136).²³ Christian women visited community members, taught neophytes, baptized and served as prophets. Critics labeled them as “gossips” (Osiek and Macdonald, 39)²⁴ which was a way to sully “... a woman's sexual reputation” and undermine “her legitimacy as a prophet” (Murphy, 212-213).²⁵

2. **In the 2nd and 3rd centuries, some Christian theologians and secular (pagan) Greco-Roman philosophers questioned the validity of women leaders and condemned their public ministry.**
 - a. **Tertullian of Carthage (160-220), a Christian theologian, described women evangelists as “... heretical women—[who] have no modesty; ... bold enough to teach, to engage in argument, to enact exorcisms, to undertake cures, and, it may be, even to baptize.” In *De Virginibus Velands*, he states, "It is not permitted for a woman to speak in the church, nor is it permitted for her to teach, nor to baptize, nor to offer [the Eucharist], nor to claim for herself a share in any *masculine* function--not to mention any priestly office” (Pagels, 60).²⁶ His view stands in sharp contrast to Jesus’ and Paul’s inclusion of women in their inner circle of disciples.**
 - b. **The Christian author of the *Didascalía* (c. 225) denounced the Order of Widows and insulted them as gadabouts. He wanted them inside, praying silently (Malone, 129).²⁷**
 - c. **Origen of Alexandria (d. c. 250) demanded that women not speak in the assembly “even if she says admirable things, or saintly things.” He chastised women saying, “For you wish to be wiser and to know better not only than men but even the presbyters” (Malone, 130).²⁸**
 - d. **The Greek, pagan philosopher, Celsus (late 2nd c.) “...scoffed at Christianity for being a religion ... appealing to the simple and lowly and those without understanding, such as women, slaves and children”(Haskins, 85).²⁹ He criticized Christians as fools who believed Jesus had risen from the dead on the testimony of a woman and for allowing women to evangelize. (Haskins, 85. Osiek and MacDonald, 58).³⁰**

3. **The early Ascetic and Monastic movements (3rd – 6th c.) both blessed and damned women. In the mid-4th c., celibate women, often led by a wealthy widow, formed urban monastic communities devoted to prayer and the study of scriptures. They were admired for their spiritual lives and leadership; an example is Gregory of Nyssa’s praise for his sister, Saint Macrina’s wisdom and learning in his biography of her. (Malone, 135-142 and Brown, 370).³¹**
 - a. **As the persecutions ended mid-4th c., virginity and spirituality replaced martyrdom as the symbols of holiness and communities of celibate women gained status and followers. They were inspired by Jesus’ life in scripture, not by the invention of “Mary the Virgin” which came later (Malone, 145).³²**
 - b. **By the late 4th c., male leaders wrote of being amazed that women, the “weaker and more despised sex,” could be so disciplined (Malone, 151).³³ Due to the increasing practice of virginity among women, some bishops pressured male priests to be celibate. (Malone, 151; Brown, 357).³⁴**

4. **By the late 4th and early 5th c. many male leaders taught that celibacy was key to the highest spiritual life. Women were perceived as roadblocks to their spiritual perfection. Diatribes by Ambrose, Augustine and Jerome reduced women to their sexuality and reveal that women were seen as an existential threat to their salvation (Malone, 144-171; Brown, 425-427).³⁵**

- a. **The 5th c. doctrine of virginity** grew from John Chrysostom’s (d. 407) treatise, “On Virginity” and Ambrose’s hierarchy of spirituality in which Virginity was the supreme source of holiness and sainthood (Malone, 151; Brown, 353-357).³⁶
 - b. **Ambrose developed and promoted the concept of the Virgin Mary as “ever virgin”** claiming that **no part of Mary was “opened” in conceiving or giving birth to Jesus** and that **Jesus was not scarred by sex** (Malone, 157).³⁷
 - c. **Proscriptions limiting the leadership role of women were decreed in multiple Church Councils and Synods** (Malone, 131).³⁸
5. **In 4th c. studies of the ascetic life, demons were redefined as sin and temptations. This was a significant departure from the presentation of demons in the gospels as signifying an internal or mental illness in the Gospels (Ricci, 37-38).**³⁹
- a. In his “Life of St. Antony”, Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria (d. 373) outlined the characteristics of a holy, ascetic. He claimed to have interviewed Antony who described “demons” as temptations that terrified the holy in a number of ways such as deceiving “... the heart by openly filthy pleasure” and assuming “the shapes of women... as well as beasts and armies.”⁴⁰
 - b. It must be noted that ascetics used abstinence and fasting to strive for human and spiritual freedom not to just control their bodies. **Anxiety about “demons” of lust emerged from those who studied asceticism not from ascetics** (Brown, 442).⁴¹
 - c. This 4th c. distortion of demons is key to Pope Gregory I’s “penitent Magdalene” distortion of the late 6th century. He claimed that Mary Magdalene’s “seven demons” had to be the seven deadly sins (Forty Homilies, 269).⁴² **The 20th c. retrieval of the gospel meaning of demons is key to the restoration of the Mary Magdalene of the gospels (Ricci, 37-38).**⁴³
6. **Theology of the Sources of Evil – A Dark Legacy:** In the 4th – 5th c. theologians developed theories of the sources of evil. Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine claimed sexual urges, lust and sensuality were evidence of our “depraved nature” and the sinful state we inherited from Adam.
- a. **Ambrose and Augustine, in particular, left us (mostly in the West) a legacy of anxiety about sex and sinfulness.** They pressed clergy to be celibate rather than recognizing celibacy as a calling. Augustine created a large body of teaching on other topics, however, his conviction that sexual urges were evidence of man’s broken will and depravity **contributed to the accretion of ideas, opinions and blindness to Jesus’ example of including women in his ministry** (Gioia).⁴⁴ Despite Genesis 1:27, he taught **that women were not made in God’s image, that they must be subject to men** and that **women and men could not be friends** (Malone 167).⁴⁵ **This hostility to women** (Malone, 152-163; Haskins, 89-90)⁴⁶ **may have contributed to Pope Gregory I’s conclusion that Mary Magdalene “had to be” Luke’s sinner.** (DeBoer 2007, 4).⁴⁷
 - b. **In contrast, Julian of Eclanum proposed that sexual urges were created by God, that men and women could live as friends and that clergy could be married though they should be “continent” after ordination** (Brown, 408-415)⁴⁸ and John Cassian rebutted Augustine’s teaching on lust (Brown, 420).⁴⁹ **Clearly their voices did not dominate western theology for centuries.**

7. **With this growing antipathy to women leaders and anxiety about women as “demons”, Mary Magdalene’s authority was questioned in the 4th- 6th centuries.** Commentators still praised her Resurrection witness, but with qualifications and **she became identified more with Eve’s sin than with her redemption**
- a. Gregory of Nyssa (d. 394, Cappadocia) and Jerome (d. 420) praised Mary Magdalene for redeeming Eve who they saw as the source of sin (Schaberg and Johnson-DeBaufre, 47).⁵⁰ As opposition to women leaders grew and as women were increasingly characterized as impure and dangerous, Mary Magdalene became Eve’s “sin,” not her redemption (Schaberg and Johnson-DeBaufre, 47).⁵¹ This association of Eve, “sin” and claims that women cannot be trusted continue to have a devastating effect on Christian women and the church.
 - b. Based on Jesus’ command to Mary Magdalene, “... don’t cling to me” or “don’t touch me” (John 20:17), Jerome concluded, “she was not worthy to touch [Jesus].” He speculated that she could be Luke’s sinner, but did not assert that (Haskins 58).⁵²
 - c. **Augustine praised, but also diminished the significance of her being commissioned to proclaim the Resurrection by claiming that Jesus appeared to her only because she sought him “more ardently, being of a more emotional nature than the apostles who are of the stronger sex”**(Haskins, 94).⁵³
 - d. **In the 6th c., with “... a heightened unbiblical hostility to women”⁵⁴ official roles for women (orders of Widows and Deacons) were removed or banned by Synods and Councils such as the 5th Council of Carthage (401) and the Synod of Epaon, (517) (Kung, 65; Malone, 131).⁵⁵ Eventually, the only way women had authority and autonomy was to renounce their sexuality and live in celibate communities (Malone, 132).⁵⁶ These evolved into monastic orders which, in the 7th – 9th c. would be key to evangelizing the Celtic and Germanic peoples of north and Western Europe.**
8. **Confusion about the identities of Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany and Luke’s unnamed sinner** grew as each had elements of “**incense and weeping**”⁵⁷ in their stories (Haskins, 93). All three were not conflated until 591.
- a. Augustine (d. 430) thought Mary of Bethany, who in John’s gospel (12:1-8) anointed Jesus’ feet in anticipation of his death, may have been Luke’s unnamed sinner but he did not associate Mary of Bethany with Mary Magdalene (Haskins, 94-95).⁵⁸
 - b. Ambrose (d. 397) asked, “Were there Mary, the sister of Lazarus, and Mary of Magdalen [sic], or more people?”³⁰ but did not reach a conclusion.
9. **“Flamboyant legends of converted prostitutes”** were popular in the 4th-6th centuries. They were used to illustrate how women (not men), such as Saint Afra could repent and return to God. In fact, Palladius collected their stories in a book about reformed prostitutes in the desert (Malone, 134).⁵⁹

By the late 6th c. the belief that the Christian church was destined to be hierarchical was established (Brown, 359-361).⁶⁰ The Roman Empire’s laws and social structures, both just and unjust, including slavery, authoritarian rule, subjugation of women, forced prostitution of slaves, etc. – were accepted by most bishops (Anderson, 14).⁶¹ Some regions selected bishops from monasteries to assure that they were celibate. (Brown, 431-432).⁶²

C. In 591, in this social and ecclesiological (i.e., church hierarchy) context, Pope St. Gregory I invented a new Mary Magdalene. He arbitrarily merged her with Mary of Bethany and transformed both into Luke’s unnamed “sinner from the city” (Lk 7:37), known popularly as the “penitent prostitute.” Only the western church accepted this, not the eastern churches.

1. In his homily on Luke 7: 36-50, Gregory I applied the 4th century definition of “demons as temptations and sin” to Mary Magdalene’s “seven demons” (Luke 8:2) saying they equaled the totality of vices.⁶³ Jesus’ 1st century healing of these “seven demons” meant she had an internal or mental illness – not that she was sinful.⁶⁴ Even worse, in his homily on penitence, Gregory spoke of only one woman and her supposed sexual sin; “The suggestion is clear: women are above all sexual beings and their sexuality has to be controlled and tamed.” (DeBoer, 182; Schaberg and Johnson-DeBaufre, 48).⁶⁵ This generated legends, art, and teachings which still have a negative presence today.⁶⁶
2. In homily 25 on John 20:1-18, Gregory I praised Mary Magdalene’s perseverance and faith, acknowledged her Resurrection witness. However, he again presented her as a “sinner” and claimed she went to the tomb seeking mercy, rather than as a faithful disciple. He saw Jesus’ selection of her to announce the resurrection as redemption for Eve’s sin, “the source of death for man.”⁶⁷ **He ignored that Jesus commissioned her to proclaim his Resurrection and that John’s Resurrection text does not include any reference to a sinner. Thus, in one homily Gregory negated her commissioning and created the mixed “penitent prostitute/Resurrection witness” image.** (De Boer, 183).⁶⁸
3. **In sharp contrast**, in the east about the same time, **Gregory, Bishop of Antioch** (d. 593) (now in northern Syria) gave a sermon in which he **imagined Jesus saying to the women at his tomb, “Be the first apostles to the apostles. So that Peter ... learns that I can also ordain even women as apostles”** (Haskins,92; De Boer, 167-68).⁶⁹
4. Multiple factors led to this 6th c. conflation and denigration of Mary Magdalene. By then male leaders ignored Jesus’ example of including women in his ministry and ignored the fact that, in canonical texts, Jesus did not designate women as a source of sin. **“Gregory the Great’s image of Mary Magdalene as a penitent and a reformed prostitute is a construct and must be rejected not only on moral, but also on historical grounds”** (De Boer, 183).⁷⁰

D. How did the themes of Gregory I’s homilies on Mary Magdalene evolve into a multi-part legend of the sinner/proclaimer Magdalene, help shape the church’s view of women and still, today, influence art, music, film and literature? This history applies only to the Western Church.

1. Venerable Bede, Abbot of Jarrow, (d. 735) brought Gregory I’s conflation to eastern England through his preaching and his commentary on Luke’s gospel in the early 8th century (Haskins, 109).⁷¹
 - a. Perhaps as a result of Bede’s preaching a (false) image of Mary Magdalene washing Jesus’ feet was included on the Ruthwell Cross. It was installed in the early 8th c. in what is now southern Scotland – close to a double abbey in Northumbria of celibate women and men (Haskins, 109-110).⁷²

2. **The *Vita eremitica beatae Marie Magdaleneae*, a late 9th c. legend known in Italy, Germany and England, describes Mary Magdalene retreating to the desert, emerging only to ask to be buried by a priest.** It may have developed from tales of the 5th century Mary of Egypt, a hermit who had been a prostitute (Haskins, 120).⁷³ By the 12th c. it was woven into Gregory I's conflation to create the fantastical, medieval Provençal legend.
3. **In the 10th c. Odo of Cluny (d. 942) included excerpts from Gregory's homily 33 in a sermon on Mary Magdalene.** He portrayed her as a **forgiven sinner, a model of zealous devotion who followed the Lord, and "through [being] the herald of the resurrection removed the dishonor of the female sex created by Eve."** She was the "Apostle to the Apostles" with the "virtues of poverty, obedience, chastity and servitude" but not the authority to teach. Odo's sermon was read to the monks at Cluny at least once a year for several centuries (Haskins, 114).⁷⁴
 - a. In 1037, Geoffrey from Cluny, became the Abbot of Vezelay; by 1050 he used the cult of Magdalene⁷⁵ to build Vezelay into one of the wealthiest pilgrim centers (Haskins, 114-121).⁷⁶
4. **In the 10th c. Gregory I's and Odo's sermons were combined with the *Vita Eremetica* to create two similar medieval legends. They both portrayed Mary Magdalene as a disciple who had landed in southern France with her supposed sister and brother (Martha and Lazarus of Bethany), as a penitent prostitute, Resurrection witness, miracle worker, preacher who became a hermit in a cave in Ste. Baume (Haskins, 120).⁷⁷ The two main legends differed in their emphasis on her Resurrection witness.**
 - a. **The Provençal legend, which came to dominate, has just two lines on Mary Magdalene's Resurrection role.** This legend was part of "The Golden Legends," a popular 12-13th c. collection of lives of the saints that was read to pilgrims staying at abbeys while visiting her shrines (Schaberg and Johnson-DeBaufre, 50).⁷⁸ **The abbeys and towns with Mary Magdalene shrines acquired great wealth** (Haskins, 115-116).⁷⁹
 - b. **The 12th c. legend, *The Life of Mary Magdalene and her Sister Martha*, elaborated on her Resurrection witness and preaching in five of its 21 chapters** (Schaberg, 94).⁸⁰ **Elegant images of Mary Magdalene preaching may derive from this legend, such as one at the Cathedral "Vieille Major, Marseille"** (Ricci, 115, 118).⁸¹
5. **By the mid-11th – 15th centuries she was honored as both "the penitential model for all sinners" and the Resurrection witness.**
 - a. **Mary Magdalene's witness** is recalled in the Easter Sequence section that begins, "Tell Us Mary What You Saw on the Way" (c. 1050) (Haskins, 210; Osiek, *Give Us This Day*, 28-29).⁸²
 - b. Some regions had a double mass complete with Magdalene hymns recalling her penitence and her Resurrection witness; attendance was mandatory in some areas.
 - c. **The memory of Mary Magdalene as Resurrection proclaimer was preserved in at least two 12th-13th psalters for women in abbeys, one for Christina of Markyate** (Haskins, Frontispiece and 220).⁸³
 - d. **Penitential fraternities in northern Italy and Spain** took Mary Magdalene as their patroness in the 13-15th centuries (Haskins, 145-147).⁸⁴ **Banners** used in their processions **reveal a reverence for Mary Magdalene as an intercessor.**

6. **13th c. Theology changed when Aristotle’s work, newly translated into Latin, was introduced to Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-1274) (Haskins, 148).⁸⁵**
 - a. Aquinas used Aristotle’s **dehumanized image of women lacking in reasoning power (*Politics*) to “... put her in the same category as children and mental deficient” and to justify excluding women from the priesthood and from preaching (Haskins, 178-79).⁸⁶**
 - b. In effect, **Albertus Magnus and Aquinas elevated a 5th c. pagan, Greek philosopher above the gospels as the source for Christianity’s thinking about women. They accepted Aristotle’s view of women as is, without interrogating it against scripture. Through their writings they gave Aristotle’s view of women a theological veneer (Haskins, 150).⁸⁷**
 - c. **Aquinas specifically diminished Mary Magdalene’s witness saying she proclaimed resurrection to only “apostles” and had not seen Jesus’s actual rising so she was not an “official” witness. It must be noted that no male disciples saw Jesus’ actual rising, but that did not diminish them to Aquinas (Haskins, 178).⁸⁸**
7. **The *Summa Praedicatorum*, a collection of 13th-14th c. sermons for traveling monks embodied Aristotle/Aquinas’ view of women. The chapter, “Luxuria,” contains sermons that portray women as vessels of sin, expound at length on the dangers “of lustful and false women” and depict the female body in detail as “the greatest filth” (Haskins, 152).⁸⁹**
8. **During the final campaign to mandate clerical celibacy in the 12th c., women were constantly portrayed as obstacles to holiness. Bishops pursued laws and “reforms” to restrict women’s abbeys with support from some secular leaders. By the 14th c. all women religious were cloistered, their incomes cut, and the authority of abbesses almost eliminated. The bishops who led these “reforms” seem to have been motivated by power rather than theological issues (Malone, 172-197).⁹⁰**
9. **In the 13th – 16th c. women, primarily in northern Europe, found other ways to live the gospel. “Begunines”, often led by royal women, **pooled their resources to form communities not under a bishop’s rule**, to work with the poor and sick. Bishops repeatedly examined them and demanded they be cloistered. “Celebrated spiritual writers and mystics including Mechtild of Magdeburg, Beatrijs of Nazareth, Hadewijch of Brabant, and Marguerite Porete, who was condemned as a heretic and burned at the stake in Paris in 1310.” were Begunines.” (Swan, 163 and AbesBooks.com web summary).⁹¹**

E. What happened? Why, after 1570, was Mary Magdalene seen as only the “penitent prostitute?”⁹² Christians in the west had seen her both “Penitent Prostitute and Resurrection Witness” for over 9 centuries (7th-late 16th c.) (Haskins, 248).⁹²

1. **To counter the Protestant Reformation, the Council of Trent (1545-1563) of the Roman Church re-emphasized penitence and indulgences. They mandated the first standard missal and calendar of saints of 1570; in them Mary Magdalene was labeled only as “penitent”; reference to her Resurrection witness was erased (De Boer, 14-15).⁹³**
2. **The “penitent” epithet generated two new art themes- “The Penitent Magdalene” and the “Conversion of Magdalene.” In these paintings she forever begs for forgiveness, often shown nude or semi-nude removing jewels and luxurious clothes. **Nude images further****

denigrated her, made her an object, not a witness; they betray a streak of voyeurism and created visual essays “in eroticism in the guise of sanctity (Haskins, 257 and 308).⁹⁴

F. How did we begin to regain the Mary Magdalene of scripture?

1. **With deeper study of the scripture texts, at least two 16th-18th c. scholars challenged the Roman church’s “unicity theory”** that conflated Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany, and Luke’s unnamed sinner. Jacques Lefèvre d’Étaples (1517) and Calumet (1737) were both condemned and ostracized for their theories (Haskins, 250-251, 328).⁹⁵
2. **19th and 20th century scholars across Christian denominations developed new tools for historical critical and rhetorical analysis of original scripture texts.** They re-examined and revised conclusions about Mary Magdalene’s identity.’
3. **1943 was a turning point for Catholic scholarship:** Catholic women entered the field; An advanced Theology degree program was opened to American Catholic women at St. Mary’s College. The first woman, Kathryn Sullivan, RSCJ, was admitted to the Catholic Biblical Association. Also in 1943, Pope Pius XII allowed Catholic scholars to study original biblical texts. (*Divino Afflante Spiritus*, issued by Pius XII on Sept. 30, 1943).⁹⁶
4. Vatican II – The Vatican agreed that Mary Magdalene was not the “sinner from the city.” Instead, she was a close disciple who came up with Jesus from Galilee, supported his ministry from her means (Lk 8:1-3), remained a faithful presence at the cross (Mk 15:40-41, Mt 27:50-51, Jn 19:25), went to the tomb on the first Easter, and was the first witness and first commissioned by Jesus to proclaim his Resurrection (Mt 28:1-10, Jn 20:-18).
 - a. They agreed that the texts showed **she was not Luke’s unnamed “sinner from the city”** / “penitent prostitute” and was not Mary of Bethany (Ricci, 34-37).⁹⁷
 - b. 1970 - The gospel for her mass was changed to half of John’s Resurrection text (Jn 20: 1, 11-18); two footnotes in the 1969 Liturgical Calendar stated her role in scripture. There were no changes to “penitent” references in clergy’s Breviary until 1978 (Haskins, 388; *Calendarium Romanum*, 98, 131).⁹⁸
5. **Transformative studies by pioneering feminist biblical scholars introduced new views and missing pieces.**
 - a. Post Vatican II Women Religious reassessed their charisms and sent members to ThD and Scripture PhD programs – S. Schneiders, B. Reid, MK Hilkert, E. Johnson, and more
 - b. They taught/still teach and have developed 2nd, 3rd and 4th waves of feminist biblical scholars (women and men) whose work supports restoration of Mary Magdalene’s “ministry of witness.” (Schneiders, “Encountering”).⁹⁹
 - c. The discovery of the Gospel of Mary Magdalene added new vigor and interest.
6. **2016 - the Roman Church elevated Mary Magdalene’s memorial to a Feast.**¹⁰⁰
 - a. The Vatican’s decree makes her witness “official” with this concise “Proper Preface” for her mass: “He appeared in the garden and revealed himself to Mary Magdalene, for she had loved him while he was alive, seen him dying on the Cross, sought him as he lay in the tomb, and

was the first to adore him newly risen from the dead. He honored her with the task of being Apostle to the Apostles, so that the good news of new life might reach the ends of the earth.”

- b. This Proper Preface depicts the Mary Magdalene as disciple, witness and chosen Resurrection proclaimer.¹⁰¹ Hopefully, it will inspire new art, music, films, books, etc.

G. But why does she still remain “forgiven, but forever sinful” in the popular imagination?

1. **Mary Magdalene remained “forgiven, but forever sinful” in art, literature, plays and movies and in our popular imagination after 1970 because:**
 - a. **The Vatican did not issue an official, public correction in 1970.** Few priests, catechists, art critics, authors or artists knew of it. Distorted images from the Provençal Legend continued in homilies, art, literature, movies and even in Children’s Bibles (see endnote 66).
 - b. **The denigrating art remains** - museums and churches still present her as **“penitent prostitute” at Jesus’ feet or semi-nude** in prayer. There are no new labels to make clear **these images do not reflect scripture.**
 - c. **No new corrective art commissioned by bishops.** (Some organizations did create new art, however it is not widely distributed.)
 - d. **Her witness was described as “unofficial” for example, in a 1973 report for the Vatican by the Catholic / Lutheran commission.**¹⁰²
2. **After the Vatican’s 2016 Decree elevating her mass to a Feast there was some publicity but again no new art, no corrections of old portrayals,** no other overt actions, so she still remains “forgiven, but forever sinful.” New art, seminarian training, preaching guides and correction of old art are needed on a larger scale. In 2018 a few newspapers picked up the story of Mary Magdalene’s Feast and identity in the context of the “#MeToo” movement.¹⁰³

H. Value of Correcting Misrepresentations - 20th & 21st Centuries: What needs to happen now?

1. Restoration of Mary Magdalene as a leader and authentic witness highlights the radical nature of Jesus’ inclusion of women and other marginalized people in his ministry. (Ricci, 44-45).¹⁰⁴
2. New, positive depictions that present her as a model of faith and leadership will help change the perception of Mary Magdalene as a “sexually sinful penitent.”
3. The unnamed woman (Mk 14:1-9, Mt 26:1-13) and Mary of Bethany (Jn 12:1-8) who **prophetically anointed Jesus before his death were also lost in Gregory I’s depiction of Mary Magdalene as “penitent prostitute”.** New art, songs, poetry and preaching that celebrates their faithful and prophetic witness will bring more of their gospel role to the world.

4. Updating museum labels on old art that misrepresents Mary Magdalene as a penitent can also help counter the legends and bring her real gospel story to more of the public. A sample label is included in the endnotes.
5. The social impact and psychological damage of the slanderous representations and official condemnations of Mary Magdalene, of monastic women, of Beguines - needs to be assessed so we can begin the correction and regain the Full Gospel.

Her 2016 Feast designation opens the way for more to see Mary Magdalene as the Proclaimer of the Resurrection and to replace the medieval legends of the “Penitent Magdalene”.

The ReclaimMagdalene project will publicize the Vatican’s correction and advocate for new art in all forms to honor Mary Magdalene’s Resurrection witness, faith, and leadership. Please join us by creating, advocating for, and sharing new art that honors her.
<http://reclaimmagdalene.org> #ReclaimMagdalene

Proposed Label for Artwork that Misrepresents Mary Magdalene:

In scripture Mary Magdalene (or “Mary of Magdala”) stayed at the cross, was the first to witness the risen Jesus and the first disciple Jesus commissioned to proclaim his Resurrection. (John 20:1-18, Matt 28:1-10) Scripture scholars agree that the only scripture texts that refer to Mary of Magdala are those that include her name and so she is not any of the unnamed women in the New Testament.

Example: “Repentant Magdalene” by Cagnacci does not depict Mary of Magdala as she appears in scripture. Rather it is based on a legend that incorrectly conflated three unrelated scripture texts: the unnamed “sinner from the city” who washed Jesus’ feet with her tears (Luke 7:36-50), the unnamed woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11) and Mary of Bethany who anointed Jesus’ feet in preparation for his death (John 12:1-10). This legend created a negative view of Mary of Magdala. It suppressed depictions of her positive role as the leader of the women disciples and as the first apostle commissioned by Jesus to proclaim his Resurrection. (Matthew 28:1-10, John 20:1-18) The negative legend also suppressed positive depictions of Mary of Bethany’s prophetic act of anointing Jesus’ feet in anticipation of his death. Mary of Bethany was the sister of Martha and Lazarus.