

**Boston College**  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AND MINISTRY

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**Transcript of**  
**"Mary Magdalene: Pieces of a Natural History"**

presented on J

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representation of Mary Magdalene develops in preaching and devotion in the Middle Ages. By way of conclusion, I will attempt to make some connections and to relate these shifting mosaics of Mary Magdalene to our contemporary questions, appropriations, and possible futures.

After last year's spectacular slide show presentation of images of Mary Magdalene, I didn't

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First, let's think of her or visualize her as apostola apostolorum , and in a moment as a woman anointing Jesus. Some who were present at that dinner that night judged her to be wasteful of money that would be better spent on the poor. They found Mary of Bethany, who with her sister Martha hosts a dinner to celebrate Jesus's raising of their brother Lazarus. Mary makes an ointment of precious perfume and nard to anoint his feet, wiping away the excess with her hair. Judas complains of the waste in these gestures.

And they found another anonymous woman, a woman of the city who was a sinner, who crashes dinner parties at the house of Simon the Pharisee and washes the feet of Jesus (i)-20.2(m)-.6(n6( comities sraeiair of20-2.5( )0.6(J)-o8.6(h)nerandeof3-2.1(u)-1k.6(x)-10.6(e).4(

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Hippolytus writes on the Song of Songs, he sees Mary and Martha of Bethany together as apostles to the apostles.

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the place more glorious than any bridal chamber. Come see the dumb tomb that loudly sings the power of him who was buried there."

At this point in the sermon, the angel concludes with an admonition. "See that you do not hide the wonder by keeping silent." The women then run to the tomb, together rather than competitively— [LAUGHTER]—where they encounter the Lord bodily present before them. Jesus reveals to them all that his resurrection has accomplished reversing the sin and death of humankind in Eve and Adam, recalling for us Hippolytus's similar use of Eve—pardon me—of Mary, comparison of Mary with Eve.

Jesus reveals to them the death of humankind that renews human nature and restores and establishes firmly its capacity for immortality. He urges the women to be joyful, to dance, to rejoice, and to feast. And he commissions them, sending them out:

Go, tell my disciples. See that I bear not hate, but loving kindness. I call them brothers who left me alone at the moment of the Crucifixion. I know how to be generous when I am violated. I know how to bear it when I am treated ungratefully. I know how to be lenient for the weakness of my friend. I know how to show compassion to those who sin and weep about it. Go, tell my brothers that they must go to Calvary and that they will see me there. Tell my disciples the mysteries that you have seen. Be the first teachers of the teachers. Let Peter, who has denied me, learn that I can also ordain or make women to be apostles.

That is what the Lord said to the women.

This wonderful narration so typical, characteristic, so filled with the Orthodox ethos and spirituality, with their understanding of humanity, of creation, of sin, and of salvation. This wonderful narration is not without its problematic parts, of course. And most notably so in regard to its treatment of the Jews. Nor does it automatically translate into ecclesial structures and practices. Though the Eastern churches still honor the myrrh-bearers on the second Sunday after Easter, and they have a long history of women deacons throughout the Byzantine Empire, and some would argue, continuously to the present day.

The Greek Orthodox Church around the world has been discussing the restoration of women deacons for two decades now. They move slowly, but eventually their mills grind fine. But they are talking about it. There is a movement. There is official participation of bishops at consultations in Rhodes, in Geneva, and elsewhere, in the United States. There is a strong movement here at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Theological School in Brookline.

Last year, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Alexandria in Egypt ordained women deacons for the Orthodox Church in Congo in February, 2017, and has stated that he intends to extend this restoration of the female diaconate for the mission of the church in Egypt in order to tell his brothers and sisters what Mary Magdalene had seen. Of course there has been a mixed reception and there is ongoing debate, but the historical precedents are undeniable, and the myrrh-bearing women speak in witness as well.

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writings of St. Jerome. [LAUGHTER] He writes, "Her eyes—" sorry. Feverish enough to make my throat dry. [LAUGHTER] "Her eyes had sought earthly things. Now chastising them through repentance, she wept. She had used her hair to beautify her face. Now she used it to wipe away her tears. She had spoken proudly with her mouth, but in kissing the Lord's feet she fixed it to the footsteps of her Redeemer. She converted the number of her faults into the number of virtues so she could serve God as completely in repentance as she had rejected him in sin."

This is so typically a Western frame of mind. Western and Roman. The rest of the homily is considerably more recollected in tone, as Gregory pieces together the Gospel text he draws on from his extensive study of the Scriptures and his inherited cultural assumptions about women and men. I'm sorry. This sentence does not make any sense. [LAUGHTER]

Gregory pieces together Gospel text he draws on from his extensive study of the Scriptures and his inherited cultural assumptions about women and men. He comes to the Scriptures with cultural presuppositions, as do we all. It is from these sources that he constructs the woman he understands to be Mary Magdalene, a repentant prostitute, a great sinner. In doing so—unwittingly, I think—he sets the context for later Western believers and preachers to perceive her likewise. In evaluating h

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