

Mary Magdalene and Jesus in the Medieval Liturgy

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Frank Henderson's Page on Liturgy and Medieval Women

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Introduction

At the core of Dan Brown's novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, is the idea that Jesus and Mary Magdalene married and had children, thus that their relationship was marital and sexual. In addition, this book claims that the Roman Catholic Church has concealed the real nature of their relationship. I consider these ideas to be legitimate acts of imagination on the part of a writer of fiction – but nothing more.

Neither fans nor detractors of *The Da Vinci Code* seem to be aware that the Roman Catholic Church has in fact spoken publicly about the relationship between Mary Magdalene and Jesus for more than twelve centuries. Its message on this subject has been communicated especially in the biblical texts and prayers used for Mass on July 22, the feast of St Mary Magdalene in the Church's liturgical calendar. These Mass texts have been in use at least since the seventh century; some changes were made in 1570, but the basic message was not much affected. Since 1970 the liturgy for July 22 has expressed a different appreciation of Mary Magdalene and her relationship with Jesus.

The pre-1970 biblical-liturgical message regarding Jesus and Mary Magdalene said that their relationship was "nuptial", but not marital and not sexual. This may be surprising, and may be difficult for people today to appreciate. But it was never a secret.

Here I first name the multiple biblical stories used in the Mass liturgy for July 22, the feast of St Mary Magdalene. After an interlude that deals with methodology and background, I continue by laying out the biblical texts through which these multiple stories are told. The next

step is to show how these stories and texts are woven together in the July 22 liturgy to tell a new and unified story of Mary Magdalene. Finally I make a brief critical appraisal of this liturgy and its view of Mary Magdalene and add a few additional reflections.

I do not deal with either gnostic traditions or medieval legends of Mary Magdalene, as neither has influenced the liturgical texts studied here. In addition, both subjects deserve and have recently received more extensive study than is possible now. There is one small exception, however, as will be noted below.

Other articles on Mary Magdalene that I have posted on this website are the following:

Where have all the Marys Gone?

The Disappearance of the Feast of Mary Magdalene from the Anglican Liturgy

The Feast of Mary Magdalene in Modern Anglican Liturgies

[the latter article also considers modern Lutheran and Roman Catholic liturgies]

The definitive reference on Mary Magdalene and the liturgy is the following:

Victor Saxer, *Le Culte de Marie Madaleine en Occident*

Paris: Clavreuil 1959

Multiple Biblical Stories and Liturgical Settings

The story of Mary Magdalene and Jesus that is proclaimed on July 22 is generated by bringing together a number of individual stories; in the course of the liturgy the latter are woven into a new creation. Here I first name the separate stories, giving as well the relevant biblical passages involved and the parts of the liturgy in which they are used.

The naming of significant biblical passages is not a simple matter. Some biblical passages are used in full in the July 22 liturgy; others only in part. Most stories are told only once, but some are used several times. Some stories are lengthy; others are brief. One biblical passage is interpreted here as telling two distinct stories. Finally, some stories remind us of additional, related biblical passages that I consider to be included in the liturgy “by implication,” even though they are not actually printed in the liturgical books; these are sometimes indicated here by the use of square brackets. I also include two texts that are more prominent in preaching and legend than in actual liturgical texts.

Relevant biblical texts are found in every part of the Mass liturgy for July 22 up to and including the offertory verse: introit, collect, epistle or first reading, gradual, alleluia, sequence, gospel or second reading, and offertory. They are also found in the last two proper texts, the communion and postcommunion. However, biblical texts relevant to Mary Magdalene are not found in other proper prayers (secret, preface) or in the ordinary texts of the Mass, for example the canon.

The creed refers to one of the biblical stories of Mary Magdalene simply by its presence. In the symbolic language of the medieval liturgy the use of the creed says that the saint of the day is an apostle, pointing to the story of Mary being commissioned to be an apostle to the apostles. Finally, the Mass as a whole, and especially its invariable parts -- offertory rite, canon, communion rite – commemorate the death and resurrection of Christ and hence bring to mind, especially on July 22, biblical stories of Mary Magdalene at the cross and the tomb.

In summary, the liturgy of July 22 includes the following biblical passages and tells these stories in the liturgical settings named.

A princess marries a king and becomes queen

Psalm 44 (Vulgate) / Psalm 45 (NRSV) (Vulgate verse numbers)

Introit - 44:1

Gradual - 44:3-4, 10-11, 14-15

Offertory - 44:9

Communion - 44:2

A capable wife manages her household

Proverbs 31:10-31

Epistle or first reading

Lady Wisdom manages her household

Proverbs 31:10-31

Epistle or first reading

[Mary travels with Jesus and disciples and supports them financially

Luke 8:1-3

Implied reading based on Proverbs 31:10-31]

Mary makes the better choice, to converse with Jesus

Luke 10:42 (38-42)

Alleluia - 10:42

Postcommunion - 10:42

Jesus sends Mary as apostle to tell the other apostles and disciples that he is risen.

John 20:17-18 (11-18)

Sequence (portion): - 20:17-18

Creed (use of creed implies 20:17-18)

The sinful and penitent woman washes Jesus' feet with her tears and anoints them with precious ointment; Jesus declares her sins forgiven.

Luke 7:36-50

Collect (allusion/paraphrase)
Sequence (portion)
Gospel or second reading

[Other women also anoint Jesus
Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8.
Implied readings based on Luke 7:36-50]

Jesus and Mary love each other
Luke 7:47 + John 11:5
Preaching

[Mary Magdalene at the Cross and the Tomb
Matthew 27:55-56; Mark 15:40-41; John 19:25 (Cross)
Matthew 28:1ff; Mark 16:1-8, 9-11; Luke 23:55-56; 24:1-11;
John 20:1-2, 11-18; (Tomb)
Implied readings based on theology of the offertory rite, canon, and
communion rite]

A Biblical-Liturgical Methodology

The list presented above shows that a number of biblical stories are included in the Mass liturgy for the feast of St Mary Magdalene. It has also been stated that these individual stories are woven into the single story of Mary Magdalene in the course of the liturgy. How is this to be carried out? What method might be pursued in considering this objective? Here are some initial thoughts on this matter.

First, it ought to be recognized that reading or hearing biblical stories in the context of the liturgy is not the same thing as reading and meditating on them privately, or discussing them in a bible study group, or subjecting them to scholarly analysis, or experiencing them in art or music. Rather, interpreting the biblical readings of the July 22 Mass liturgy requires its own methodology. This does not require great scholarly expertise, but does ask for the use of some imagination.

All the biblical texts used on July 22 are to be understood as in some way applying to Mary Magdalene; that is why the Church chose them for this liturgy. This is the case even when biblical passages had nothing at all to do with Mary Magdalene in their original context. And yet the original context is not ignored; there is a dialectic between the one story of Mary Magdalene and the many stories told in the individual passages.

Next, the multiple biblical passage of the liturgy are not to be read one after another as if they were independent. Instead, they interact and interpret one another; they connect with passages that both precede and follow them in the liturgy. The separate stories are like threads that are woven together into a new design, a process that often generates new insights.

Additionally, the biblical stories actually used in the July 22 liturgy may remind us of other passages that contribute to our appreciation of Mary Magdalene. Some of these may be sufficiently significant to be considered part of the liturgy “by implication,” even if not printed or read.

The songs sung on the feast of St Mary Magdalene are also important and make their own contribution; however, this matter goes beyond the scope of the present study.

Appreciating the biblical stories of the July 22 liturgy involves bringing several perspectives together to promote and express Christian spirituality and serve Christian worship.

Interpretative Framework

Two matters cut across many or all of the biblical passages used on the feast of St Mary Magdalene and should be considered here. One is the identity of Mary Magdalene. The other is “nuptial imagery”.

Identity of Mary Magdalene

The liturgy of the feast of Mary Magdalene includes gospel stories taken from Luke 7, Luke 10, John 11, and John 20; and by implication, Luke 8, Matthew 26, Mark 14, John 12 and still others. Obviously these texts speak about more than a single woman. Some passages speak of the “real” Mary of Magdala while other passages tell of several other women – some named and some nameless. Their inclusion in the July 22 liturgy, however, indicates that in this context, they are all intended to speak about Mary Magdalene.

By the “real” Mary of Magdala I mean the woman who was cured by Jesus and who, with other women traveled with and supported Jesus and his other disciples in their itinerant ministry (Luke 8:1-3). This same Mary watched the crucifixion of Jesus (Matthew 27:55-56; Mark 15:40-41; John 19:25) and then encountered the risen Christ, spoke with him in the garden (Matthew 28:1ff; Mark 16:1-8, 9-11; Luke 23:55-56; 24:1-11; John 20:1-2, 11-18), and was commissioned by him to carry the good news to the male apostles (John 20:17-18).

The medieval liturgy for the feast of St Mary Magdalene included this “real” Mary only as a minor figure. Her commissioning as apostle to the apostles is referred to in poetic paraphrase in the part of the liturgy called the sequence. Luke 8:1-3 is not an explicit part of the liturgy for this feast but is included only “by implication”. Her other roles in the gospels are either not included in the July 22 liturgy at all, or only indirectly. The more important women in this liturgy, therefore, are the unnamed woman of Luke 7 and Mary of Bethany; allusions to the unnamed women of Matthew 26 and Mark 14 may also be detected.

One might think that this use of biblical passages about several different women is an

example of biblical-liturgical imagination: bringing together in the liturgy biblical texts whose origins in some cases are not about Mary Magdalene at all. Historical studies, however, show that this use of biblical texts is the result of erroneous biblical interpretation dating from ca 500. From this time Mary Magdalene was widely thought of as a composite figure, made up of the real Mary of Magdala plus Mary of Bethany and the unknown women of Luke 7, Matthew 26, and Mark 14. This misidentification of Mary Magdalene lasted until 1970, when it was completely replaced. It should also be noted that the mis-identification of the biblical Mary of Magdala was a characteristic of the medieval western church. It was not held by the Eastern Orthodox Churches, nor by the Protestant churches, at least after ca 1550.

This issue will be raised again when the medieval liturgy is evaluated. In the meantime the medieval view of Mary Magdalene's identity will be accepted, as that is the basis for the Church's liturgy of the medieval period.

Nuptial Imagery

Biblical passages used in the Mass liturgy for the feast of St Mary Magdalene include stories of marriage, wives, households, and love. These are elements of "nuptial imagery", and they are intended to communicate the idea that Mary Magdalene and Jesus are in some way spouses: bride and groom, wife and husband. In this liturgical-theological context, however, this does not mean that they are married, or share sexual relations, or have children. The accommodation involved in the use of the biblical texts in this manner and context indicates that their nuptial relationship is a spiritual one.

This type of nuptial relationship was common and appreciated in the middle ages, though it is not as much either recognized or valued today. Because nuptial imagery is so important to the liturgical story of Mary Magdalene and Jesus that is under consideration here, and because it can easily be misunderstood, it will be given further attention here.

Origins

The idea that God is Israel's husband is set forth in several biblical passages, for example:

For your Maker is your husband,
the Lord of hosts is the Creator's name...
For the Lord has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit,
like the wife of a man's youth when she is cast off, says your God.

Isaiah 54:5-6

See also Isaiah 62:4-5 and Hosea 2:14-20..

In the Second Testament the image of the church as Christ's bride is raised up or alluded to several places, for example 2 Corinthians 11:2, Ephesians 5:22-23, John 3:29, Revelation 19:7, 9.

Another type of nuptial imagery is provided by Psalm 44/45, a text used (in part) for the feast of St Mary Magdalene. The psalm itself speaks of human marriage (that of a princess to a king). Later biblical passages (Hebrews 1:8-9 = Psalm 44/45:7-8), however, as well as subsequent Christian interpretation, have viewed this psalm as speaking about a different nuptial relationship, that of Christ and the church. This type of “second meaning” is also found in Christian reinterpretations of the Song of Songs.

Classification

Other types and examples of nuptial imagery are known in the liturgy and in Christian tradition, and the subject can become complex and difficult to appreciate. In an attempt to make the subject more transparent, I offer the following classification. Some preliminary comments are provided first.

First, nuptial relationships between two persons involve some kind of special closeness, affinity and bonding, though these may be of different kinds. This is taken for granted here.

Second, the two “persons” involved may be two human individuals, or a human individual and the divine, or a human collective personality and the divine, or a human individual and a human collective personality, or combinations of these. Most of these categories may be further subdivided.

The appreciation of nuptial imagery given here begins with ordinary human marriage and related relationships between two human persons. Relationships between human persons and the divine that may be considered nuptial or spousal, are then named.

(Nuptial imagery is also important in Judaism, for example Shabbat is viewed as bride in the Jewish liturgy. However, this is a subject of its own and is not considered further here.)

Nuptial Imagery in Christian Tradition: A Tentative Classification

Two Human Individuals

- Ordinary Human Marriage; this relationship is marital and sexual
- Particular Marriages, e.g., that of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Joseph, and some others: such relationships are marital but not sexual
- Concubinage: this relationship is sexual but not marital
- Symbolic Marriage: such relationships are neither marital or sexual, e.g, the Archbishop of Florence and Abbess of an important monastery (a medieval example)

A Human Individual and the Divine --The Risen Christ

- Such nuptial relationships are neither marital nor sexual
- Spiritual Marriage, e.g., nuns, who are considered to be brides of Christ
- Mystical Marriage, e.g., women such as Catherine of Sienna, who are

called into a particular type of relationship with Christ

A Human Corporate Personality and the Divine

Such nuptial relationships are neither marital nor sexual
Israel and God
The Church and Christ

A Human Individual and a Human Corporate Personality or a Putative Human Personality

Such nuptial relationships are neither marital nor sexual
Rulers and their people
Bishops and their church
The Doge of Venice and the Adriatic Sea (a medieval example)

Human Marriage plus Human-Divine Nuptial Relationships

Biblical texts that refer to regular human marriage (marital, sexual) are later viewed as referring to a relationship between humans and the divine (Jesus Christ) that is neither marital nor sexual.

Biblical Texts

The next phase of this study is to present and examine the full texts of all the biblical passages included in the Mass liturgy for the feast of St Mary Magdalene. In most cases, interpretations of modern scripture scholars are provided as well, both to indicate that my interpretation is not idiosyncratic and to provide another voice. If readers find these a distraction rather than a help, of course skip over them.

A Princess Marries A King and Becomes Queen

Psalm 44 in the Latin Vulgate Bible is Psalm 45 in NRSV and other versions of the Bible; Vulgate verses 1, 3-5, 11-12, 14-15 are used.

Selected verses of this psalm are used for four different elements of the liturgy: introit, gradual, offertory and communion. To show context and the way individual psalm verses are re-interpreted in the process of selection, the entire psalm is given below in the NRSV translation from the Hebrew. Verses used in the liturgy are interposed, in F. E. Warren's translation of the Latin Vulgate text (which would have been used in the medieval liturgy); these verses are also indented, italicized and identified as to liturgical use.

See *The Sarum Missal in English*. Translated by F. E. Warren. Alcuin Club Collection XI. London: A. W. Mowbray 1913, vol 2, p 417-419

Psalm 44 / 45

To the leader: according to Lillies. Of the Korahites.

A Maskil. A love song.

- 1 My heart overflows with a goodly theme;
I address my verses to the king;

Introit

*My heart is inditing [that is, proclaiming] of a good matter:
I speak of the things which I have made unto the King.*

- 2 my tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe.
You are the most handsome of men,
grace is poured upon your lips;
therefore God has blessed you forever.

Communion

Full of grace are thy lips, because God hath blessed thee for ever.

- 3 Gird your sword on your thigh, O mighty one,
in your glory and majesty.
4 In your majesty ride on victoriously
for the cause of truth and to defend the right;

Gradual B

*According to thy worship and renown:
Good luck have thou with thine honour, ride on.*

- 5 let your right hand teach you dread deeds.
Your arrows are sharp
in the heart of the king's enemies;
the peoples fall under you.
6 Your throne, O God, endures forever and ever.
Your royal scepter is a scepter of equity,
7 you love righteousness and hate wickedness.
Therefore God your God has anointed you
with the oil of gladness beyond your companions;
8 your robes are all fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia.
From ivory palaces stringed instruments make you glad;
9 daughters of kings are among your ladies of honor;
at your right hand stands the queen in gold of Ophir.
10 Hear, O daughter, consider and incline your ear;
forget your people and your father's house,
11 and the king will desire your beauty.

Gradual A

Hearken, O daughter, and consider, incline thine ear.

So shall the king have pleasure in thy beauty.

- 12 Since he is your lord, bow to him;
the people of Tyre will seek your favor with gifts,
the richest of the people 13 with all kinds of wealth.
14 The princess is decked in her chamber with gold-woven robes;
in many-colored robes she is led to the king;
behind her the virgins, her companions, follow.

Offertory

*Kings' daughters were among thy honourable women;
Upon thy right hand did stand the queen in a vesture of gold,
Wrought about with divers colours.*

- 15 With joy and gladness they are led along
as they enter the palace of the king.
16 In the place of ancestors you, O King, shall have sons;
you will make them princes in all the earth.
17 I will cause your name to be celebrated in all generations;
therefore the peoples will praise you forever and ever. [NRSV]

Verse 1 is an introduction, verses 2-9 refer to the king and bridegroom, and verses 10-15 to the princess bride; verses 16-17 return to the king. As used liturgically, however, all verses appear to be viewed as being spoken by or referring to the princess / queen.

The character of this psalm as a whole is set out in the commentary of Peter C Craigie. He states:

With respect to form, Psalm 45 is basically a royal psalm; specifically, it is described in the title as a love song, and the substance indicates that the love song should be interpreted as a wedding song. The content of the song focuses on the bride and groom, apparently in the context of the wedding ceremony as such.

There can be little doubt that this poetic composition originated in the wedding celebration for a particular king, composed for the occasion; subsequently, it would have been used frequently at royal weddings. (p 338)

After an introduction and initial section referring to the groom, the scene now shifts from the royal groom to the princess who is the bride, who is pictured as standing, perhaps in the palace, among the land's noblest women. The gold which adorns her is no doubt decorative, but . . . the poet has taken the visual element of gold and applied it, by implication to the inner worth of the princess.

The poet . . . urges [the princess] ... not to lament the loss of her paternal home, but to look

forward to the new love she will find in her groom, the king. She is not only to be married, but she is coming into a new position; no longer a daughter in her father's house, she will be a queen in her own house, whose favor is sought by men and women alike. (pp 339-340)

Peter C Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol 19.
Waco TX: Word Books 1983, pp 335-341

A Capable Wife Manages Her Household

Prior to 1570, this was the epistle or first reading for the July 22 Mass liturgy; the entire passage is read.

Proverbs 31:10-31

- 10 A capable wife who can find?
 She is far more precious than jewels.
- 11 The heart of her husband trusts in her,
 and he will have no lack of gain.
- 12 She does him good, and not harm,
 all the days of her life.
- 13 She seeks wool and flax
 and works with willing hands,
- 14 She is like the ships of the merchant
 she brings her food from far away.
- 15 She rises while it is still night
 and provides food for her household
 and tasks for her servant girls.
- 16 She considers a field and buys it;
 with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.
- 17 She girds herself with strength,
 and makes her arms strong.
- 18 She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.
 Her lamp does not go out at night.
- 19 She puts her hands to the distaff,
 and her hands hold the spindle,
- 20 She opens her hand to the poor,
 and reaches out her hands to the needy.
- 21 She is not afraid for her household when it snows,
 for all her household are clothed in crimson.
- 22 She makes herself coverings;
 her clothing is fine linen and purple.
- 23 Her husband is known in the city gates,
 taking his seat among the elders of the land.
- 24 She makes linen garments and sells them;
 she supplies the merchant with sashes.

25 Strength and dignity are her clothing,
and she laughs at the time to come.
26 She opens her mouth with wisdom,
and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.
27 She looks well to the ways of her household,
and does not eat the bread of idleness.
28 Her children rise up and call her happy,
her husband too, and he praises her.
29 Many women have done excellently;
but you surpass them all.
30 Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain,
but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.
31 Give her a share in the fruit of her hands,
and let her words praise her in the city gates. [NRSV]

The first words of this passage may also be translated “a woman of worth”, “a valiant woman”, and “a woman of strength”.

Carole R. Fontaine gives the following commentary:

The family unit picture here is an elite one, in keeping with the sages’ social background and goals. The wealth of the woman and the forethought with which she provides for the future well-being of her home are more than a simple reflection of the milieu of the sages, however. Just as Woman Wisdom began the book with promises of wealth, happiness, honor, and long life as the reward for following her prudent teachings, the Woman of Worth and her fine household represent the concrete fulfillment of those earlier promises and so make a fitting conclusion to the work. While there is evidence here of possibilities that only elite women could realize in their everyday lives (the purchase of land, for example, in v 16), it is likely that this picture of rosy contentment and good fortune is held up as a goal to which all wives, regardless of their social statuses, ought to aspire. As seen earlier, the success of this woman is viewed from the perspective of what she provides for her husband and children. It is her fulfillment of the roles in the home assigned to her by society that causes her to be praised in the very gates of the city where woman Wisdom first raised her cry. (p 153-160 [here 160])

Carole R. Fontaine, “Proverbs”, in Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, eds., *Women’s Bible Commentary*. Expanded Edition. Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998

Diane Bergant makes the following comments:

Both chapters 1-9 and 31:10-31 declare the importance of fear of the Lord, and each provides a description of what this means. In both sections, the prominent figures are assertive women, not the docile women normally associated with patriarchal societies. (p 78)

Chapter 31 is comprised of two literary pieces: an instruction of a queen to her son Lemuel, and a hymn of praise in honor of an industrious wife. The women that we glimpse in these two passages differ significantly from the inconsequential or disreputable women referred to throughout the book. These two women are strong and influential in their own right. Their positions as wives and mothers have not restricted them but, on the contrary, have given them an arena within which they can exert power. The power that they employ is neither oppressive nor exploitative nor manipulative. It is used for the benefit of others. The picture of womanhood sketched here is highly complimentary. The criteria for an ideal king are followed by a poem celebrating the ideal wife. (pp 91-92)

After characterizing the wife in a manner earlier ascribed to wisdom, the poem sketches the advantage that she brings to her husband. This is a woman of high social and economic standing, whose husband occupies a position of importance within the community. She appears to make business decisions independently, providing for her own household as well as for the needs of others. She is not only successful but also virtuous. This is a very successful and prosperous woman. She has much to be happy about. (p 92)
Diane Bergant, *Israel's Wisdom Literature: A Liberation-Critical Reading*.
Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1997

Lady Wisdom Manages Her Household

Proverbs 31:11-31 has already been presented in full. In addition to being interpreted in terms of the ideal wife, it may also be understood in relation to Lady Wisdom (Woman Wisdom). She is prominent in chapters 1-9 of the book of Proverbs, as well as in chapter 31. Verse 31:26 identifies the capable wife with wisdom:

She opens her mouth in wisdom
and on her tongue is kindly counsel.

In addition, texts such as “She is far more precious than jewels” (31:10) associate this passage with earlier sections of Proverbs:

for [wisdom's] income is better than silver,
and her revenue better than gold.
She is more precious than jewels.... (3:14-15)
and
for wisdom is better than jewels (8:11).

Furthermore, this passage (and hence the entire book of Proverbs) concludes by speaking of “the fear of the Lord” (v 30); toward the beginning of the book this is identified as the beginning of wisdom.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction. (1:7)

Finally, Proverbs 31:10-31 appears to echo an earlier section that refers to Lady Wisdom, as follows:

Proverbs 8:14-21
14 I have good advice and sound wisdom;
I have insight, I have strength.
15 By me kings reign,
and rulers decree what is just,
16 by me rulers rule,
and nobles, all who govern rightly.
17 I love those who love me,
and those who seek me diligently find me.
18 Riches and honor are with me,
enduring wealth and prosperity.
19 My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold,
and my yield than choice silver.
20 I walk in the way of righteousness,
along the paths of justice,
21 endowing with wealth those who love me,
and filling their treasuries.

Diane Bergant makes the following remarks about this passage in connection with wisdom.

Some interpreters believe that the final editor intended that this poem, both in form and content, echo the figure of Woman Wisdom found in chapters 1-9. (p 78)

After characterizing the wife in a manner earlier ascribed to wisdom (v 10b; cf 3:15) (p 92)

This poem not only stands on its own as a literary composition but also employs some of the same female imagery found in the very first section of the book (chs 1-9). Both sections allude to the teaching of the mother (1:8; 31:1). Both Woman Wisdom and the industrious wife are more precious than jewels (3:15; 31:10), and whoever finds them will not lack material gain (3:14-15; 31:11). Just as Woman Wisdom can be found at the city gates (1:21), so this woman is praised at the city gates (31:31). Finally, the book of Proverbs begins and ends with “the fear of the Lord” (1:7; 31:30). These correspondences create a kind of *inclusio*, suggesting deliberate literary composition. (p 92)

Diane Bergant, *Israel's Wisdom Literature: A Liberation-Critical Reading*.
Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1997

Mary Travels with Jesus and Disciples and Supports Them Financially

The first reading of the July 22 liturgy is not linked to the gospel reading of the day, Luke 7:36-50. Instead it may be considered to be a commentary on and interpretation of another gospel story, Luke 8:1-3. This speaks of Mary of Magdala, together with other women of substance, who had been ministered to by Jesus, now travel with Jesus, and minister economically to him and his disciples. This reads:

Luke 8:1-3

Soon afterwards, he [Jesus] went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities; Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources. [NRSV]

Luke Timothy Johnson comments:

In 8:1-3, Jesus is shown proclaiming the good news of the kingdom from town to town, accompanied by the Twelve and supported by the women he had helped. With this small note, Luke not only anticipates the critical role the women will play later (as witnesses of Jesus' death and resurrection), but shows a people *in nuce* gathering around the prophet, and sharing their lives and possessions, a picture that foreshadows that of the Galilean communities of believers in Acts 1 and 2. (p 134)

Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*. Sacra Pagina 3. A Michael Glazier Book. Collegeville: Liturgical Press 1991

Joseph Fitzmyer adds:

... for Luke it is important that Jesus be seen again preaching the kingdom "from town to village" and that the Twelve and the women are associated with him in this ministry. It is part of the Lucan concern to present Galileans as witnessing his teaching and preaching. (p 696)

In particular, it is noteworthy that Luke at this stage introduces into his story of Jesus' Galilean ministry women followers. What the episode of 8:1-3 does indicate, however, is a recollection about Jesus which differed radically from the usual understanding of women's role in contemporary Judaism. The women are depicted by Luke as ministering to Jesus and the Twelve in roles surprising for their day: providing for them, and from their own means; at least one of them was a married woman (Joanna); how many among the "many others" were so too? In introducing these women followers here, Luke is foreshadowing their role at Jesus' cross and at the empty tomb; but he will also depict them deliberately in association with the Twelve, with Mary, and his brothers. They are "the women" who with the other first believers prayerfully await the promised Spirit "with one accord". This Lucan episode also depicts a distinction between the women and the Twelve. Luke makes the women "provide for" not only Jesus, but also the Twelve. (p

697)

Joseph A Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (I-IX)*. The Anchor Bible 28. Garden City NY: Doubleday & Co. 1981

Mary Makes the Better Choice, To Converse with Jesus

A single verse, Luke 10:42, is used or referred to in two places in the July 22 liturgy, as shown below.

Alleluia

Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.

Postcommunion

...that we may be found worthy to have a share in that good part which shall not be taken away from her.

This verse of course presumes and reminds us of the entire passage, Luke 10:38-42, given here.

Luke 10:38-42

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks, so she came to him and asked, Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me. But the Lord answered her, Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.

Here Mary of Bethany (now understood to be Mary Magdalene), is affirmed for listening to Jesus and seeking to be close to him, rather than busying herself with either domestic chores or the formalities of hospitality.

Joseph Fitzmyer comments:

In this [passage] the contrast is seen between the reactions of Martha, the perfect hostess, and of Mary, the perfect disciple. But that is a superficial consideration at most, even if Martha's distraction is gently reproved, whereas Mary's attention is clearly approved.

This passage is somewhat subtle, since Jesus' answer to Martha's fretting request seems at first to reassure her, telling her that she need prepare only one dish. But when his pronouncement is complete, one realizes that the "one thing" means more than "one dish" and has taken on another nuance. It has become the "best part," and he who has been part of it guarantees that it will not be taken away from Mary to send her to help distracted Martha.

The episode makes listening to the “word” the “one thing” needed. ... Priority is given to the hearing of the word coming from God’s messenger over preoccupation with all other concerns. Martha wanted to honor Jesus with an elaborate meal, but Jesus reminds her that it is more important to listen to what he has to say. The proper “service” of Jesus is attention to his instruction, not an elaborate provision for his physical needs.

Moreover, Luke in this scene does not hesitate to depict a woman as a disciple sitting at Jesus’ feet.... Jesus rather encourages a woman to learn from him.... (p 891)

Joseph A Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (I-IX)*. The Anchor Bible 28. Garden City NY: Doubleday & Co. 1981

Significantly, Fitzmyer makes the following connection with Proverbs 31:26, saying:

Jesus own attitude here may rather reflect Prov 31:26.

She opens her mouth with wisdom,
and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. (Proverbs 31:26)

Jesus Sends Mary as Apostle to Tell the Other Apostles and Disciples That He Is Risen

One portion of the lengthy sequence for July 22 (also used for Saturday of the first week of Easter) refers to John 20:17-18. The following is the translation of F. E. Warren, in *The Sarum Missal in English, vol I, p 310-311*

Sequence

Harbinger of his resurrection then,
right quickly Mary Magdalen
 with her glad tidings sped.
She to Christ’s brethren, grieving sore
That their dear Lord should be no more,
 Did joy long-looked-for bring.
O blessed eyes! which first did see
See free from death’s captivity
 The world’s almighty King!

The biblical text reads as follows. To show the context for the underlined verses, the entire passage is provided:

John 20:11-18

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, Woman, why are you weeping? She said to them, They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him. When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did

not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for? Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus said to her, Mary. She turned and said to him in Hebrew, Rabbouni (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God. Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, I have seen the Lord; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Mary Magdalene sees and speaks with the risen Christ, and she is commissioned to carry the good news of the resurrection to the other disciples. Because of this commission, Mary Magdalene is known as the apostle to the apostles.

Creed

In the medieval liturgy, the Creed was used on feasts of apostles and evangelists, but not those of other saints. Though the feast of Mary Magdalene is classified (uniquely) as Penitent and not apostle-evangelist, the use of the Creed is a recognition that she is apostle to the apostles and therefore the story of John 20 is implied. However, this is very subtle and probably not appreciated by many.

The Sinful and Penitent Woman Washes Jesus' Feet with Her Tears and Anoints Them with Precious Ointment; Jesus forgives Her Sins

This passage is used or referred to three times in the July 22 liturgy. Thus it is read in full as the gospel or second reading in the Mass liturgy for the feast of St Mary Magdalene.

Luke 7:36-50

One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment.

Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him – that she is a sinner.

Jesus spoke up and said to him, Simon, I have something to say to you. Teacher, he replied, Speak.

A certain creditor had two debtors; one owned five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?

Simon answered, I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt. And Jesus said to him, You have judged rightly.

Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.

Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven loves little.

Then he said to her, Your sins are forgiven.

But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, Who is this who even forgives sins? And he said to the woman, Your faith has saved you; go in peace. [NRSV]

The same passage is also alluded to in the collect for the feast of St Mary Magdalene:

Collect

Grant unto us, most merciful Father, that like as blessed Mary Magdalene by loving thy Only-begotten One above all things, obtained pardon of all her sins, so she may secure for us everlasting blessedness in thy compassionate presence. Through etc.

Finally, the same gospel story is referred to in part of the sequence. This is the translation of F. E. Warren in *The Sarum Missal in English*, vol 2, p 310-311.

Sequence

This is indeed that woman wailing
At Jesus' feet, whose grace availing
 Did wash her sins away;
While silent she doth pray and weep
For Christ her Lord, affection deep
 Her actions all display.
Not ignorant whom she worships there,
Nor yet for what should be her prayer,
 Her guilty soul is healed.

Taken at face value, this passage gives no evidence of any relationship between Jesus and the woman prior to this incident, nor of any relationship afterwards. Jesus accepts what she does to him, uses it as a “teachable moment”, affirms her and declares that her sins are forgiven.

The word “love” is used three times in this reading. In two cases it refers to the hypothetical debtors about whom Jesus speaks.. Once it is used of the woman: “hence she has

shown great love.”

Luke Timothy Johnson remarks:

since she has shown so much love: In line with Jesus’ argument, the “since” is to be understood not as the basis for the forgiveness but as the demonstration of it. (p 128)

What distinguishes this story, however, are the distinctive points of Lukan thematic interest: the language of possessions used to symbolize human relationships; the reading of hearts by the prophet; the forgiveness of sins; faith as saving; salvation leading to peace. Most of all, in the sinful woman we recognize again a member of the outcast poor, rejected by the religious elite as an untouchable, but like the poor throughout this Gospel, showing by her acts of hospitality that she accepts the prophet Jesus. Here we find [Jesus] eating and drinking at table, showing himself a friend to a sinner, who in turn accepts him as a prophet, while the Pharisee rejects him. (p 129)

Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*. Sacra Pagina 3. A Michael Glazier Book. Collegeville: Liturgical Press 1991

Joseph Fitzmyer adds:

The sense of the Lucan passage as a whole is not difficult. Repentance, forgiveness of sins, and salvation have come to one of the despised persons of Israel; she has shown this by an act of kindness manifesting a more basic love and faith, love shown to Jesus and faith in God himself. (p 686)

It has often been thought that the sinful woman comes to Jesus as a penitent, seeking forgiveness of him; her love then would be the condition of her pardon. ...

It should rather be understood that the sinful woman comes to Jesus as one already forgiven by God and seeking to pour out signs of love and gratitude; in this understanding, the love of v 47b is the consequence of her forgiveness.... (p 686-7)

Joseph A Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (I-IX)*. The Anchor Bible 28. Garden City NY: Doubleday & Co. 1981

Thus the significance of “love” in v 47 is understood somewhat differently by these modern scholars than it was in the middle ages. The medieval mind generally understood “hence she has shown great love” as referring to Mary Magdalene’s love for Jesus.

Jane Schaberg comments:

In Luke’s version, however, the anointing itself is not central. Rather, focus is on the emotional extravagance of the woman’s actions, on Jesus’ acceptance of the touch of such a person, and on her being forgiven.

Jesus tells the parable of the two debtors who are forgiven, the one forgiven more loving

more. Then the parable is applied to the woman, who has shown Jesus more love than has Simon, the inadequate host. Love, in the logic of the parable, is both cause and result or sign of divine forgiveness. The woman embodies that love. Because of the emotional quality of her action and its lavish sensuousness, her love has a strong erotic dimension, though its essence may be thought to be grief and gratitude. (p 374)

Jane Schaberg, "Luke" pp 363-380 in Carol A Newsom and Sharon H Ringe, editors, *Women's Bible Commentary*. Expanded Edition. Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox 1998

Other Women Also Anoint Jesus

In its liturgical context on July 22, Luke 7:36-50 also reminds us of related stories. Prominent among these are the several other gospel accounts of women anointing Jesus:

Anointing by Mary of Bethany - John 12:1-8

Anointing by an unnamed woman - Matthew 26:6-13

Anointing by an unnamed woman - Mark 14:3-9

Here these are considered to be present and significant in the July 22 liturgy by implication. It seems unnecessary to present these texts in full or to add any commentary.

Jesus and Mary Love Each Other

Two gospel verses were of particular importance to medieval preachers on the feast of St Mary Magdalene -- though preaching on July 22 was by no means confined to these. The first comes from the gospel reading of the day, Luke 7:36-50, as follows.

Luke 7:47

Hence she has shown great love.

The second passage is taken from an entirely different story, that of the faith of Martha and Mary and the raising of Lazarus.

John 11:5

Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

These verses are also prominent in medieval legends about Mary Magdalene, and these legends too influenced medieval preaching. Here I quote selected passages from two medieval sermons as well as excerpts from *The Golden Legend*, a popular source of legendary material.

First Sermon

Christian men and women, such a day [July 22] you shall have the feast of Saint Mary Magdalene that was so holy a woman, that our Lord Jesus Christ after his mother loved her most of all women.

And then with all the love that was in her heart, she kissed his feet and so with her box

anointed them.

Then for that joy that she was thus delivered of the devil's bonds, she took such a tender love to Christ, that ever after she was glad and fayne to love all her leuderschip, and saw him forth ay with so fervent love.

Thus she loved Christ, both alive and dead.

Wherefore he, in his life, for love of her, helped Martha...

Then, for it was known to the Jews that Christ showed her so many signs of love before many others....

Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies, ed. Theodor Erbe. London: Early English Text Society ES 96 (1905), pp 203-208 [here 203-4]

Second Sermon

Therefore for her great love is the multitude of her sins forgiven.

Women, for you have shoed [showed] to me love, these sinnins are forgiven.

Joseph telleth us that Marie Magdaline for the great burning love that she loved God would never have husbond nor see man with her eyes after the ascension of Christ.

Sire, I am the same Marie, and for the great love that I have to my lord I may see no man.

O Seynt Marie Magdalene, so well beloved with Christ....

Speculum Sacerdotale, ed. Edward H Weatherby. London: Early English Text Society OS 200 (1936), pp 170-174 [here 170-1]

Golden Legend

This is the Magdalene upon whom Jesus conferred such great grace and to whom he showed so many marks of love.

He cast seven devils out of her, set her totally afire with love of him, counted her among his closest familiars, was her guest, had her do the housekeeping on his travels, and kindly took her side at all times.

He defended her when the Pharisee said she was unclean, when her sister implied that she was lazy, when Judas called her wasteful.

Seeing her weep he could not contain his tears.

For love of her he raised her brother, four days dead, to life, for love of her he freed her sister Martha from the issue of blood she had suffered for seven years

Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*. Trans William Granger Ryan. Princeton: Princeton University Press 1993. Vol I, p 376.

It is interesting that such medieval preachers made no mention of the reading from Proverbs 31. A wider selection of sources should be examined on this point.

Mary Magdalene at the Cross and the Tomb

Matthew 27:55-56; Mark 15:40-41; John 19:25 (Cross)

Matthew 28:1ff; Mark 16:1-8, 9-11; Luke 23:55-56; 24:1-11;

John 20:1-2, 11-18; (Tomb)

Implied readings based on theology of the offertory rite, canon, and communion rite

It does not seem necessary to include complete texts or commentary here.

The Story of Mary Magdalene

The next step in this study is to weave the multiple biblical stories and texts considered above into a single story of Mary Magdalene. The liturgy's story may be described as follows.

The July 22 Mass begins with Mary Magdalene singing the first verse of Psalm 44 / 45, her wedding song. She sings other verses in the course of the laturgy, and also near the end. Thus Mary Magdalene's nuptial hymn is wrapped around the whole of the liturgy; it embraces the other texts and puts its stamp on the entire celebration.

As princess who marries a king and becomes queen, Mary Magdalene is described as blessed, beautiful, honorable and favored. She enters the king's household and as queen becomes leader of all the women there; she is a highly influential figure at court.

Mary Magdalene's nuptial relationship with the king – Jesus – is unique. Though the nuptial relationship actually referred to in Psalm 44 / 45 is marital and sexual and includes bearing children, the theological relationship to which this psalm points is not marital or sexual, though still intimate in other ways. Mary Magdalene may also be considered to be an image of the church, whose spouse is Christ.

Mary Magdalene, the newly married queen spoken of in Psalm 44 / 45, is also the wife of Proverbs 31: capable, strong, valiant -- a woman of worth. She is versatile and talented; she does everything well; she carries out her responsibilities with initiative and forethought. Caring and competent, she deservedly gains a high reputation.

Her household is large, well to do, and significant in its social setting. Again, though the nuptial relationship described in the text is marital and sexual and results in children, at a theological level Mary Magdalene's relationship with her spouse, Jesus, is neither marital nor sexual.

Reading the Proverbs 31 text as a wisdom passage leads us to view Mary Magdalene as one who walks in the footsteps of Lady Wisdom. Thus verse 26 applies to Mary Magdalene:

She opens her mouth with wisdom,
and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.

From one perspective we see that women's ordinary domestic responsibilities and opportunities are acts of human wisdom, reflecting and echoing the work of holy wisdom.

Jesus, the king, Mary Magdalene's spouse, is also a wisdom figure. She listens to his wisdom and orders her life accordingly; they work together as wise persons. Mary Magdalene seeks wisdom and listens to wisdom. She knows that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. She celebrates and rejoices in wisdom; she is a wise woman.

The capable wife who takes care of her husband and household – the queen who heads the private household of the king – is also the Mary Magdalene who takes care of Jesus and his friends during their travels. This group constitutes a kind of household, and she has an important place in it. She is generous and caring; she is grateful to Jesus for his ministry to her and her companions. She is wise, seeking wisdom and listening to wisdom's voice. She is disciple and friend.

Mary Magdalene is also prominent in another household, one that includes Martha as well as herself. Jesus is a regular visitor, indeed really one of its members. When he visits, regular responsibilities, even though ordinarily highly regarded, take second place. Thus Mary chooses to converse with Jesus while Martha is occupied with responsibilities of hospitality. The biblical text describes Mary's choice as "the better part."

The biblical text describes this Mary as only listening to Jesus, but this surely is a interpretation of the evangelist. I cannot imagine that Jesus would only wish to talk at Mary; instead he would have wanted dialogue, questions, comments, responses, challenges, objections, affirmations – he would have wanted real conversation with a friend and disciple. In speaking the good news, Jesus is prophet – but also wisdom figure and spouse.

The Mary Magdalene who is newly married queen, capable wife, wisdom figure, disciple and conversation partner, is also commissioned by Jesus to be apostle to the apostles. The community of fellow apostles and disciples is a kind of household, headed by Mary Magdalene and Jesus. It is a wisdom community, learning from both. It is a community of emerging leaders and teachers, in final stages of apprenticeship under the guidance of Jesus and Mary Magdalene. She sets an example in providing leadership, accepting responsibility, taking chances, carrying out Jesus' directives, facing rejection.

In the context of the July 22 liturgy, the sinful, penitent woman who washes Jesus' feet with her tears and dries them with her hair, acquires a name, that of Mary Magdalene. She also acquires a history, a lineage, a larger character: queen, wife, wisdom figure, household manager, care giver, conversation partner, financial manager, apostle to the apostles, and more. We already recognize her as one who is bold and one who takes risks; she is imaginative, generous, honest,

loving.

The host of this household spoken of in this passage is no longer the Pharisee, but Mary Magdalene, as she washes and dries feet; no longer the Pharisee, but Jesus, as he teaches, declares forgiveness, challenges. As a couple, they bring about transformation. – they challenge, give example, demonstrate God’s reign, exemplify wisdom.

Medieval preachers bring it all together, especially in their understanding of “love”. Mary loves Jesus; Jesus loves Mary. The queen and king; the wife and husband – both beloved of God.

In summary, the relationship of Mary Magdalene and Jesus that is depicted in the July 22 liturgy is multifaceted, rich and imaginative; it is a close relationship and described as nuptial (but not marital or sexual). The relationship is one of mutual high regard, which those who celebrate this liturgy admire.

The relationship of Mary Magdalene and Jesus is complex, however, because it encompasses several dimensions of time, and because each of these is viewed through two sets of eyes. The temporal dimensions are these:

- Mary Magdalene before her death, and Jesus before his death
- Mary Magdalene before her death, and the crucified and risen Christ
- Mary Magdalene after her death (in heaven), and the crucified and risen Christ
- Mary Magdalene after her death (in the church community), and the risen Christ

The viewer in the first place is the evangelists and the traditions that they communicate. They produce the gospel stories that are foundational for appreciating the relationship of Mary Magdalene and Jesus. The other viewer is the later Christian community, which engages in reflection, imagination and theological development. The church composed the medieval liturgy, was confused about Mary Magdalene’s identity, and considered her a great patron and intercessor as well as image of the church as bride of Christ.

Post-medieval Developments

The liturgy discussed above was in general use in the western church from about the seventh century until the liturgical revisions that followed the Council of Trent. These changes, which were modest, were set forth in the Roman Missal of 1570; the reasons these revisions were made is not known. Further changes were published in 1970, and these constituted a radical revision. These steps in the development of the July 22 liturgy are merely summarized here.

Changes in 1570

The mass for July 22 in the Missale Romanum of 1570 was different from the medieval liturgy for that day in several respects. The reason these changes were made is not known.

The sequence has been deleted. The reference to John 20:17-18 is therefore lost.

Psalm 44 / 45, with its clear nuptial imagery, is weakened; verses that remain are less gendered, and some verses of this psalm are replaced by verses of Psalm 118; in general these are not gendered or nuptial in content.

Introit: Ps 118:95-96

Gradual: Ps 44:8 - Thou hast loved justice, and hated iniquity. Therefore God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness.

Alleluia: Ps 44:3 - Grace is poured abroad in thy lips: therefore hath God blessed thee for ever.

Offertory: Ps 44:10 - The daughters of kings in Thy glory: the queen stood on Thy right hand in gilded clothing, surrounded with variety.

Communion: Ps 118:121

The collect is new. Instead of referring to Luke 7:36-50, it speaks of John 11, saying that the raising of Lazarus is a result of Mary's intercession; this further confuses her identity.

May the prayers of blessed Mary Magdalen help us, O Lord: for it was in answer to them that Thou didst call her brother Lazarus four days after death, back from the grave to life. Who livest and reignest.

The epistle or first reading is new: it comes from the Song of Songs. Though entirely different in some respects from Proverbs 31:10-31, it still is highly nuptial in character. The full text is given here.

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

I will rise now and go about the city
in the streets and in the squares.

I will seek him whom my soul loves.
I sought him, but found him not.

The sentinels found me,
as they went about in the city.
Have you seen him whom my soul loves?

Scarcely had I passed them,
when I found him whom my soul loves.

I held him, and would not let him go
until I brought him into my mother's house,
and into the chamber of her that conceived me.

I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
by the gazelles or the wild does;
do not stir up or waken love until it is ready.
Set me as a seal upon your heart,

as a seal upon your arm
for love is strong as death,
passion fierce as the grace
Its flashes are flashes of fire,
a raging flame.
Many waters cannot quench love,
neither can floods drown it.
If one offered for love
all the wealth of his house
It would be utterly scorned [NRSV]

In this context, Mary Magdalene is the bereft lover.

This reading does not really connect with that of Luke 7, but instead reminds us of another gospel passage, John 20:11-15. Here Mary Magdalene searches for the body of Jesus after the resurrection. This text reads:

John 20:11-15

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb, and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet.

They said to her, Woman why are you weeping? She said to them, They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.

When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.

Jesus said to her, Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for? [NRSV]

The brief overview shows that despite the changes made, the 1570 liturgy for the feast of St Mary Magdalene still views this woman as a composite figure derived from several biblical women, and it still has a nuptial character.

Changes in 1970

This liturgy is significantly different from those that preceded it. It uses only passages that speak of the “real” Mary Magdalene; the composite figure of the past has been set aside. In addition, the emphasis is on Mary as apostle to the apostle; nuptial imagery likewise has been set aside.

The first reading is I Corinthians 4:14-17, and the gospel or second reading is John 20:1-2, 11-18.

The following short texts are used:

Entrance Antiphon: John 29:17

Responsorial Psalm Ps 63:2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9
Alleluia: (a nonbiblical text)
Communion antiphon: 2 Cor 5:14-15)**Evaluation**

Evaluation and Further Reflections

What are we to think of the interpretation presented here? Here are a few brief reflections and conclusions.

1. The medieval liturgy for the feast of St Mary Magdalene is creative and imaginative.
2. Mary Magdalene is important in the gospel story and important in the church; she is held in high regard.
3. Mary Magdalene and Jesus were close friends; their relationship was characterized by deep affection and mutual love. It was nuptial, though not marital or sexual.
4. The Mary Magdalene of this liturgy is not really the Mary Magdalene of the gospel accounts; instead she is a composite of a number of biblical women. In this respect, the medieval liturgy of July 22 is built on a serious flaw.
5. Though the idea of nuptial relationship that was neither marital or sexual was well known and accepted in the middle ages, it is not as familiar to people today.
6. The liturgy tells the story of Mary Magdalene within a patriarchal world view, one in which male-female relationships were unequal.
7. The 1970 liturgy for July 22 portrays the biblical Mary Magdalene correctly. However, the idea of a close personal relationship between her and Jesus is much diminished compared to the medieval liturgy.
8. The 1970 liturgical calendar names Mary Magdalene and Martha (plus Mary of Nazareth, of course), but fails to recognize other women of the gospels or of the early church.
9. This study of the medieval liturgy for the feast of St Mary Magdalene was written neither to support nor criticize *The Da Vinci Code*. Instead it is an attempt to raise up a little known but significant and interesting story told by Christian liturgy.
10. In its own day – prior to 1970 – this view of the relationship of Mary Magdalene and Jesus was never a secret; not it seems to be known only by a few scholars.
11. Nuptial imagery is important both in the liturgy of July 22 and *The Da Vinci Code*,

though in one case it is nonmarital and nonsexual while in the other it is marital and sexual. Both works have their roots in scripture, and in both cases the biblical story has been the subject of creative development. The nature of this development has led this liturgy and this novel to quite different outcomes.

12. The story of the liturgy for the feast of St Mary Magdalene is not yet completed. Further improvements need to be imagined and implemented.