

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

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Outline

Introduction

Mary Magdalene in the 1549 Book of Common Prayer

The Disappearance of Mary Magdalene in 1552

Who Disappeared?

 The Marys of the Gospels and of the Medieval Church

 Mary Magdalene in the Medieval Liturgy

 Mary Magdalene in Debate, 1519-1525

 Luther, Zwingli, Calvin and Mary Magdalene

 Cranmer and Mary Magdalene

 Mary Magdalene in the Catholic Liturgy of 1570

 The Mary Magdalene of Medieval Legend, Drama and Art

Possible Bases for the Disappearance of Mary Magdalene

 Mary Magdalene as Woman

 Mary Magdalene as Single

 Mary Magdalene as One with Authority

 Mary Magdalene as Apostle

 Mary Magdalene as Preacher

 Mary Magdalene as Minister of Baptism and Orders

 Mary Magdalene's Day as a Liturgical Feast Day

Discussion

Introduction

The 1549 Book of Common Prayer included a feast of Mary Magdalene, with its own collect, two scripture lessons, and introit psalm. In contrast, the 1552 Prayer Book had no such feast and Mary Magdalene disappeared from the Anglican liturgy for some 400 years.

Here I ask *why* a feast of Mary Magdalene was omitted from the 1552 Book of Common Prayer. This was not explained at the time, nor have later Anglican commentators shed much light on this question.

This study begins with a brief consideration of the feast of Mary Magdalene in the 1549 Book of Common Prayer, followed by a survey of the circumstances surrounding its disappearance in 1552. The identity of Mary Magdalene will be studied next, for the woman who disappeared in 1552 is not quite the same person as the woman known by that name today. Finally, I shall suggest several possible reasons for the decision to remove the feast of Mary Magdalene from the Prayer Book; however, there is no definitive proof in this regard.

To put this liturgical feast in some historical context, it may be noted that by the mid-sixteenth century, the feast of Mary Magdalene had been known and celebrated in England for over eight centuries. Thus it was included in the Martyrology of Bede (ca 731), the Old English Martyrology (ca 850-900), and in eight of nineteen liturgical calendars published by Wormald and dated before 1100. It is found in all 18 calendars dated after 1100 that Wormald published.

Bede, [Martyrology], in J-P Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 94, col 797-1138 and 138, col 1293-1302

George Herzfeld, ed., *An Old English Martyrology*. EETS 93. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner 1900

Francis Wormald, *English Kalendars Before A. D. 1100*. Henry Bradshaw Society 72. London 1934.

Francis Wormald, *English Benedictine Kalendars After A. D. 1100*. Vol I. Henry Bradshaw Society 77. London 1939.

Francis Wormald, *English Benedictine Kalendars After A.D. 1100*. Vol II. Henry Bradshaw Society 81. London 1946.

Mary Magdalene in the 1549 Book of Common Prayer

The feast of Mary Magdalene in the 1549 Book of Common Prayer may first be considered in the context of the liturgical calendar of that book as a whole. This calendar was substantially briefer than that of the preceding medieval Sarum calendar. It included the christological feasts of Christmas, Purification, Annunciation, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension and Pentecost; Mary the mother of Jesus was visible only within this framework. In addition, there were feasts of the apostles and evangelists and a few other biblical men such as John the Baptist, Stephen, the Innocents, plus the archangel Michael. Finally, the calendar included one feast of a biblical woman, Mary Magdalene. No postbiblical saints, male or female, were included.

So far as the specific content of the liturgical feast of Mary Magdalene is concerned, the two scriptural lessons or readings were exactly the same as in the medieval Sarum liturgy, Proverbs 31:10-31 (the capable wife) and Luke 7:36-50 (the penitent woman). Psalm 146 was printed prior to the readings as an introit.

The collect was newly composed, and is substantially different from that used previously. These texts are given here.

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.

The Sarum Missal in English, trans. Frederick E. Warren, 2 vol. Alcuin Club Collections XI. London: Mowbray 1913. [Here Part II, p 417]

Merciful father geue us grace,
that we neuer presume to synne through the example of anye creature,
but if it shall chaunce vs at any tyme to offende thy dyuine maiestie:
that then we maye truly repent, and lament the same,
after the example of Mary Magdalene,
and by lyuelye faythe obtayne remission of all oure sinnes:
through the onely merites of thy sonne oure sauour Christ.

F. E. Brightman, *The English Rite*, 2 vol. London: Rivingtons 1921. [Here Vol 2, p. 604.]

The medieval collect would have been problematic for Anglicans on the basis of reformed views of the intercession of saints and the sole mediatorship of Christ. These issues, therefore, were recognized and corrected in the 1549 collect; they should not have constituted difficulties when the Prayer Book was revised in 1552.

The Disappearance of Mary Magdalene in 1552

There is only one difference between the liturgical calendars of the 1549 and 1552 editions of the Book of Common Prayer: the feast of Mary Magdalene. The numerous feasts of biblical men remained unchanged.

The 1552 Prayer Book (and subsequent editions) divided calendar entries between “red letter days” and “black letter days.” The former were intended for liturgical celebration, the latter were not. Black letter days had no collect or scripture lessons but had some function for civil

society. Mary Magdalene was not included among the black letter days of the 1552 calendar, but with a number of other saints, was added to this new category in 1559. This did not affect the fact that the *liturgical* feast had disappeared.

Anglican commentaries on the Book of Common Prayer provide only a little information regarding the omission of the feast of Mary Magdalene from the 1552 and subsequent editions.

In this regard, it is significant, first, that Martin Bucer did not name the feast of Mary Magdalene among his criticisms of the 1549 Book of Common Prayer. He had been invited by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer to prepare a detailed critique in preparation for its revision during 1550-1552. Indeed, so long as postbiblical saints were absent, Bucer seemed content with the 1549 calendar.

Martin Bucer's *Censura* or "Critical Examination" is printed in E C. Whitaker, *Martin Bucer and The Book of Common Prayer*. Alcuin Club Collection 55. Alcuin Club 1974. See pp 138, 140-142.

Other records reveal, however, that some questions did arise regarding the calendar. Thus Peter Heylyn, in his *Ecclesia Restaurata: or, the History of the Reformation of the Church of England* (1661), notes that there were concerns regarding "holy days and fasting days" (p 99), and "the first debate [of Convocation in 1550] was of such doubts, as had arisen about some things contained in the Common-Prayer book, and more particularly, touching such Feasts as were retained" (p 107). No details are provided. This information was later summarized by Francis Procter in *A History of the Book of Common Prayer* (London 1872). He writes that alterations to the 1549 Prayer Book were already being considered at Convocation toward the close of 1550 and states that "Mention was made of doubts which had arisen – namely which holidays should be observed" (p 34). No details are given.

In his book, *A History of Conferences and other Proceedings connected with the Revision of The Book of Common Prayer, from the year 1558 to the year 1690* (second edition, 1841), Edward Cardwell records that a motion was put to Convocation in 1562 "that all the Sundays in the year, and principal feasts of Christ, be kept holidays; and all other holidays to be abrogated," (p 40, 118); it was defeated by one vote in the lower house. Though this is a later debate, its seeds may well have been present in 1550-1552.

These sparse records of discussions related to the revision of the calendar of the 1549 Prayer Book do not state that the feast of Mary Magdalene was an issue. Of course, it might have been, or might have been among various calendar-related matters that were the concern of some.

Writing in 1849 Charles Wheatly suggested the following reason for this omission:

But upon a stricter inquiry, it appearing dubious to our reformers, as it doth still to many learned men, whether the woman mentioned in the scripture that was appointed for the Gospel [Luke 7:36-50] were Mary Magdalene or not; they thought it more proper to

discontinue the festival.

Charles Wheatly, *Rational Illustration of the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England*. London: Henry G. Bohn, 1849, pp 66-67

His sources are not identified and the history of this explanation is not known.

This is the most substantial explanation put forward for Mary Magdalene's removal from the Prayer Book Calendar in 1552. Doubts that the "real" Mary Magdalene was a composite of several biblical personages (see below), however, could easily have been solved by choosing new scripture readings that speak of only one woman. Thus the gospel might have been changed from Luke 7 to John 20:1-18 - as Cranmer had himself suggested in one of his experimental calendars (see below). That this course of action was not followed suggests that other factors were at work – instead of or in addition to those mentioned by Wheatly.

Who Disappeared?

Who exactly was the woman whose feast disappeared in 1552? The identity of Mary Magdalene was a matter of discussion and debate in the sixteenth century and this issue is here approached from several perspectives. The history of thinking about the Magdalene is also of considerable interest to modern scholarship; the following references are simply an introduction to the large literature on this subject.

Theresa Coletti, *Mary Magdalene and the Drama of Saints: Theater, Gender, and Religion in Late Medieval England*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2004

Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor*. New York: Harcourt Brace 1993

Ingrid Maisch, *Between Contempt and Veneration . . . Mary Magdalene: The Image of a Woman through the Centuries*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press 1998

Jane Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene: Legends, Apocrypha, and the Christian Testament*. New York: Continuum 2002

The Marys of the Gospels and the Medieval Church

The gospels themselves distinguish Mary of Magdala (e.g., Luke 8:2 and John 20:1-2, 11-18), Mary of Bethany (Luke 10:38-42; John 12:1-8), and the unnamed sinful, caring, loving and forgiven woman of Luke 7:36-50. The medieval western church, however, wrapped these up into one composite figure; this simplification is usually attributed to Gregory the Great. Within this figure, the sinful and penitent woman of Luke 7 received particular emphasis. This composite Mary Magdalene sometimes also included the unnamed woman who anointed Jesus of Matthew 26:6-13 and Mark 14:3-9. In the eastern church, it should be noted, the several biblical

women involved remained separate personalities.

Mary Magdalene in the Medieval Liturgy

The liturgy of Mary Magdalene's feast in the medieval church has been studied in great detail by Victor Saxer:

Victor Saxer, *Le Culte de Marie Madeleine en Occident*
Paris: Clavreuil 1959

For the liturgy in England in particular, see also

The Sarum Missal in English. Translated by F. E. Warren. Alcuin Club
Collections XI. London: A. W. Mowbray 1913

The gospel most often used for the feast of Mary Magdalene was Luke 7:36-40, the story of Jesus and the sinful, penitent and loving woman (Saxer 160, 167). It is important to note, however, that in some places the gospel passage used was John 20:11-18, the story of Mary Magdalene at the tomb, the first witness to the resurrection and the one commissioned by the risen Christ to announce the good news to the other disciples (Saxer 178-179).

The main "epistle" or first reading used was Proverbs 31:10-31, the "competent wife" or "woman of worth" (Saxer 160-167). This reading presents a spousal image, which was among those known in the middle ages for the relationship of Mary Magdalene and Christ. In addition it raises up a strong, wealthy, relatively independent woman – reminding us perhaps of the Magdalene of John 20:11-18. She was chosen by Christ to be first witness to the resurrection and apostle to the apostle – a unique symbol of female authority.

Of the two prefaces in common use, one focused mostly on the penitent woman of Luke 7, while the other referred both to her and to the witness to the resurrection of John 20 (Saxer 368). In a few places, the preface of the apostles was used (e.g., Saxer 409).

Of other mass texts used in England, the alleluia verse refers to Mary of Bethany. The sequence, used also on the Saturday following Easter (*Sarum Missal in English*, vol 1, pp 310-311), speaks of Mary at the tomb and apostle to the apostles from John 20, but is focused mainly on the woman of Luke 7. She is described as equal to Mary the mother of Jesus, and as a great intercessor.

Collectively, the introit, gradual, offertory and communion verses quote psalm 45:1, 3-5, 10-12. In the translation of F. E. Warren (*Sarum Missal in English*, vol 2, pp 417-419), these included the following passages::

Hearken, O daughter, and consider, incline thine ear.
So shall the king have pleasure in thy beauty. (vv 11,12)

Kings' daughters were among thy honorable women:
upon thy right hand did stand the queen
in a vesture of gold, wrought about with divers colours. (v 10)

These verses raise up images of queens, princesses and other women of a royal court (or harem). Their relationship with the king (God, Christ) is very close -- spousal, familial, sensual, perhaps along the lines of the first reading. Is the "capable wife" the "queen" of psalm 45? If so, this again suggests a close, spousal relationship between Mary Magdalene and God/ Christ.

Mary Magdalene in Debate, 1519-1525

The traditional medieval western view that Mary Magdalene was a composite of Mary of Magdala, Mary of Bethany, and the penitent woman of Luke 7 was challenged in 1519, debated for the next several years, but in the end the traditional position was upheld – at least in many circles. The details of the debate will not be repeated here; they may be found in the following references:

Anselm Hufstader, "Lefevre d'Etaples and the Magdalen," in *Studies in the Renaissance*, vol 16-17 (1969-1970) pp 31-60

"Controversial Maneuvers of the Tyro," pp 274-289 in Edward Surtz, *The Works and Days of John Fisher*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 1967.

See also Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, and Coletti, *Mary Magdalene*, above.

There was more at issue here than the close reading of the biblical text and paying careful attention to the names and descriptions of the women in question. To what extent was it permissible to challenge centuries-old interpretations, even when there was no "heretical intent?" Could mere scholars overturn such ancient traditions?

In addition, papal authority was at stake. Pope Gregory the Great had begun the tradition of combining several biblical women into one, and this view had been reiterated by popes down to the sixteenth century. At a time when Luther and Zwingli were attacking popes and their authority, this was a touchy subject indeed. (Calvin, and Henry VIII's divorces and act of supremacy were some years in the future, however.)

Finally, the composite Mary Magdalene of medieval tradition was popular with preachers and people alike. What would they do without her?

The initial debate between Jacques Lefevre d'Etaples and John Fisher regarding the identity of Mary Magdalene lasted from 1519 to 1521. Others joined in and this led to some additional writing and preaching on the subject until 1525. Then the matter was closed again – at

least for some years. In the present context, a key question is, “Might this debate have affected the decision to remove Mary Magdalene from the calendar of the 1552 Prayer Book -- 25-30 years later? I am not aware of any explicit evidence to this effect.

Some presentations of “the Magdalene Controversy” can give the impression (a) that continental Reformers were involved in the original debate, and (b) that the question of the identity of Mary Magdalene was closely related to development of reformed doctrines regarding the intercession of saints, sole mediatorship of Christ, justification, and good works. I find no evidence for such views.

The original debate was among Catholics, and as shown below there is no evidence that Luther or Zwingli was particularly concerned with the identity of Mary Magdalene. Calvin certainly was, but mainly in commentaries published toward the end of his life; he died in 1564.

I suggest that the reformed doctrines that challenged the Catholic position on saints evolved independently of the question of Mary Magdalene’s identity. Such theological positions then had important implications for how she and other saints were regarded within the reformed community. Regard for the saints was also influenced by a general feeling what whatever Catholics did was superstition and error.

The reformed doctrine of sola scriptura and associated biblical scholarship and commentary probably led to a renewed discussion of the identity of Mary Magdalene and an understanding of her composite identity. In addition, the fact that the medieval interpretation of scripture regarding her was enforced and reinforced by the authority of the popes was enough to bring rejection and contradiction from the reformed side.

Increased devotion to Mary Magdalene among Catholics in the late sixteenth century and afterwards was likely to have been mostly a reaction to what the reformers were saying and doing about the saints in general and Mary Magdalene in particular, it is doubtful if memories of the debates of 1519-1525 played a part in this.

Luther, Zwingli, Calvin and Mary Magdalene

What views did the major Protestant reformers have regarding the identity of Mary Magdalene? Was she named in the course of the theological controversies of the period? Here I survey the writings of Luther, Zwingli and Calvin on this matter.

Martin Luther. The Index to the English translation of *Luther’s Works* lists 26 passages in Luther’s writings where he refers to Mary Magdalene. Luther died in 1546.

Joel W. Lundeen, ed., *Luther’s Works* vol 55, *Index*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1986
I have analyzed these and determined that “Mary Magdalene” in fact was identified with a variety of biblical women, as follows. Numbers refer to volumes and pages of *Luther’s Works*.

The Penitent Woman, Luke 7

Luther's Works, 14:151; 14:346; 17:402; 23:268; 34:313; 42:64

Mary of Bethany, Luke 10

Luther's Works, 11:541

Mary of Bethany, John 12

Luther's Works, 6:337

Mary of Bethany, general

Luther's Works, 23:247; 23:251; 35:190

Mary of Magdala, Luke 8

Luther's Works, 2:321

Mary of Magdala, John 20

Luther's Works, 3:263; 10:92; 11:510; 11:512; 26:43; 37:66; 37:76

Unnamed anointing woman, Matthew 26 and Mark 14

Luther's Works, 6:326; 6:337

The Marys at the Tomb, Matthew 28

Luther's Works, 22: 104; 37:298

General or Vague

Luther's Works, 22:192.

This analysis shows that Luther's Mary Magdalene was the composite figure of the medieval tradition. In none of these passages was the question of her identity raised, and in no place was she named in the context of theological controversy.

Ulrich Zwingli. In his 1524 treatise on "true and false religion," Zwingli refers to Mary Magdalene several times. Zwingli died in 1531.

U. Zwingli, *Commentary on True and False Religion*, ed. by Samuel Macauley Jackson and Clarence Nevin Heller, 1928. Reprint Durham NC: Labyrinth Press 1981

Thus on p 331 of the English translation he says:

For when [Jesus] rose from the dead He would not suffer the same Magdalene who had bathed his feet with her tears to touch Him...

The editor gives John 12:3 (Mary of Bethany) as scriptural reference for "who had bathed his feet with her tears", though Luke 7:36-50 would be more accurate; after all Jesus' feet were

bathed with tears in Luke 7 but anointed with ointment in John 12. The second reference (“to touch Him” of course refers to John 20.

On page 335 Zwingli says,

We set up a wooden Magdalene to remind us of her to whom many sins were forgiven; not because we wish to imitate her by sitting at the feet of the Lord and listening to and following His word...

The first line refers to the penitent woman of Luke 7:36-50, while the second part refers to the Mary of Bethany of Luke 10:42. Thus this reformer too accepts the composite figure of Mary Magdalene of medieval tradition.

Certainly, Zwingli was opposed to the invocation of the saints and certain views of merit associated with this practice (pp 32, 267-271, 382-388). However, Mary Magdalene is never named in his discussion of these matters.

She is given as an example, however, in his consideration of images and statues – as is Anne, the supposed mother of Mary of Nazareth (pp 330-337). Though only these two women saints are named, I really do not perceive any implication that their images are worse than others or that devotion to them is more to be condemned than devotion of any other saint. All images “in human shape which are set up before altars or churches ... ought to be abolished”. It is interesting to note, however, that Zwingli had no objections to images that are purely artistic in nature.

John Calvin. Calvin died in 1564. He refers to Mary Magdalene in three books, the first being a work of satire and sarcasm having to do with relics.

John Calvin, “An Admonition Showing the Advantages Which Christendom Might Derive from An Inventory of Relics,” vol. 1, pp 287-341 in his *Tracts and Treatises on the Reformation of the Church*, 2 vol. Translated by Henry Beveridge; Historical Notes and Introduction by Thomas F. Torrance. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1958.

This does not directly consider the question of Mary Magdalene’s identity. Her name is mentioned, however, and Lazarus is named as her brother – indicating that she is a composite figure that includes Mary of Bethany, at least.

The second set of references is found in Calvin’s commentary on a harmony of the synoptic gospels; this was published in 1563.

John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*. Translated and edited by William Pringle. Originally published for the Calvin Translation Society, Edinburgh 1845. Reprint Grand Rapids: Baker Book House [Original three

volumes published in two volumes of the English edition.]

Here he considers separately the penitent woman of Luke 7, the Mary of Bethany of Luke 10, the Mary of Magdala of Luke 8, and the unnamed anointing woman of Matthew 26 and Mark 14. The identity of these women is considered twice. Thus when dealing with Matthew 26 and Mark 14, he explicitly states that the anointing woman here is the same as Mary of Bethany and that there was really only one anointing of Jesus – and one woman carried out this anointing (p 330).

In addition, when commenting on Luke 8:1-18 + 10:23-24, Calvin states:

In Mary, the boundless goodness of Christ was displayed in an astonishing manner. A woman, who had been possessed by seven devils, and might be said to have been the meanest slave of Satan, was not merely honoured to be his disciple, but admitted to enjoy his society. Luke adds the surname Magdalene, to distinguish her from the sister of Martha, and other persons of the name of Mary, who are mentioned in other passages (John 11:1; John 19:23) (pp 99-100).

A third source is Calvin's commentary of John's gospel.

John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*. Translated and edited by William Pringle. Originally published for the Calvin Translation society, Edinburgh 1845.

Reprint Grand Rapids: Baker Book House 1989. [Two volumes in the English edition.]

In his commentary on John 11:2, Calvin remarks on identity and confusion with respect to the Marys and other women:

It was that Mary [of Bethany] who anointed the Lord. It is a similar display of ignorance, to imagine that this Mary, the sister of Lazarus, was that woman of wicked and infamous life, who is mentioned by Luke (vii.37). This mistake was occasioned by the anointing; as if it were not evident enough that Christ was anointed on various occasions, and even at different places. The woman who was a sinner, of whom Luke gives an account, anointed Christ at Jerusalem, where he dwelt; but Mary afterwards anointed him at Bethany, which was her own village. The past tense employed by the Evangelist, who anointed, must be referred, not to the time of the occurrence which he is now relating, but to the time when he wrote; as if he had said, "It was this Mary who afterwards poured on the head of Christ the ointment, on account of which a murmuring arose among the disciples" (Matth xxxvi.7) (p 425).

Calvin's commentary on John 20:1-18 is noteworthy for exhibiting a quite negative attitude toward Mary Magdalene – and indeed, women in general. First, Mary Magdalene, as a woman, was not a competent witness. He states:

It may be thought strange, however, that he [Christ] does not produce more competent witnesses; for he begins with a woman; but thus the saying is fulfilled, that “God chooseth what is weak, and foolish, and contemptible in the world, that he may bring to nought the wisdom, and excellence, and glory, of the flesh (1 Cor 1:27) (p 247-248).

Second, Mary Magdalene was too emotional and insufficiently spiritual. In commenting on John 20:11 he says:

The evangelist now begins to describe the manner in which Christ appeared both to the women and to the disciples, to testify his resurrection....

As to the women remaining at the sepulchre, while the disciples return to the city, they [the women] are not entitled to great accommodation on this account; for the disciples carry with them consolation and joy, but the women torment themselves by idle and useless weeping. In short, it is superstition alone, accompanied by carnal feelings, that keeps them near the sepulchre (p 254).

This topic is mentioned again in the commentary on verse 13:

From the statements of the Evangelists, it may be readily concluded, that the angel held a long conversation.... The conversation consists of reproof mingled with comfort. The angel reproves Mary for her excessive weeping, but at the same time, mingles joy, when he says that there is no reason to weep, since Christ has risen (p 256).

The view that Mary Magdalene is not “spiritual” comes up again in the commentary on v 15:

We see that Mary has no view of the matter but what is earthly. She desires only to obtain the dead body of Christ, that she may keep it hidden in the sepulchre; but she leaves out the most important matter, the elevation of her mind to the divine power of his resurrection. We need not wonder, therefore, if such groveling views place a veil before her eyes (p 257).

Still again, Calvin criticizes Mary Magdalene in the commentary on v 17:

Now, since he [Christ] allowed himself to be touched by his disciples, what reason was there for forbidding Mary to touch him? The answer is easy, provided that we remember that the women were not repelled from touching Christ, till their eagerness to touch him had been carried to excess; for, so far as it was necessary for removing doubt, he unquestionably did not forbid them to touch him, but, perceiving that their attention was too much occupied with embracing his feet, he restrained and corrected that immoderate zeal. They fixed their attention on his bodily presence, and did not understand any other way of enjoying his society than by conversing with him on the earth. We ought, therefore, to conclude, that they were not forbidden to touch him, until Christ saw that, by their foolish and unreasonable desire, they wished to keep him in the world (p 249-250).

Finally, Mary Magdalene was “shame-ful”. This issue arises when Calvin considers why Mary Magdalene was chosen to announce the good news of the resurrection to the male disciples. He states:

I conclude, therefore, that Mary was sent to the disciples in general; and I consider that this was done by way of reproach, because they [disciples] had been so tardy and sluggish to believe. And, indeed, they deserve not only to have women for their teachers, but even oxen and asses; since the Son of God had been so long and labouriously employed in teaching, and yet they had made so little, or hardly any progress (p 251).

He continues,

Yet this is a mild and gentle chastisement, when Christ thus sends his disciples to the school of the women, that, by their agency, he may bring them back to himself. Here we behold also the inconceivable kindness of Christ, in choosing and appointing women to be the witnesses of his resurrection to the Apostles (p 251).

Another feature of Calvin’s hermeneutical method is to conclude that certain biblical events are relevant only for their own time and have no applicability or relevance for the later church. Thus in his commentary on the story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10, he criticizes a traditional application of this story to the spiritual life. He states:

As this passage has been basely distorted into the commendation of what is called a Contemplative life . . . nothing was farther from the design of Christ, than to encourage his disciples to indulge in indolence, or in useless speculations (p 142).

It is a foolish attempt of the monks to take hold of this passage, as if Christ were drawing a comparison between a contemplative and an active life, while Christ simply informs us for what end, and in what manner, he wishes to be received (p 143).

Another passage criticizes the liturgical washing of feet. In his commentary on the anointing of Jesus by Mary of Bethany (John 12), Calvin says on verse 7:

The anointing, which Judas finds fault with, is defended on this ground, that it will serve for his burial. Christ, therefore, does not approve of it as an ordinary service, or one which ought to be commonly used in the Church.... Those persons, therefore, are absurd interpreters, who infer from Christ’s reply, that costly and magnificent worship is pleasing to God; for he rather excuses Mary on the ground of her having rendered to him an extraordinary service, which ought not to be regarded as a perpetual rule for the worship of God (pp 13-14).

He continues in commenting on verse 8:

We must observe what I have already pointed out, that a distinction is here drawn expressly between the extraordinary action of Mary, and the daily service which is due to Christ. Those persons, therefore are apes, and not imitators, who are desirous to serve Christ by costly and splendid display; as if Christ approved of what was done once, and did not rather forbid that it should be done afterwards (pp 13-14).

Finally, in commenting on the Christ's commission to Mary Magdalene to announce the good news of the resurrection to the Apostles (John 20:17), Calvin comments:

It ought likewise to be observed, however, that this occurrence was extraordinary, and – we might almost say – accidental. They [the women] are commanded to make known to the Apostles what they [the Apostles] afterwards, in the exercise of the office committed to them, proclaimed to the whole world. But, in executing this injunction, they [the women] do not act as if they had been Apostles; and therefore, it is wrong to frame a law out of this injunction of Christ, and to allow women to perform the office of baptizing. Let us be satisfied with knowing that Christ displayed in them the boundless treasures of his grace, when he once appointed them to be the teachers of the Apostles, and yet did not intend that what was done by a singular privilege should be viewed as an example (pp 260-261).

Calvin's objections regarding matters of biblical precedent applied not only to women, but also to Jesus. Thus in his commentary on John 13:15, "For I have given you an example" [in washing the disciples' feet], Calvin explains as follows:

It deserves our attention that Christ says that he gave an example; for we are not at liberty to take all his actions, without reserve, as subjects of imitation. The Papists boast that, by Christ's example, they observe the forty days' fast, or Lent. [The biblical reference here is of course to Matthew 4:2 and parallels, not the footwashing.] But we ought first to see whether or not he intended to lay down his fast as an example, that the disciples might conform to it as a rule. We read nothing of this sort, and, therefore, the imitation of it is not less wicked than if they attempted to fly to heaven. Besides, when they ought to have followed Christ, they were not imitators, but apes. Every year they have a fashion of washing some people's feet, as if it were a farce which they were playing on the stage; and so, when they have performed this idle and unmeaning ceremony, they think that they have fully discharged their duty, and reckon themselves at liberty to despise their brethren during the rest of the year. But – what is far worse – after having washed the feet of twelve men, they subject every member of Christ to cruel torture, and thus spit in Christ's face. This display of buffoonery, therefore, is nothing else than a shameful mockery of Christ. At all events, Christ does not here enjoin an annual ceremony, but bids us be ready, throughout our whole life, to wash the feet of our brethren and neighbours (pp 61-62).

In conclusion, Calvin clearly distinguishes Mary Magdalene from Mary of Bethany and the woman of Luke 7.

Cranmer and Mary Magdalene

Before Thomas Cranmer became engaged in preparing the 1549 Book of Common Prayer, he had worked on two experimental liturgical calendars to try out various ideas regarding daily prayer and the liturgical year.

Cranmer's Liturgical Projects, ed. J. Wickham Legg. London 1915
later calendar, pp 3-14
earlier calendar, pp 154-165
introduction: calendar, pp xlii - xlv

Both of these included feasts of Mary Magdalene. The later calendar, however, had a “fourth lesson” to be used in daily prayer for individual feast days. The scripture passage chosen for the feast of Mary Magdalene was, significantly, not the traditional one from Luke 7, but rather John 20:1-18, Mary Magdalene and the risen Christ (p 93).

Why Cranmer made this choice is not known. In light of this, however, why John 20 was not chosen for the 1549 Prayer Book's feast of Mary Magdalene is perhaps as much of a mystery as why the entire feast disappeared in 1552.

Mary Magdalene in the Catholic Liturgy of 1570

The Catholic liturgy for the feast of Mary Magdalene following the Council of Trent was not identical with that of the medieval period, though there is no information available regarding the bases for the changes made. Certainly the *Missale Romanum* of 1570 retained Luke 7:36-50 as the gospel reading. Related to this choice, Mary Magdalene was designated as “penitent” (rather than virgin, holy woman, martyr or other category); this is the only feast so designated.

A new epistle, was chosen, however: Song of Songs 3: 2-5 plus 8:6-7. This presented quite a different image of Mary Magdalene than that given in Proverbs 31. There is no sequence.

Finally, the recitation of the Nicene Creed was included in the mass liturgy; this is done only for the feasts of apostles and is therefore a reference to the woman of John 20, the “apostle to the apostles”.

The three orations are new. The collect (opening prayer) names Lazarus and refers to John 11. It takes some liberties, however, in giving Mary (of Bethany) complete credit for asking Jesus to raise Lazarus; Martha is here given no credit at all, though in the biblical text, Martha is more significant than Mary. The secret and communion prayers both refer to “humble service” and therefore point to the unnamed anointing woman of Matthew 26:6 and Mark 14:10.

The gradual, alleluia and offertory verses still quote psalm 45, but are different verses

than before. The introit and communion verses now quote psalm 119. The images presented are different than those previously raised up.

The Mary Magdalene of Medieval Legend, Drama and Art

For medieval folk, Mary Magdalene was not only the biblical person (or persons) considered above, but also the subject of a considerable body of legend. This recounted that Mary Magdalene traveled to southern France and lived there for a number of years. She preached and evangelized, exercised considerable authority, baptized and ordained. She was also a solitary contemplative around whom a community of disciples formed and in which she was a musician and choreographer – and of course, miracle worker.

The legends of Mary Magdalene that might have been known in later medieval England are found in works such as the following:

“Saint Mary Magdalene,” vol I, pp 374-383.

In Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*.

Translated by William Granger Ryan, 2 vol. Princeton University Press 1993

“Mary Magdalen’s Life”, pp 101-124.

In *A Legend of Holy Women: A Translation of Osbern’s Bokenham’s Legends of Holy Women*. Translated and introduced by Sheila Delany.

University of Notre Dame Press 1992

The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene and of her Sister Saint Martha.

A Medieval Biography translated and annotated by David Mycoff.

Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications 1989

She was also an important figure in medieval English liturgical drams; see for example:

“Mary Magdalene” pp 53-168.

In *The Digby Mysteries*, edited by F. J. Furnivall. EETS ES 70.

London 1882

Theresa Coletti, *Mary Magdalene and the Drama of Saints: Theater, Gender, and Religion and Late Medieval England*.

University of Pennsylvania Press 2004

In addition, Mary Magdalene was depicted in art. A few examples have been described by Elisabeth Moltman-Wendel, as follows (line divisions are my own, for clarity):

The rediscovery of Mary Magdalene the preacher can be seen in the stained-glass windows of French cathedrals of the thirteenth century. Here cycles of the legendary history of the saint are presented in which features of the New Testament Mary keep

emerging, despite the alien medieval overtones.

In Chartres cathedral, dating from 1230, Mary Magdalene is merely a saint with a halo - Martha still does not merit one – but her spiritual director Maximinus preaches the sermon.

In Bourges cathedral, built fifteen years later, Martha too now has a halo. Women have increasing importance.

In Auxerre cathedral, fifteen years later again, Mary Magdalene has progressed once more. She is preaching, and Maximinus is standing by. Her spiritual companion has clearly retreated into the shadows. However, the hierarchy is still preserved: Maximinus does the baptizing.

At the end of the thirteenth century the two women, Mary Magdalene and Martha, are then depicted as preachers in the stained-glass windows of the cathedral at Semur in Burgundy

Only in the sixteenth century at Chalons-sur-Marne do we find a picture in which Mary Magdalene, too, is baptizing. The woman has regained the role that she lost.

In the following period we also find portrayals of Mary Magdalene preaching in Florence, Lubeck, Donaueschingen and elsewhere. In Lubeck she can even be seen performing yet another function of the ministry: she is enthroning her brother Lazarus as bishop of Marseilles.

In one manuscript illustration the Holy Spirit is hovering over her in the form of a dove. Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *The Women Around Jesus*. London: SCM 1982, pp 79-80

The art from Lubeck just mentioned is illustrated in another work:

The Lubeck depiction includes a further clerical duty; there she consecrates her brother Lazarus as the Bishop of Marseilles

[shown on page 9]

Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel and Jurgen Moltmann, *Humanity in God*. New York: Pilgrim Press 1983, p 7

The following dissertation is of interest in that it connects artistic representations of Mary Magdalene with fifteenth and sixteenth century political dynamics in the Low Countries.

Brian Michael Cohen, *Saint Mary Magdalen as a Cultural Symbol in the Low Countries, c 1450-1530*. Ph D Dissertation: State University of New York Binghamton 2001

Possible Bases for the Disappearance of Mary Magdalene

Having established a context in which to view the feast of Mary Magdalene in the 1549 Book of Common Prayer, it is now appropriate to try to discern just why this feast disappeared in 1552. Because there is no direct, explicit information on this point, I turn to indirect evidence

and the assembling of *possible* influences on the decision to change the calendar of the 1552 Prayer Book. Such influences are based on ways of thinking that were abroad at the time. Some were widely diffused in sixteenth century culture, while others were enunciated or fostered by Luther or Calvin.

I turn also to the group of English folk who would come to be known as “Puritans”. They were more radical theologically than “main-stream” Anglicans -- and more radical than Martin Bucer. Puritan theology was much influenced by that of Swiss reformers

Written presentations of Puritan beliefs come mostly from the 1560s, following the death of Queen Mary I. I quote from them here because they provide a source of potential bases for removing the feast of Mary Magdalene from the liturgical calendar. Furthermore, I assume that they were or might have been talked about and developed – in the wind, so to speak – in 1550-1552 when changes were made to the Book of Common Prayer. The Puritans certainly did not entirely get their way in the revision process, and they continued in subsequent years to make strong objections to the 1552 and 1559 Prayer Books. Their theological views did have some influence, however, and I suggest that they might well have been implicated in the fate of Mary Magdalene’s feast day.

Debates between Puritians and “Anglicans” are particularly illuminating; these are considered at length in the following reference:

Donald Joseph McGinn, *The Admonition Controversy*. New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press 1949

See also:

H. C. Porter, *Puritanism in Tudor England*. London: Macmillan 1970

Here I set out a number of characteristics of Mary Magdalene as she might have been known ca 1550 and indicate how each might have viewed by some reformed theologians – and why they might have sought to remove her feast from the Book of Common Prayer’s liturgical calendar.

Mary Magdalene as Woman

Mary Magdalene was the only woman named in the 1549 liturgical calendar. She might therefore have been the target of the common misogyny of the time. This included some or all of the following points:

- the woman Eve was associated with sinful disobedience and original sin
- woman was considered as temptress and particularly lustful
- woman was the weaker sex, emotional, and earthly (unspiritual)

- woman was second in the order of creation to Adam and therefore inferior
- woman was created in the image of man while man was created in the image of God
- woman was created to be man's helpmate.

Merrie Wiesner quotes Luther, for example, as saying the following about woman and Eve:

The rule by woman has brought about nothing good from the beginning of the world. When God set Adam up as Lord over all creatures, everything was good and right, and everything ruled for the best. But the woman came and also wanted to have her hand in things and be wise; then everything collapsed and became a complete disorder. We've got you women to thank for that.

Woman have inherited from Eve their tendency to believe lies and nonsense.

Merrie Wiesner, "Luther and Women: 'The death of two Marys'".

In Jim Obelkevich, Lyndal Roper and Raphael Samuel, *Disciplines of Faith: Studies in Religion, Politics and Patriarchy*. Routledge Kegan Paul 1987, pp 295-308 [here 300]

With respect to woman as temptress, Wiesner also quotes Luther as saying:

All woman know the art to catch and hold a man by crying, lying and persuasion, turning his head and perverting him . . . it is often more difficult for him to withstand such enticements than to resist his own lust (p 301).

She concludes that, for Luther, "All women, therefore, share the qualities of a prostitute to some degree" (p 301). We have already seen that John Calvin regarded Mary Magdalene as too emotional, earthly and unspiritual.

Mary Magdalene as Single

Mary Magdalene was not only female, she was also single (unmarried). Merrie Wiesner concludes that Luther believed that "Marriage and motherhood, instead of virginity, was now a woman's highest calling" (p 298). Indeed, "Marriage and motherhood was the only way for women to fulfil their God-given function" (p 299) and "Even a woman who chose to remain unmarried was to be limited to appropriate, "natural" female activities" (p 299). Wiesner concludes that

Unmarried women in the abstract are almost never considered in [Luther's] writings. When they are, it is as a problem to be dealt with, and Luther's solution is that which many cities adopted in the sixteenth-century – requiring them to live with a family, forbidding them to live on their own or with each other. They would thus fall under the "natural" control of a male head of household (p 302).

She continues,

This emphasis on marriage not only as the only ideal for women, but as their only natural vocation may have contributed to feelings of hostility toward unmarried women” (p 302]

—

And hostility toward Mary Magdalene?

Mary Magdalene as One with Authority

The biblical story gave Mary Magdalene status and authority. She was the first to encounter and speak with the risen Christ, and she was commissioned to teach and preach to the other (male) disciples.

The Mary Magdalene of medieval legend also exercised authority. One example is the following story of how Mary scolds and gives orders to the governor of Marseilles:

Magdalene preached Christ to [the governor of the city and his wife] and some days later appeared in a vision to them saying, “Why, when you are so rich, do you allow the saints of God to die of hunger and cold?” She then appeared to them in dreams...

The third time, in the silence of the dead of night, Mary Magdalene appeared to each of them, shaking with anger, her face afire as if the whole house were burning, and said...

You take your rest, you enemy of the cross of Christ, your gluttony sated with a bellyful of all sorts of food while you let the saints of God perish from hunger and thirst? You lie here wrapped in silken sheets, after seeing others homeless and desolate, and passing them by?

Jacobus Voraigne, *The Golden Legend*, vol 1, p 377.

According to Marrie Wiesner, however, Luther believed that women’s subjection to man is inherent in their very being and was present from creation (p 298). She quotes him as saying:

The man has been given so much dominion over the woman, that she must name herself according to him. For that reason, a woman adopts her husband’s names and not vice versa. This has happened because of God’s gracious will so that she stays under her husband’s rule, because she is too weak to rule herself (p 298).

and

But if a woman forsakes her office and assumes authority over her husband, she is no longer doing her own work, for which she was created, but a work that comes from her own fault and from evil. For God did not create this sex for ruling, and therefore they never rule successfully (p 298).

Further

[Obedience] is the highest, most valuable treasure that a woman can have to be subject to a man and certain that her works are pleasing to him (p 298).

Political governance, for example by queens regent and queens regnant, was a particular kind of authority. Though not directly relevant to Mary Magdalene herself, the authority of female rulers was a live issue in the sixteenth century. How John Knox felt about four living (Catholic) queens is indicated as follows:

To promote a woman to beare rule, superioritie, dominion or empire aboue any realme, natione, or citie, is repugnant to nature, contemnelie to God, a thing most contrarious to his reueled will and approued ordinance, and finallie it is the subuersion of good order, of all equitie and iustice (p 9).

And nowe to put an end to the first blast [of the trumpet] seeing that by the ordre of nature, by the malediction and curse pronounced against women, by the mouth of St. Paule the intrepeter of Goddes sentence, by the example of that common welth, in whiche God by his word planted ordre and policie, and finallie by the judgement of the most godlie writers, God hath delected woman frome rule, dominion, empire, and authoritie aboue man (p 50).

John Knox, "The First Blast of the Trumpet against the monstrous regiment of women" (1558), edited by Edward Arber. *The English Scholar's Library of Old and Modern Works*. 2. London: Southgate 1878

Another perspective is presented by B. M. Cohen, who makes the case that Mary Magdalene – especially in art – supported the legitimacy of female succession and authority in the dukedom of Burgundy during the late fifteenth - early sixteenth centuries. Thus the rule of Mary of Burgundy and her family gained legitimacy and authority by association with the cult of the Magdalene and through artistic representations in which she baptized the king and queen of Burgundy and, at least symbolically, anointed them as rulers.

Brian Michael Cohen, *Saint Mary Magdalen as a Cultural Symbol in the Low Countries, c. 1450-1530*. Ph.D. Dissertation. State University of New York Binghamton, 2001.

Mary Magdalene as Apostle

As one commissioned to carry the good news of the resurrection to the other disciples, Mary Magdalene was sometimes spoken of in medieval tradition as the "apostle to the apostles." As indicated above, this was occasionally acknowledged in the medieval and post-reformation Catholic liturgy – though it was not the predominant image of Mary Magdalene.

It is clear from the 1549 and 1552 editions of the Book of Common Prayer that the (twelve) apostles had a high status and were thought worthy of inclusion in their liturgical calendars. The image of Mary Magdalene that was presented, however, was not that of apostle, but rather the penitent woman.

Any inclination to consider Mary Magdalene as apostle to the apostles would have been opposed by the Puritans, whose theology would not permit the use of the term apostles by anyone other than the eleven apostles plus Matthias. Debates between themselves and moderates (here termed “Anglicans” specifically considered the question whether it was correct to refer to Paul, Titus, Barnabas and Epaphroditus as apostles (as they were in scripture). (McGinn, *The Admonition Controversy*, pp 404-411). The following passage was also considered.

Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me (Romans 16:7).

First, though this modern bible translation uses Junia as a female name, the written records of debate show that both sides used the masculine form, Junius.

The Puritan response was as follows:

And as for Andronicus and Junius which are by you recited belike to prove that we may have more apostles because it is said of St Paul that they were “famous and notable amongst the apostles,” it cannot be proved by anything I see there whether they had any function, ecclesiastical or no. For St Paul calleth them his kinsfolk and fellow-prisoners and doeth not say that they were his fellow-labourers, but a man may be well notable and famous amongst the apostles and well known unto them, which is no apostles” (pp 409-410).

Mary Magdalene as Preacher

The medieval church viewed Mary Magdalene as a preacher, beginning with her announcing the good news of the resurrection to the other disciples (John 20:18). In addition, medieval legend also considered her a great preacher and evangelizer in southern France (to which she, Martha, Lazarus and companions had traveled following the resurrection). Thus the *Golden Legend* tells us that:

When Mary Magdalene saw the people gathering at the shrine to offer sacrifice to the idols, she came forward, her manner calm and her face serene, and with well-chosen words called them away from the cult of idols and preached Christ fervidly to them. All who heard her were in admiration at her beauty, her eloquence, and the sweetness of her message...and no wonder, that her mouth which had pressed such pious and beautiful kisses on the Savior’s feet should breathe forth the perfume of the word of God more profusely than others could.

Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, vol 1, pp 376-377).

The Puritans, however, were strongly opposed to preaching by women, based on the following two passages from scripture:

Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law (1 Corinthians 14:34).

and

But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence (1 Timothy 2:12).

In the debates of the 1560s-1570s, the Anglicans specifically challenged Puritans regarding this matter by raising up the example of Mary Magdalene. The Anglican said:

Women were the first that preached Christ's resurrection; a woman was the first that preached Christ in Samaria, John 4; and yet undoubtedly none of them did contrary to the prescript Word of God. Women may not speak ordinarily in the congregation nor challenge any such function unto themselves but upon occasion they may speak, as I have said....

The Puritan responded as follows:

His example of the "Samaritan woman, John 4" is frivolous, that she should become a "public preacher" which had not yet learned her catechism nor was scarce out of her Christian A,B,D, where it is manifest that she did nothing which belongeth not to everyone -- that is, that we should exhort one another to go where the knowledge of Christ is to be had -- so that she did only, as it were, toll the bell to draw the Samaritans to our Saviour Christ that he might preach unto them. Neither doth his other example of the "women, Matt 28), which preached the resurrection, help him. For if that may be called a public ministry, it hath an express commandment of the Lord by the angel.

McGinn, *The Admonition Controversy*, pp 225-226.

Mary Magdalene as Minister of Baptism and Orders

In some medieval legends and art, as indicated above, Mary Magdalene was viewed as one who baptized, ordained, and consecrated rulers.

These ministries would also have run afoul of Puritan theology. The basic objection was that those who baptized needed to be ministers of the word (preachers) first, and has just been discussed, this is not possible for women.

In the context of the Book of Common Prayer, Puritan opposition to women baptizing comes up in their opposition to the liturgy entitled “Of Them That Be Baptized in Priuate Houses in Tyme of Necessitie.” This was hedged around with cautionary statements:

The pastours and curates shall oft admonyshe the people, that they differ not the Baptisme of infantes any longer than the Sundaye, or other holy daye, nexte after the chylde bee borne, onlesse upon a great and reasonable cause declared to the curate and by hym approued.

And also they shal warne them that without greate cause, and necessite, they Baptise not children at home in theyr houses. And when great nede shall compell them so to doe, that then they minister it on this fashion.

Although the rite never explicitly refers to women, in fact such clinical baptisms were often conferred by midwives -- and the Puritans were quite aware of this. In addition, Puritan theology did not consider the death of unbaptized infants a particular concern. (A view that may simply have followed from opposition to emergency baptism by midwives.)

In McGinn’s *The Admonition Controversy*, the question of women baptizing occupies considerable space (pp 220-237) and is considered together with the closely related issue of “private administration of the sacraments [of] baptism and communion”. The debate on these matters is long and rather tedious.

In the course of this debate, the Puritans also express disapproval of the circumcision of her sons by Sepphora (Zipporah), Moses’ wife (Exodus 4:25); Moses should have done this himself. In another place (p 163) and context, the Puritans criticize Mary of Bethany for grieving excessively when she went to Lazarus’ grave “to weep there” (John 11:19)..

Mary Magdalene’s Day as a Liturgical Feast Day

Puritans objected to the observance of any and all feast days; they believed that Sunday was the sole day for worship. One writer made the following observations regarding the liturgical calendar of the Book of Common Prayer:

In this book [BCP], days are ascribed unto Saints and kept holy with fasts on their evens, and prescript service appointed for them, which beside that they are, of many superstitiously kept and observed, are also contrary to the commandment of God,. Six days shalt thou labour, and therefore we, for the superstition that is put in them, dare not subscribe to allow them (p 126).

John Field, “A view of popish Abuses yet remaining in the English Church, for which the godly Ministers have refused to subscribe”, in H.C. Porter, *Puritanism in Tudor England*. London: Macmillan 1970

This issue was debated at great length; see McGinn, *The Admonition Controversy*, pp 245-251.

Finally, in his *The Worship of the English Puritans* (Westminster: Dacre Press 1948), Horton Davies states,

For the Puritan there was only one festival of the Church, and that a weekly one, the Lord's day was the single red-letter day in his calendar.... The whole drama of salvation was rehearsed each Sunday in its entirety. What need was there, then, for separate festivals which celebrated only one scene of the divine drama at once? But the Puritans did not merely regard the Saints' days and Festivals as superfluous. They regarded the Saints days in particular as a diminution of the glory due to God alone, as well as a denial of the sole Mediatorship of Christ (p 75-76).

Discussion

I have tried to reconstruct a hypothetical case that might have been made, in whole or in part, for the removal of the feast of Mary Magdalene from the liturgical calendar of the Book of Common Prayer. The points to which objection could be raised are characteristics of the Mary Magdalene of medieval consciousness. The objections themselves are quoted from reformed theologians writing at or around the date that the feast of Mary Magdalene disappeared from the Prayer Book. The assumption is made that theological positions expressed in writing later than 1552 were in the process of development, and known to, persons prior to the written records available to us.

The basic issue, I suggest, is mainly that Mary Magdalene is a woman -- and just being a woman was problematic for some of the theological perspectives involved. But Mary Magdalene is not just any woman: she is single (unmarried), she has high status as the one who first encountered and spoke with the risen Christ, she is commissioned to be apostle to the apostles, teaching and preaching to them the good news of the resurrection. In the context of subsequent ministry, described in legend and art, she preaches and evangelizes, holds authority, baptizes and ordains. Every one of these characteristics would have been objectionable to some theologians of the reformation and their followers. It appears that a strong case could have been made against the continued inclusion of her feast in the liturgical calendar.

This case remains hypothetical, however. It presents arguments that *may have been* involved in the removal of Mary Magdalene from the 1552 Book of Common Prayer. Direct evidence is lacking, however, and the question remains open.