

Mary Magdalen and the mendicants: The preaching of penance in the late Middle Ages

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Abstract

This essay examines *de sanctis* sermons written to commemorate the feast day of Saint Mary Magdalen in order to extract the social meaning of penance in the late Middle Ages. Since sermons were the 'mass media' of the day, they provide a glimpse into how the obligation of penance was presented by preachers, mostly friars, in the later medieval period. Through an analysis of what the friars preached about Mary Magdalen – the paradigmatic penitential saint – light can be thrown on how the reformulation of the sacrament of penance at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 helped to rejuvenate the cult of the Magdalen and how, in turn, the saint came to represent the sacrament of penance in the late medieval period.

In the year 1279 Charles of Salerno had a vision. It was disclosed to the Angevin prince that the body of Saint Mary Magdalen was not interred in Burgundy, as the canons of Vézelay claimed; it remained, rather, in the city of Aix-en-Provence, where it had been buried since apostolic times. On 9 December of that same year, a tomb in the crypt of the church of Saint-Maximin was opened and the saint's relics were miraculously discovered. According to the inquisitor Bernard Gui O.P., a contemporary witness, the body contained an identity card of sorts. An ancient *cartellus*, encased in a protective piece of wood, stated unequivocally that the body was that of Saint Mary Magdalen. On 18 December, prelates were convened to authenticate the finding, on 5 May 1280 the relics were exhumed in the presence of the prince, assorted clergy and the people, in 1281 they were translated to a suitably opulent reliquary, and in 1283 the Magdalen's skull was placed in a golden reliquary of its own and crowned with an Angevin

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diadem sent from Italy especially for the occasion by the prince's father, Charles I, King of Naples. Such a flurry of activity suggests a renewed devotion to the saint in the late thirteenth century.¹ The Provençal claims were aided immeasurably in 1295 when Boniface VIII gave papal approbation to the site, installing the Dominican order at Saint-Maximin, and explicitly acknowledging that the body of the saint had indeed been concealed there.² Within two years the Dominicans had unofficially claimed the Magdalen as their patroness, and were honoring her with an octave granted by decree of the General Chapter in 1297.³ Official recognition and institutionalization of the cult of Mary Magdalen in Provence was not solely the work of an Angevin prince in collaboration with the papacy, however. This essay will suggest that the emergence of mendicant

¹ My account of these events is drawn primarily from M. Faillon, *Monuments inédits sur l'apostolat de Sainte Marie-Madeleine en Provence...*, 2 vols (Paris, 1865; 2nd edition), vol. 1, 870–904. The report of Bernard Gui, who claims to have seen the actual *cartellus* (*Hunc cartellum vetustissimum legi ego ipse, qui haec scribo*), is reprinted in Faillon, *Monuments*, vol. 2, 777–782. Faillon, it must be remembered, was an apologist for the cult of Mary Magdalen in Provence; thus his evidence must be used with proper caution.

For further studies on the history of the cult of Mary Magdalen see, Helen Meredith Garth, *Saint Mary Magdalene in mediaeval literature* (Baltimore, 1950); Victor Saxer, *Le culte de Marie-Madeleine en occident dès origines à la fin du moyen-âge* (Auxerre–Paris, 1959), the most comprehensive of his many Magdalen studies; *Marie Madeleine dans la mystique, les arts et les lettres* (Actes du colloque international. Avignon 20–22 juillet 1988), ed. Eve Duperray (Paris, 1989); the recent volume of collected essays, *La Madeleine (VIIIe–XIIIe siècle)* published in the series *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome. Moyen Âge (MEFRM)* 104/1 (1992); and most recently, Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalen. Myth and Metaphor* (London, 1993).

For an Angevin saint see M.R. Toynbee, *Louis of Toulouse and the process of canonization in the fourteenth century* (British Society of Franciscan Studies, vol. 15, Manchester, 1929) and M.-H. Laurent, *Le culte de S. Louis d'Anjou à Marseille au XVIe siècle* (Rome, 1954). For the Hungarian branch of the family and their patron saints see, F. Levárdy, 'Il Leggendaro Ungherese degli Angiò conservato nella Biblioteca Vaticana, nel Morgan Library e nell'Ermitage,' in: *Acta Historiae Artium Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 9 (1963) 75–138, and Gábor Klaniczay, 'The cult of dynastic saints in central Europe: fourteenth-century Angevins and Luxemburges,' now collected in *The uses of supernatural power. The transformation of popular religion in medieval and early-modern Europe*, trans. Susan Singerman (Princeton, 1990), 111–128.

² 6 April 1295, to Charles II, King of Naples and count of Provence (whom the pope addresses as Charles, King of Sicily): *Sane habet tua insinuatō, facta nobis, quod ob magne devotionis affectum, quem ad B. Mariam Magdalenam geris interne in Ecclesia Sancti-Maximini, Ordinis Fratrum Predicatorum, Aque. Diocesis ... in qua est Corpus dicte Sancte reconditum. Bullarium Ordinis FF. Praedicatorum...*, 8 vols, ed. Thomas Ripoll (Rome, 1729–1740), vol. 2 (1830), 40.

³ William R. Bonniwell, *A History of the Dominican liturgy 1215–1945* (New York, 1945; 2nd edition), 220; Daniel-Antonin Mortier, *Histoire des maîtres généraux de l'ordre des frères prêcheurs*, 7 vols (Paris, 1903–14), vol. 2 (1904), 345. Mortier concedes that there is no official decree proclaiming the saint as patron of the Order; however, in their liturgical calendar the following words can be found: *Sanctae Mariae Magdalenae Protectricis Ordinis Nostri*. As he so nicely puts it: "Le corps de Madeleine est sous la garde des Prêcheurs, l'ordre des Prêcheurs, sous la garde de Madeleine."

preaching earlier in the century,⁴ and the Fourth Lateran Council's reformulation of the sacrament of penance at the same time, culminated in renewed enthusiasm for the saint. Further, it will suggest that the constellation of notions crystallized and diffused through the friars' sermons, served to work out the practical meanings and implications of sacramental penance.

1. Penance

In November 1215 the synod gathered at the Fourth Lateran Council reformulated penitential theology. Canon number twenty-one was the result. It decreed that in order to participate in holy communion, every member of the Church was obliged to make annual confession of his or her sins.⁵ To the requisite steps of contrition, satisfaction, and absolution, confession was now officially added, irrevocably changing the ways in which the sacrament was conceived, understood, and performed.⁶

⁴ The literature on mendicant preaching is enormous; the following studies have been most useful to me. A. Lecoy de la Marche, *La chaire française au moyen âge spécialement au XIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1886; 2nd edition), 110–151; Johannes Baptist Schneyer, *Geschichte der katholischen Predigt* (Freiburg, 1969), 141–171; Carlo Delcorno, *La predicazione nell'età comunale* (Florence, 1974), 22–35; Roberto Rusconi, 'La predicazione francescana sulla penitenza alla fine del Quattrocento nel "Rosarium Sermonum" di Bernardino Busti,' *Studia Patavina* 22 (1975) 68–95; Carlo Delcorno, 'Origini della predicazione francescana,' in: *Francesco d'Assisi e francescanesimo dal 1216 al 1226* (Atti dei convegni della società internazionale di Studi Francescani, vol. 6, Assisi, 1977), 127–160; Carlo Delcorno, 'Predicazione volgare e volgarizzamenti,' *Les ordres mendiants et la ville en Italie centrale (v.1220–v. 1350)*, *MEFRM* 89/2 (1977) 679–689; Jean Longère, *La Prédication médiévale* (Paris, 1983), 93–123; D.L. d'Avray, *The preaching of the friars. Sermons diffused from Paris before 1300* (Oxford, 1985); Zelina Zafarana, 'La predicazione francescana,' and 'Predicazione francescana ai laici,' both now collected in *Da Gregorio VII a Bernardino da Siena* (Perugia, 1987); Daniel R. Lesnick, *Preaching in medieval Florence. The social world of Franciscan and Dominican spirituality* (Athens, GA, 1989); Augustine Thompson O.P., *Revival preachers and politics in thirteenth-century Italy. The Great Devotion of 1233* (Oxford, 1992); and the recently collected essays of Fr. Louis-Jacques Bataillon, *La prédication au XIIIe siècle en France et Italie. Etudes et documents* (Aldershot, England, and Brookfield, VT, 1993).

⁵ The Latin text of *omnis utriusque sexus* is quoted in A. Michel, 'Pénitence du IVe concile du Latran à la réforme,' in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, 16 vols (Paris, 1903–1972), vol. 12 (1933).

⁶ On penance see, Henry Charles Lea, *A history of auricular confession and indulgences in the Latin church*, 2 vols (London, 1896; repr. New York, 1968); O.D. Watkins, *A history of penance*, 2 vols (London, 1920); Emile Amanne, 'Pénitence,' in: *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, vol. 12 (1933); A. Michel, 'Pénitence du IVe concile du Latran,' *Dictionnaire de théologie*, vol. 12 (1933); Bernhard Poschmann, *Penance and the anointing of the sick*, trans. Francis Courtney (The Herder History of Dogma, New York, 1964); Joseph A. Spitzig, *Sacramental penance in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries* (Washington, D.C., 1947); Gianfranco Garancini, 'Persona, peccato, penitenza. Studi sulla disciplina penitenziale nell'alto medio evo,' *Rivista di storia del diritto italiano* 47 (1974) 19–87; Thomas Tentler, *Sin and confession on the eve of the Reformation* (Princeton, 1977) and Cyrille Vogel, *Le pécheur et la pénitence au Moyen Âge* (Paris, 1982; 2nd edition).

At the same council, the mendicant orders received their mandate to preach.⁷ The four-fold obligation of penance provided the early friars with a topic on which they were permitted to sermonize, high theological matters having been forbidden to those who had not been properly trained in such occult topics.⁸ This was particularly true for the early Franciscans, whose founder actively scorned scholastic pursuits and favored extemporaneous sermons on the theme of repentance in the style of a *concionatore*.⁹ In a letter which dates nearly to the end of his life, Saint Francis continued to emphasize the importance of penance, exhorting the superiors of the Friars Minor: “In all your sermons you shall tell the people of the need to do penance, impressing on them that no one can be saved unless he receives the Body and Blood of our Lord.”¹⁰

Penance was, and continued to be, at the heart of Dominican preaching as well. A century after the death of Saint Dominic, the Dominican translator, Domenico Cavalca, in his tract on preaching, argued that an apostolic life was predicated on the preaching of repentance. “*Per le quali parole voglio concludere, che quelli, che sono successori di Cristo, e delli apostoli, come sono prelati, religiosi, e sacerdoti, sono tenuti a predicare lo vangelo, e chiamare le genti a penitenza: sicchè non possono tacere senza grande colpa.*”¹¹

If we can judge by the emergence of lay orders of penitents and *disciplinati* companies, the preaching of penance by the friars was an immediate success. Rules for tertiary orders date as early as the second decade of the thirteenth

⁷ Canon 10 can be found in translation in M.-H. Vicaire O.P., *Saint Dominic and his Times*, trans. Kathleen Pond (Greenbay, WI, 1964), 191.

⁸ Innocent III had set the precedent in 1199 when, in his letter to the faithful of the city of Metz, he explained that “*arcana vero fidei sacramenta non sunt passim omnibus exponenda, cum non passim ab omnibus possint intelligi, sed eis tantum qui ea fideli possunt concipere intellectu.*” J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina* (PL), vol. 214, 696.

⁹ In 1212 when Francis and his disciples went to Rome to seek Innocent III’s approval of their order, the pope gave them permission to preach provided that they preach only repentance. Thomas of Celano, *Vita Prima*, 33 (I Cel) trans. Placid Hermann in: *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and early biographies. English omnibus of the sources of the life of St. Francis*, ed. Marion A. Habig (Chicago, 1983; 4th revised edition). Compare: *Legenda Trium Sociorum*, 25 (3 Soc.), trans. Nesta de Robeck in: *St. Francis*, ed. Habig. For Francis’s style of preaching, see Carlo DelCorno, *Predicazione volgare*, 680–682.

¹⁰ This letter, from a unique Latin codex 255 in the Guarnacci Library in Volterra, is included in: *St. Francis*, ed. Habig, 113.

¹¹ *Frutti della Lingua*, (Rome, 1754), 214. For the career of Cavalca see Carlo DelCorno, ‘Cavalca, Domenico,’ in: *Dizionario biografico degli italiani (DBI)* 36 vols (Rome, 1960–), vol. 22 (1979), 577–586.

century.¹² Such groups of pious lay people, loosely affiliated to the mendicant orders, dedicated themselves to performing acts of *misericordia* and leading penitential, but nonetheless secular, lives.¹³ In the case of the *disciplinati*, self-flagellation was added as the central ritual of the penitential regime.

Clearly, then, lay people had received the message of penance. Now we must attempt to understand how the friars themselves understood and presented the obligation of penance to that eager audience. Mendicant sermons about Mary Magdalen provide a path into the subject and vividly illustrate the friars' understanding of the meaning of penance, how they elaborated it, and what was entailed in its practice. So it is to the preachers and their sermons that we must now turn in order to discover one layer of meaning of the Magdalen in the late medieval period.¹⁴

2. The penitent saint

Tears, for medieval preachers, were a multivalent symbol. They could simultaneously denote woman per se, since they were a form of water, an archetypal

¹² The literature is again vast; the following studies have been particularly useful to me. For penitents and *disciplinati* see Gerard Gilles Meersseman, 'Penitenti e disciplinati nel duecento' in: *Il movimento dei disciplinati nel settimo centenario dal suo inizio (Perugia – 1260)*, *Bollettino della Deputazione di storia patria per l'Umbria (BDU)*, 9 (1961) 43–72 (appendix); G.G. Meersseman, *Dossier de l'ordre de la pénitence au XIIIe siècle* (Spicilegium Friburgense, vol. 7, Fribourg, 1961); and G.G. Meersseman and Gian Piero Pacini, *Ordo fraternitatis. Confraternite e pietà dei laici nel medioevo*, 3 vols (Italia Sacra, vols 24–26, Rome, 1977), Meersseman's collected essays. See also, Giovanna Casagrande, 'Penitenti e disciplinati a Perugia e loro rapporti con gli ordini mendicanti,' in: *Les ordres mendiants et la ville en Italie centrale (v. 1220–v. 1350)*, *MEFRM* 89/2 (1977) 711–721; John Henderson, 'The flagellant movement and flagellant confraternities in central Italy 1260–1400,' in: *Religious motivation: Biographical and sociological problems for the church historian*, ed. Derek Baker (*Studies in Church History*, vol. 15, Oxford, 1978), 147–160; and G. Casagrande, 'Il movimento penitenziale nei secoli del basso medioevo,' *Benedictina* 30 (1983) 217–33. For women and the penitential movement in Italy see the collected essays of Anna Benvenuti Papi in: *In castro poenitentiae. Santità e società femminile nell'Italia medievale* (Italia Sacra, vol. 45, Rome, 1990). The emergence of the *disciplinati* companies, of course, post-dates 1260.

¹³ Orders of penitents and *disciplinati* frequently dedicated themselves to the Magdalen. For penitents see, for example, André Simon, *L'ordre des pénitentes de Ste Marie-Madeleine en Allemagne au XIIIe siècle* (Fribourg, 1918). For *disciplinati* see, for example, Guido Tammi, 'Lo statuto dei disciplinati di S. Maria Magdalena di Bergamo. Dal codice sigma 3,2 della Biblioteca Civica di Bergamo,' *BDU* 9 (1961) 257–268; Lester K. Little, *Liberty, Charity, Fraternity. Lay religious confraternities at Bergamo in the age of the commune* (Bergamo and Northampton, MA, 1988), 191–205; and Salvatore Andreucci, 'La compagnia dei disciplinati di S. Francesco e S. Maria Maddalena in Lucca,' *BDU* 68/2 (1971) 233–40.

¹⁴ See Nicole Bériou's fine study of Parisian Mary Magdalen sermons in 'La Madeleine dans les sermons parisiens du XIIIe siècle,' *MEFRM*, 104/1 (1992) 269–340. Michel Lauwers, in the same volume, examined Jacques de Vitry's Mary Magdalen sermons, "'Noli me Tangere" Marie Madeleine, Marie d'Oignies et les Pénitents du XIIIe siècle,' 209–268. See also David J. Viera, 'Vincent Ferrer's Sermon on Mary Magdalen: A Technique for Hagiographic Sermons,' *Hispanofila* 101 (1991) 61–66, looked briefly at this Dominican's Magdalen sermon.

emblem of the female, and they could signify baptism and rebirth in that they washed away sin,¹⁵ but most commonly they were the visible sign of a soul prepared to enter the condition of repentance. In his tract in praise of tears, the eleventh-century reformer Peter Damian maintained that “tears which are from God rise up confidently to the divine tribunal, pleading immediately, and trusting in the certain remission of our sins.”¹⁶ Mary Magdalen had the gift of tears. According to the evangelists she was preternaturally disposed toward them. She wept at the house of the Pharisee, bathing Christ’s feet with her tears, she wept at the tomb of her dead brother Lazarus, and she most famously wept outside Jesus’s tomb, causing the risen Christ to ask, “Woman, why are you weeping?”¹⁷

Jacobus de Voragine, Dominican archbishop of Genoa and celebrated author of *The Golden Legend*, used these lachrymose passages in his five 22 July sermons – those for the Magdalen’s feast day¹⁸ – to construct a model penitent saint. Jacobus, in fitting scholastic fashion, distinguished the Magdalen’s tears according to their nature: those of compunction in keeping with the memory of her sins; those of compassion for her dead brother Lazarus; those of contrition at the Crucifixion; those of love, wept while standing outside the sepulchre.¹⁹ If we follow Jacobus’ schema, and proceed according to scholastic principles, his categories – *compunctio*, *compassio*, *contritio*, and *amor* – will illuminate the late medieval notion of penance in all its manifold configurations.

3. *Compunctio*

Let us first take up the topic of the Magdalen’s tears of compunction. These were the tears shed in memory of her sins, which were so efficacious that they

¹⁵ For woman see Lilia Sebastiani, *Tra/Sfigurazione: Il personaggio evangelico di Maria de Magdala e il mito della peccatrice redenta nella tradizione occidentale* (Brescia, 1992), 60–62. For baptism see Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism*, trans. Philip Mairet (New York, 1961), 155–157. For the symbolism of tears in the eastern tradition, see Evelyn Patlagean, ‘Pleurer à Byzance’ in: *La Souffrance au Moyen Âge* (Les Cahiers de Varsovie. Actes du Colloque Varsovie October 1984, Varsovie, 1988), 251–261.

¹⁶ PL vol. 145, 308. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁷ Luke 7:36–50; John 11:1–44; John 20:11–18.

¹⁸ *Sermones Aurei de praecipuis sanctorum festis quae in ecclesia celebrantur, a vetustate et in numeris prope mendis repurgati*. Per R.P. F. Rudolphum Clutium, Ordin. Praedicat. Cum notis marginalibus, & sermonum rerumque indice locupletissimo (Mainz, 1616), 254–263. Jacobus uses this same schema in his first sermon for the Friday of the fifth week of Lent.

For the career of Jacobus de Voragine see Ernest C. Richardson, *Materials for a life of Jacopo da Voragine* (New York, 1935), and more recently, Carla Casagrande and Silvana Vecchio, ‘Cronache, morale, predicazione: Salimbene da Parma e Jacopo da Varagine,’ *Studi Medievali* 30 (1989) 749–88. There is no standard form of his name; I have chosen to use the Latin form which has a variant spelling: Varagine. The Italian is Jacopo da Varazze.

¹⁹ Fundit enim quator genera lachrymarum scilicet lachrymas compunctionis ex peccatorum recordatione. ... Compassionis in fratris sui morte. ... Doloris ex Christi passione. ... Amoris ex corporis Christi subtracta desiderata visione, *Sermones Aurei*, 254.

provoked Christ's famous words of forgiveness: *Remittuntur tibi peccata tua*.²⁰ *Compunctio*, as Jean LeClercq has defined it, is the "pain of the spirit, a suffering resulting simultaneously from two causes: the existence of sin and our own tendency toward sin."²¹ It was hoped that this pain of the spirit, this prick of conscience, would induce the sinner to enter the state of *contritio*, the first milestone along the penitential path. In his Mary Magdalen sermon, Friar Ludovicus O.F.M. relates an *exemplum* in which the workings of *compunctio* are made plain. Saint Ambrose, it seems, had rebuked a certain emperor for his impertinence. "Didn't David sin?" asked the emperor. "If you followed him erring," replied the saint, "also follow him practicing penance." The chastened emperor, Ludovicus reports, was "immediately pricked by conscience and converted to penance."²²

The notion of *compunctio*, as it was employed by medieval preachers, was mildly associated with shame; yet another condition necessary for proper penance. It was necessary to feel shame at the sin not at the penance, a subtle but important Gregorian distinction. Aldobrandinus de Cavalcantibus, prior of Santa Maria Novella, applauded the Magdalen for feeling ashamed of her sins, the sign of which was her position *behind* Christ at the Pharisee's banquet.²³ On the other hand, Humbert of Romans, fifth minister general of the Friars Preachers, was concerned that his audience not feel ashamed of their condition as penitents. He admonished his confraternity of penitents to instruct themselves in the lesson of the Magdalen, learning by her example. He preached that it was necessary for those who wanted to do praiseworthy penance in the midst of the world to put

²⁰ Quia erat infirma libenter recipiebat Jesum medicum & salvatorem qui sanavit eam valde faciliter, hoc est cum quator verbis dicens: *Remittuntur tibi peccata tua*, *Sermones Aurei*, 254. See also his sermon for the fifth day of the fifth week of Lent, *Sermones Quadragesimales* (Venice, 1621), 158–161; and Domenico Cavalca, who remarks: 'Ma perchè la Maddalena per amore compunta pianse molto, però Christo commendandola disse: Sonole dimessi molti peccati, imperciocchè amò molto,' *Specchio de' Peccati*, ed. Francesco del Furia (Florence, 1828), 35.

²¹ *The love of learning and the desire for God. A study in monastic culture*, trans. Catharine Misrahi (New York, 1961; 3rd repr. edition 1985), 29.

²² Legitur in quodam libro Ambrosius quod reprehendebat quondam imperatorem & cum respondisset 'Nonne David peccavit?' dicebat Beatus Ambrosius 'si secutus es errantem sequere et penitentem.' & ad hoc verbum statim est compunctus & ad penitentiam conversus. Venice, Biblioteca Marciana, MS Marc. Lat. fondo antico 91 (1775), f. 16v.

J.B. Schneyer attributes the sermons in this MS to Saint Louis of Toulouse. After careful examination of the MS, I found no evidence – internal or external – to support this attribution. *Repertorium der lateinischen Sermones des Mittelalters für die Zeit von 1150–1350* (RLS), 11 vols (Münster–Westfalen, 1969–1990), vol. 3, 117.

²³ Luke 7:38, cited by Aldobrandinus. Primum est exemplum pudoris de culpa commissa. Cuius signum est quia retro stetit. Unde *stans retro* &c et merito quia multa magna et publica peccata commiserat. Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (BAV), MS Vat. Burgh. 175, f. 28r. The *incipit* is listed in Johannes Baptist Schneyer, RLS vol. 1: 349.

For the career of Aldobrandinus de Cavalcantibus see, A. Paravicini Bagliani, 'Cavalcanti, Aldobrandino,' *DBI*, vol. 22 (1979) 601–603.

aside human modesty, as did the Magdalen when she entered the festivities at the house of Simon Pharisee, offering her tears without so much as a blush of shame.²⁴ Domenico Cavalca offered much the same analysis of the events at the banquet, but invoked Saint Augustine in order to increase the value of the conceptual currency: “*E così simigliantemente con dolore sia la vergogna; imperocchè, come dice S. Agostino, la vergogna è la grande parte della soddisfazione, grande cagione della remissione.*”²⁵

4. *Compassio*

Compunction had so stung the conscience of Mary Magdalen that she had followed the penitential path to absolution; but it was her compassionate tears that so moved Christ that he too wept, and raised her brother Lazarus from the dead.²⁶ Although *compassio* is not generally considered a state, or even a condition of penance, I would suggest that Jacobus de Voragine explores this particular theme in order to summon others to repentance. By identifying with the Magdalen's tears, sympathizers were meant to lament their own sins and undertake penance. An anonymous Franciscan from Marseille preached:

*‘Cor enim humanum est naturaliter pium et ideo si videmus plorantem aliquem ploramus cum illo. ... Et quia respiciendo Mariam Magdalenam videmus eam anxiam, dolorosam, et lacrimosam, debemus anxari, dolore, lacrimari cum ea. Si enim peccator es tribuit tibi ad plorandum exemplum ut plores cum ea.’*²⁷

Thus through compassion, or what we would perhaps call empathy, pious auditors were expected to weep with the Magdalen over their own sins. Logically it then followed that if a sinner such as the Magdalen could move Christ to such great mercy through her tears, perhaps then hope was at hand for anyone who followed the example of the penitent saint.

²⁴ Notandum iterum quod illi, qui volunt in medio mundi poenitentiam laudabilem facere, necessarium est ut deponant verecundiam humanam, ut non erubescant signa poenitentiae coram mundo, exemplo Magdalenae, de qua dicit Gregorius: “Super convivantes ingressa est, non iussa venit, inter epulas lacrimas obtulit. Discite ergo quo dolore ardet, quae inter epulantes non erubescit.” [*Homily 33, Homiliarum in evangelia* Lib. II, PL vol. 76, 1239] Et ideo dicitur Eccli. 20,4: “Quam bonum est correptum manifestare poenitentiam,” idest poenitentiam facere manifestam. *Ad Fratres de Poenitentia*, reprinted in Meersseman, *Dossier*, 125–128.

For the career of Humbert of Romans see Edward Tracy Brett, *Humbert of Romans. His life and views of thirteenth-century society* (Toronto, 1984).

²⁵ *Specchio de' Peccati*, 35.

²⁶ John 11:32–44. Christus autem eam consolatus est in lachrymis compunctionis peccata sua sibi remittendo. In lachrymis compassionis, fratrem suum resuscitando. Jacobus de Voragine, *Sermones Aurei*, 254.

²⁷ BAV, MS Burgh. lat. 138 f. 144v. I am grateful to Fr. Louis-Jacques Bataillon for bringing this manuscript to my attention.

Such in fact is the theme or sub-theme of a number of 22 July sermons.²⁸ Jacobus de Lausanne, a Dominican preacher active in the early fourteenth century, dedicates a whole sermon to explicating two words: *ne timeas*.²⁹ He uses those words to explain that Mary Magdalen, like the Virgin Mary, need not have feared, because both found grace with the Lord whose gift of grace destroyed sin, forgave punishment and restored honor.³⁰ Quoting Bernard of Clairvaux, he further exhorts, “Don’t fear because sin is the cause of fear.”³¹ Arriving at the heart of the matter, Jacobus suggests to his auditors that the Magdalen was given as an example, a form, a mirror of one needing to do penance.³² Nicholas of Aquaville, a Franciscan preacher active in and around Lyons, reminds his audience of the pauline admonition that ‘though the compassion of the Lord is great, it is great only for those who select a penitential life.’³³ This caveat notwithstanding, one should hope for compassion, according to Nicholas, “because the Lord will have mercy on us just as he had mercy on the Magdalen.”³⁴

“Do not despair” was a related motif for medieval preachers. The notorious Franciscan inquisitor, Bertrandus de Turre, preaching a Magdalen sermon from the text of Isaiah 55:13, explicated the prophetic words in this way: “He [Isaiah] predicted the penance of the Magdalen, giving in her the example to sinners of not despairing.”³⁵ Nicholas of Aquaville interpreted the Magdalen’s frequent position at Christ’s feet as symbolic of hope; distancing herself would have signaled despair.³⁶ Jacobus de Voragine maintained that the Magdalen abode in hope, the sign of which was that she stood behind Jesus at the Pharisee’s; if she

²⁸ Compare Jacobus de Voragine, *Sermones Aurei*, 256–257 and Nicholas of Aquaville, BAV, MS Vat. Lat. 1251, ff. 14r–17v. *RLS*, vol. 4: 136.

²⁹ Luke 1:30, the words which the angel of the annunciation spoke to the Virgin Mary. BAV, MS Vat. lat. 1261, ff. 270v–271v. This sermon is not listed in Schneyer, *RLS*.

For the career of Jacobus de Lausanne see, Guy-Thomas Bedovelle, ‘Jacques de Lausanne,’ *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, 15 vols (Paris, 1937–1991), vol. 8 (1974), 45–6.

³⁰ Ideo dominus Jesus Christus consolatus beatam Mariam Magdalenam ne in mortem animae ... quia invenit gratiam apud dominum. ... Iam gratia adveniens culpam tollit poenam remittit famam restituit. BAV, MS Vat. lat. 1261, f. 270v.

³¹ Ne timeas peccatum est causa timoris. BAV, MS Vat. lat. 1261, f. 270v.

³² ...in exemplum et formam et speculum penitendi data. BAV, MS Vat. lat. 1261, f. 271r.

³³ Et ne dicas magna est miseratio domini quare omnium iniquitatum mearum miserebitur. Hoc est verum dum modo possis venire ad veram penitentiam. BAV, MS Vat. lat. 1251, f. 15r.

For the career of Nicholas of Aquaville see Pierre Péano, ‘Nicolas d’Hacqueville,’ *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. 11 (1981), 283.

³⁴ ...miserebitur nostri sicut misertus est Magdalenae. BAV, MS Vat. lat. 1251, f. 15r.

³⁵ [P]raedicat poenitentiam Magdalenae dantis in ea peccatoribus exemplum non desperandi. Naples, Biblioteca Nazionale, MS VIII.A.36, ff. 72v–73r. *RLS*, vol. 1: 897.

For his career see, P. Gauchat, *Cardinal Bertrandus de Turre. His participation in the theoretical controversy concerning the poverty of Christ and the apostles under John XXII* (Vatican City, 1930).

³⁶ Secus ergo pedes domini debet penitens sedere per spem de eius misericordia, sed non longe a pedibus eius per desperationem. BAV, MS Vat. lat. 1251, f. 15r.

had despaired she would have fallen.³⁷ Cavalca remarked that the saint was a great hope and comfort “for us sinners.”³⁸

A pictorial analogue to the friars’ preaching can be found in the work of a Tuscan artist of the same period. He produced a panel painting of the penitential



Fig. 1. The symbol of Hope. The Magdalen Master, Galleria dell' Accademia, Florence. The legend inscribed on her scroll reads: *Ne desperetis vos qui peccare soletis. Exemploque meo vos reparate Deo.* Photo: author.

³⁷ *Habuit spem quod notatur cum dicitur: Stans retro. Spes enim facit stare, cum desperatio facit cadere. Sermones Aurei*, 258.

³⁸ *Specchio di Croce*, ed. Bartolommeo Sorio (Venice, 1840), 127.

saint in which she is clothed in nothing but her long hair. She carries a scroll inscribed with the following legend: *Ne desperetis vos qui peccare soletis. Exemplo me vos reparate Deo*³⁹ (Fig. 1). This time the Magdalen's message is direct and unmediated. She herself tells her audience of sinners not to despair, but to follow her example and to reconcile themselves with God.

5. *Contritio et confessio*

If we return to Jacobus de Voragine's schema, and advert to his notion of the tears of *contritio*, we find that taking the Magdalen as an example signifies entering a state suffused with sorrow.⁴⁰ Nicholas of Aquaville explores the theme of contrition in a lovely 22 July sermon. He begins by imagining himself into the banquet at the house of the Pharisee: "If I had come to the feet of the Lord with blessed Mary Magdalen, I would have flooded those feet with the tears of contrition."⁴¹

Contrition was suffused with pain and bitterness. Jacobus de Voragine, in a Magdalen sermon explicating the mysterious workings of divine love, employs an

³⁹ The Florentine artist is known only as the Magdalen Master. Scholars date the work to the latter half of the thirteenth century, the *terminus ad quem* being 1280. It hung in the convent of Santissima Annunziata in the eighteenth century, but no earlier documentation for the painting exists. It is now in the Galleria dell' Accademia in Florence, inventory no. 8466. For its iconography see, George Kaftal, *Iconography of the Saints in Tuscan Painting* (Florence, 1952), 718; Magdalen LaRow, 'The iconography of Mary Magdalen: The evolution of a Western tradition until 1300' (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1982), and D. Russo 'Entre le Christ et Marie: la Madeleine dans l'art italien des XIIIe–XVe siècles,' in: *Marie Madeleine dans la mystique*, 173–190.

⁴⁰ *Sermones Aurei*, 254.

⁴¹ Si ad pedes domini cum beata Maria Magdalena venissem eosque lacrimis irrigassem conpunctionis. BAV, MS Vat. lat. 1251, f.16r.

The literary device of imagining oneself into the life of Christ was used frequently in devotional instruction. Giovanni de Caulibus, an Italian Franciscan of the late thirteenth century, used this technique to good effect in his *Meditations on the Life of Christ*. He continuously exhorts his reader, a Poor Clare, to join in the events of the life of Christ. See the English edition by Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green (Princeton, 1961). This devotional practice finds its analogue in the pictorial tradition in which saints (or patrons) are represented in gospel narratives, frequently pre-empting the original participants. See, for example, the late thirteenth-century painted crucifix in the Church of Santa Croce in Arezzo, where Saint Francis takes the place of the Magdalen at the foot of the cross. This motif and others of its genre are reproduced in Evelyn Sandburg Vavalà, *La croce dipinta italiana e l'iconografia della passione* (Rome, 1980; second edition), figs. 550, 518, 522, 525, 529, 533, and 536. See also Daniel Russo, 'Saint François, le Franciscains et les représentations du Christ sur la croix en Ombrie au XIIIe siècle. Recherches sur la formation d'une image et sur une sensibilité au Moyen Âge,' *MEFRM* 96/2 (1984) 647–717.

For a Saint Dominic at the foot of the cross of a slightly later date, see the anonymous Tuscan *Crucifixion* in the Vatican Pinoteca reproduced as plate 189 in William Hood, *Fra Angelico at San Marco* (New Haven and London, 1993). Here Dominic occupies the customary position of Mary Magdalen and is flanked by the Virgin Mary and John the Evangelist. This iconography, however, as Hood comments, "is sunk deeply in the soil of Franciscan, not Dominican imagery," 154–5.

augustinian metaphor, observing that tears are the witnesses of pain, which like arrows wound the heart of the sinner. Therefore, he argued, the Lord, through his great love, had shot the arrow of pain into the mind of Mary Magdalen, the evidence of which was her tears of contrition.⁴²

Bitterness also characterized contrition. This was apposite in the case of the Magdalen, given that her first name, Maria, was thought to have derived from the words *stella maris*.⁴³ Nicholas of Aquaville repeats this etymological interpretation, remarking that “Maria is interpreted as the star of the sea. By the sea which is bitter I understand the bitterness which a penitent must have when he [or she] thinks about his sins.”⁴⁴ He similarly scrutinizes her surname: “Through Magdala, a penitent is signified. Magdala is interpreted as *admigdalum*, which is food for the sick, thus penance is food for penitents. Note that there are two things in *admigdalum*: the exterior bark which is bitter, by which the bitterness of penance is signified [and] the sweetness, the consolation of penance, is represented within, in the kernel.”⁴⁵

Jacobus de Lausanne continues the conceit of using medicinal language to speak about penance. His therapeutic notions are based on techniques of catharsis rather than the administering of medicaments, the penitential regime as Nicholas represented it. In a Magdalen sermon which employs an extraordinary amount of bestiary imagery, Jacobus compares the penitent to a stork who, having gorged on too many snakes and toads, must drink bitter sea water to prick and goad its intestines into vomiting up the superfluity. In the same way, a penitent must drink the bitter potion of contrition to purge the soul of sin.⁴⁶

Tears were the visible sign of contrition,⁴⁷ a state which once entered produced marked results for the penitent. Jacobus de Voragine maintained that the Magdalen’s tears of contrition produced in her a cleansing tantamount to

⁴² ...[A]mor Dei fecit in ea mentis sagitta doloris. Et hoc patet per lachrymas quas effudit, quia ut patet per Augustinum. Lacrymae sunt testes doloris, quibus quasi sagittis cor peccatoris vulneratur. *Sermones Aurei*, 260.

⁴³ The Virgin Mary’s name was also the subject of the same such etymological speculations.

⁴⁴ Maria interpretatur stella maris. Per mare[m] quod amarum est intelligo amaritudinem quam debet habere penitens quando cogitat de peccatis suis. BAV, MS Vat. lat. 1251, ff. 14r–14v. See also Jacobus de Voragine, ‘Saint Mary Magdalen,’ *The Golden Legend*, trans. Granger Ryan and Helmut Ripperger (New York, 1941; repr. New York, 1969), 355.

⁴⁵ Similiter per Magdalam penitens significatur. Magdala interpretatur admigdalum quod est cibus infirmorum. Ita est poenia cibus penitentium. Nota in admigdalo duo sunt. Cortex exterior qui amara est per quam amaritudo poeniae significatur. Interius in nucleo est dulcedo per quod consolatio designatur. BAV, MS Vat. lat. 1251, f. 14v.

⁴⁶ Ita legitur de ciconia qui serpentes comedit et bufones et cum sentit se gravata nimia replecione aquam maris igitur incorporat quae mordet et purgit intestina et sic emitit superfluum quo gravabatur. Sicut prima infirma propter nimia[m] replecionem peccatorum debet bibere amaram contritionem. BAV, MS Vat. lat. 1250 P.II, f. 68v.

⁴⁷ Aldobrandinus de Cavalcantibus: Secundum est exemplum doloris de culpa perpetua cuius signum est lacrimatio. BAV, MS Vat. Burgh. 175, f. 28r; Jacobus de Voragine quoting Augustine: Unde dicit Augustinus quod lachrymae sunt testes doloris. *Sermones Aurei*, 258.

purgation of all sin, a serene conscience, and finally, the suppression of all her sins.⁴⁸ Such an assertion raises a question about the theology supporting such a claim. As we have already seen, the Fourth Lateran Council had added confession to the sacramental definition of penance, an act predicated on the mustering of proper contrition. Confession required contrition; consequently, the two notions became irrevocably associated in the minds of the preachers. Furthermore, it was a question of metaphor: both concepts often employed aqueous imagery – water and tears – so that language itself constructed a link between the two notions. Nicholas of Aquaville associated them when he observed that Mary Magdalen came to Christ and washed her inner self in the tears of contrition and the waters of confession.⁴⁹ He further advised that the penitent soul wash itself two times in the water of contrition and confession.⁵⁰ Then, taking up the language and imagery of II Kings 5:14, he urged lepers, that is sinners, to go to Elisha, that is Christ, and to wash themselves in the water of the Jordan, that is confession.⁵¹ Using similar imagery, Guy d'Evreux, a contemporary of Nicholas, but a member of the Friars Preachers, produced two schematized Mary Magdalen sermons (out of a total of eight) for his *Summa sermonum* on the inter-related subjects of cleansing and purification.⁵² Jacobus de Lausanne, in a long meditation on washing, confession, and contrition, invoked a memorable metaphor on how confession should be made, particularly when it involved mortal sin. He observed: “Just as a maid does not wash her clothes well if she throws them folded and tangled into the water; on the contrary, it is necessary that she unfold them all, one by one, just as when confessing one ought to explain one’s mortal sins and scrub everywhere in confession.”⁵³

⁴⁸ Quae quidem lachrymae tres magnas efficacias habuerunt. Primo fecerunt ipsam totam mundam. ... Secundo fecerunt sibi serenam conscientiam. ... Tertio in ipsa aqua lachrymarum submersa sunt omnia crimina eius. *Sermones Quadragesimales*, 162–163.

An excellent analysis of the complicated relationship between contrition and absolution is provided by Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, 22–27 and 250–300.

⁴⁹ Et ad Christum venit et lavit se in interius lacrimis contritionis et aquam confessionis. BAV, MS Vat. lat. 1251, f. 16r.

⁵⁰ Sequitur lavit se duplici aqua debet anima penitens lavare se aqua contritionis et confessionis. BAV, MS Vat. lat. 1251, f. 16v.

⁵¹ Nahaman significat peccatorem quia leprosus erat. Hic debet venire ad Elyseum id est Christum salvatorem nostrum qui docet leprosos id est peccatores mundare se sed per confessionem hoc est aqua iordanis. BAV, MS Vat. lat. 1251, f. 16v.

⁵² BAV, MS Vat. Burgh. 66, f. 175v and 177r–178r. *RLS*, vol. 2: 493, 497.

For the *schemata* of Guy d'Evreux see P. Michaud-Quantin, ‘Guy d'Evreux O.P., Technicien du sermonaire médiéval,’ *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 20 (1950) 213–233.

⁵³ Sicut unde ancilla non bene lavat pannos suos si eos plicatos et involutos in aquam proiciat immo oportet quod explicet eos quoslibet singillatim. Sicut confidens debet peccata mortalia explicare et qualibet confessione fricare. BAV, MS Vat. lat. 1250 PII, f. 68v.

question for medieval preachers.^{53a} In the following passage, Aldobrandinus de Cavalcantibus seems to be responding to an insistent parishioner's question on the topic. We can almost succeed in hearing the question itself if we listen very closely to his response. He replies:

*'Ista patent in evangelio ubi de confessione non agitur quia non fuit ei necessaria, cum sacerdos qui eam absolvit sciret omnia peccata eius nude et aperte et omnes circumstantias peccatorum et videret etiam contritionem cordis sufficientem ad delenda eius peccata. Possibile est etiam eam aliqua verba dixisse in quibus fatebatur se esse peccatricem etsi non legatur in evangelio.'*⁵⁴

The question, then, seems to have been, "*Quare de Magdalenae confessione in evangelio non legimus?*" Aldobrandinus' reply, although quite ingenious, disclosed the difficulty associated with using the Magdalen as a paradigm of penance. He argued that the Magdalen's verbal confession would have been redundant because the Lord, her priest, looked into her heart and saw sufficient contrition there. Aldobrandinus could not, however, in good conscience, escape the irritating fact that the Gospels make no mention of a verbal confession, a speech act; so he had to concede that in all likelihood Mary Magdalen probably uttered a few words confessing herself a sinner, but the evangelists, for reasons known only to themselves, did not bother to record it.

In an earlier period, an absence, such as this did not present any difficulties. Geoffrey of Vendôme (+ 1132), in a Magdalen sermon remarked:

'We do not read that she spoke, but that she wept; and nevertheless we believe that she spoke well, but with tears rather than words. In fact, the speech of tears is very fruitful in the sight of the benevolent God. While the woman maintained silence with her lips, tears did the work; and while her tongue was

^{53a} The literature on confession has grown very large recently. Scholars, following Lea, have begun to examine the sacrament as an instrument of social control in the middle ages. See Henry Charles Lea, *A history of auricular confession*, vol. 1, 250–255, vol. 2, 415–418; A. Teetaert, *La confession aux laïcs dans l'église latine du VIIIe au XIVe siècle* (Paris, 1926); P. Michaud-Quantin, *Sommes de casuistique*, (Louvain, 1962); L. Braeckmans, *Confession et communion au moyen âge et au Concile de Trente* (Gembloux, 1971); Thomas Tentler, *Sin and Confession* (Princeton, 1977); Roberto Rusconi, "De la prédication à la Confession: Transmission et Contrôle de modèles de Comportement au XIIIe siècle" in: *Faire Croire: Modalités de la diffusion et de la réception des messages religieux du XIIIe au XVe siècles*. Collection de l'Ecole Française de Rome 51. (Rome, 1981), 39–65; Alexander Murray, "Confession as a historical source in the thirteenth century," in: *The writing of history in the middle ages*. Essays presented to Richard William Southern. Eds. R.H.C. Davis and J.M. Wallace-Hadrill (Oxford, 1981), 275–322; the essays by Nicole Bériou, "Autour de Latran IV (1215): la naissance de la confession moderne et sa diffusion," Jacques Berlioz, "Images de la confession dans la prédication au début au XIVe siècle. L'exemple de l'Alphabetum Narrationum d'Arnold de Liège," and Hervé Martin, "Confession et contrôle social à la fin du moyen âge," collected in *Pratiques de la confession. Des pères du désert à Vatican II* (Paris, 1983), 73–136 and *L'aveu. Antiquité et Moyen Age*. Collection de l'Ecole Française de Rome (Rome, 1986).

⁵⁴ BAV, MS Vat. Burgh. 175, f. 28r.

silent, her tears were confessing and pleading better. For this reason, while weeping the Holy Sinner kept quiet, lest by chance he [the Lord] accuse her of saying too little about the evil she had done. Prayers of tears by all means satisfy better than prayers of words.⁵⁵

Pope Innocent III, who presided over the council in which confession was enshrined as a part of the sacramental obligation of penance, took no interest in tears as a speech act.⁵⁶ He seems to have taken the line that the evangelists' omission constituted an inconvenient but hardly insurmountable problem. His solution was simple: he wrote her confession.

*'Noli, Domine, indignari ancillae tuae quod importuna me ingero, quod impudens adsto, quod inter delicias gemitus prodo, quod inter epulas lacrymas fundo, quod contristo convivas, quod impedio discumbentes; non possum amplius sustinere, non possum differre, non possum usque post convivium expectare, quia necessitas urget, angit anxietas, amaritudo conturbat, terret formido, moles peccatorum me premit, funes iniquitatum me constringunt, culpa me torquet, conscientia me mordet. Ego sum, Domine, infelix femina, mulier misera, turpis notitia, turpitudine nota, foetens corpore, foeta mente, plena sceleribus, onerata peccatis. ... Confiteor et cognosco quod digna sum confusione, perditione, damnatione; sed tu, Domine, miserere, qui pro miseris advenisti, propitiare qui pro peccatoribus descendisti. Ego quidem indigna sum exaudiri; sed tu, Domine, dignus es audire, ideoque indignam exaudi, quia quidquid ultra possim ignoro nisi quod in conspectu tuo dolorem lacrymis manifesto.'*⁵⁷

Most thirteenth- and fourteenth-century preachers like Aldobrandinus de Cavalcantibus were not audacious enough to follow Innocent's lead; instead, they struggled to overcome the difficulties imposed by the historical record. Although the pope's model was not imitated by other preachers; nevertheless it provided a pattern for devotional literature. A Franciscan from San Gimignano, Giovanni de Caulibus, wrote a teary-eyed confession for the Magdalen in his *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, a text intended for the use of a Poor Clare. After reporting the

⁵⁵ PL vol. 158, 270–272.

⁵⁶ For a learned discussion of the subtle distinctions of speech according to medieval philosophers (e.g. *loquacitas* vs. *taciturnitas*) see Carla Casagrande and Silvana Vecchio, *I peccati della lingua: disciplina ed etica della parola nella cultura medievale* (Rome, 1982), 150–6 and 441–449.

⁵⁷ This sermon, the incipit of which is: *Rogabat Jesum quidam phariseus ut manducaret cum illo*, is not included in either of the two sixteenth-century editions of the *Opera Omnia*, nor is it found in Migne, PL, vol. 217, which is based largely on the two earlier editions. Nor does Schneyer include it in the *RLS*. B. Hauréau, however, published a partial transcript of it from a damaged MS in: *Notices et extraits de quelques manuscrits latins de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, 2 vols (Paris, 1890), vol. 1, 173–179. My transcription is from BAV, MS Arch. Cap. S. Pet. D. 211, f. 78r–81v. I am currently editing the sermon and will publish it in its entirety.

Magdalen's words and deeds at Christ's feet, he directs his spiritual charge to "watch her carefully and meditate particularly on her devotion, which was singularly loved by God."⁵⁸ In addition, Innocent's confession anticipated a genre of literature which made Mary Magdalen's confession its centerpiece. In a text dated circa 1474, in the introductory paragraph, the editor/author of one such confession remarked the Magdalen's reverence and devotion, and began her confession saying, "*La sancta confessione hor secomenza*"⁵⁹ What then follows is a seventeen-verse confession, written in the first person, in which 'Mary Magdalen' confesses every sin conceivable under the fifteenth-century sun. The helpful editor/author returns in the last two paragraphs to inform us that

*'Questa confessione diceva maria maddalena
Quando sul monte dela palma stava.'*⁶⁰

Ironically, the Magdalen, who had no verbal confession on the historical record, became so irrevocably linked with it that in her legends – both the pictorial and literary versions – she performs miracles on its behalf.⁶¹ Peregrinus Oppeln O.P. rehearses practically word for word the legend as it was found in Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend*, which tells of a young soldier, a devotee of the Magdalen, who was killed in combat. His parents, mourning at his tomb, rebuked the Saint for having let him die unshriven. Mary Magdalen responded immediately. She raised him from the grave, whereupon he asked for a priest,

⁵⁸ *Meditations on the life of Christ*, trans. and edited by Isa Ragusa and Rosalie Green (Princeton, 1961), 171–2.

⁵⁹ *La Confessione di Maria Magdalena* (Padua, c. 1474), 1. See also, *La Confessione di Maria Maddalena* (Venice and Treviso, 1621), *La Rappresentatione et Conversione di Santa Maria Maddalena* (Venice, 1606).

⁶⁰ *La Confessione*, 4, "[S]ul monte dela palma" should be read as the massif of La Sainte-Baume, where according to legendary material, Mary Magdalen spent the last thirty years of her life as a hermit. La Sainte-Baume is approximately sixty kilometers from Saint-Maximin, where she was buried, and where in 1279 Charles, prince of Salerno, discovered her relics. It became a flourishing pilgrimage site in the Middle Ages. The garrulous friar Salimbene made a pilgrimage there in 1283, as did Petrarch sometime in the lenten period of 1337–39. He found the retreat so inspiring that he wrote a sonnet to the Magdalen, 'Dulcis Amica Dei' during his visit. For Salimbene's report see, Salimbene de Adam, *Cronica*, ed. Giuseppe Scalia, 2 vols (Bari, 1966), vol. 2, 762; for Petrarch see now, Eve Duperray, 'Le Carmen de Beata Maria Maddalena. Marie-Madeleine dans l'oeuvre de François Pétrarque: image emblématique de la belle Laure,' in: *Marie Madeleine dans la mystique*, 273–288.

⁶¹ For an index of the legendary material see *Bibliotheca hagiographica latina (BHL)* 2 vols (Brussels, 1898–1901), vol. 2, n. 5439–5513; *BHL Supplementum* (Brussels, 1911), 217–218; *BHL Novum Supplementum* (Brussels, 1986), 605–609; H. Hänsel, *Die Maria Magdalena Legende. Quellenuntersuchung* (Inaugural Dissertation, Griefswald, 1937).

For an edition of Jean Gobi's (recently found) fourteenth-century catalogue of the Magdalen's Provençal miracles see 'Iohannes Gobi Senior OP Liber Miraculorum B. Mariae Magdalene,' ed. Jacqueline Sclafer, *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 63 (1993) 113–206. For an analysis of those miracles see Bernard Montagnes, 'Saint-Maximin foyer de production hagiographique,' in: *Marie Madeleine dans La Mystique*, ed. Duperray, 49–69, who was working from Faillon's transcription.



Fig. 2. Confession Miracle. *Leggendario Ungherese*, BAV MS Vat. lat. 8541, f. 103v. Photo: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.

confessed, received the last rites and finally, died in peace.⁶² This scene is represented in the *Leggendario Ungherese*, made in the fourteenth century for an Angevin prince (Fig. 2), and again in the church of San Pietro a Maiella in Naples, the capital of the Angevin kingdom in Italy.⁶³

⁶² *The Golden Legend*, 362–3. Peregrinus de Oppeln relates the whole miracle (and indeed most of the legend) in his first Magdalen sermon, BAV, MS Pal. lat. 465, f. 156r. For his career see André Duval, 'Pérégrin d'Opole,' *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vol. 12 (1984), 1058.

Alain Boureau has argued persuasively that the purpose of *The Golden Legend* was to provide source material for preachers. See his *La légende dorée: Le système narratif de Jacques de Voragine* (+ 1298) (Paris, 1984).

⁶³ BAV MS Vat. lat. 8541, f. 104r. For the legendary, see *Heiligenleben Ungarisches Legendarium Cod. Vat. lat. 8541*. (Facsimile edition and commentary. Zurich, 1990). For the decoration and patronage of the Cappella Pipino see Fernando Bologna, *I pittori alla corte angioina di Napoli. 1266–1414* (Rome, 1969), 311–314.

6. *Communio*

The Eucharist, as we have seen, was available only to those who had confessed at least once during the year. Confession, according to the theologians, purified and prepared the penitent for holy communion. In her legend, Mary Magdalen took her final communion at La Sainte-Baume, the site of her eremitical retirement near Aix-en-Provence. In the *Golden Legend*, Jacobus de Voragine reports that Mary Magdalen, foreseeing the hour of her death, called for Saint Maximin, and “no sooner had she taken the Communion than her body fell lifeless before the altar, and her soul took its flight to the Lord.”⁶⁴ The scene of the Magdalen’s final communion is a common one. Peregrinus de Oppeln relates it in the first of his Magdalen sermons, while Italian fresco cycles inevitably include it in their narratives.⁶⁵ The late fourteenth-century representation of the

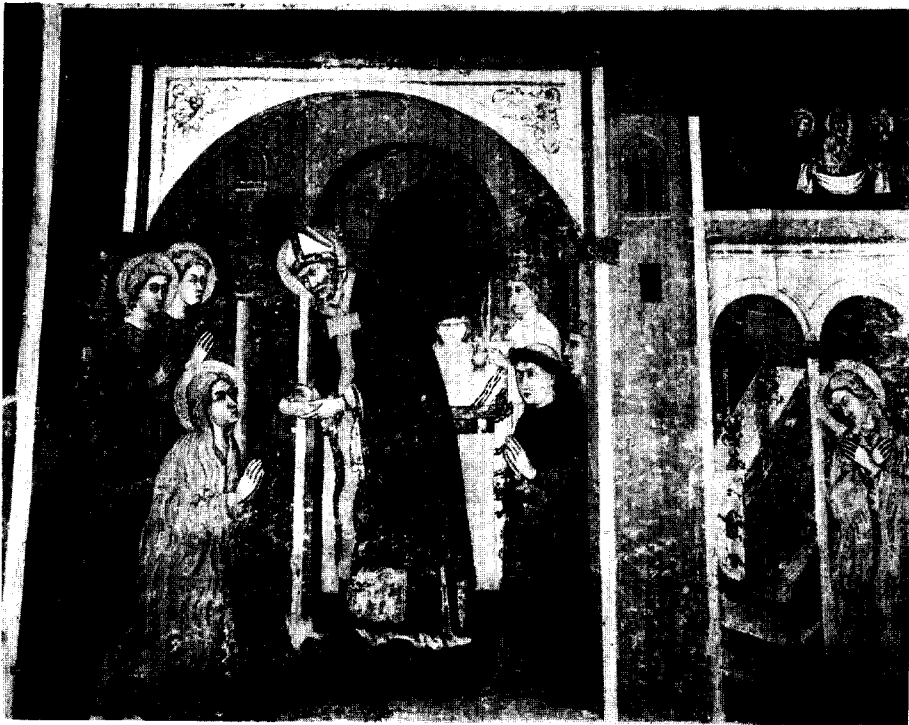


Fig. 3. Final Communion. Magdalen Chapel, San Domenico, Spoleto. Photo: Hutzel collection, Getty Center, Resource Collections.

⁶⁴ *The Golden Legend*, 362.

⁶⁵ Peregrinus de Oppeln, MS Pal. lat. 465, f. 154r. The scene is also found in the *Leggendario Ungherese*, f. 103v. Among Italian fresco cycles it is represented in the lower church cycle at Assisi; San Pietro a Maiella, Naples; San Domenico, Spoleto; the Bargello chapel, Florence; Santa Maria Maddalena, Bergamo; and the apse of San Francesco in Pistoia, where it is inserted into the life of Saint Francis and overlooks the altar on which the priest performs the miracle of transubstantiation.

scene at the mendicant church of San Domenico in Spoleto is fairly typical of this motif⁶⁶ (Fig. 3). Recent research has emphasized the centrality of this sacrament to the Christian religion of the late medieval period. Caroline Walker Bynum has argued convincingly that devotion to the Eucharist was a particularly gendered phenomenon in medieval spirituality, while Miri Rubin's recent study of the feast of Corpus Christi immeasurably enriches our understanding of this rite in late medieval society. I would argue that the symbol of the communicating Magdalen was not only a witness to, but also a piece of publicity for, the eucharistic cult in the late Middle Ages.⁶⁷

7. *Amor*

Love constitutes the final type of tear the Magdalen wept according to Jacobus de Voragine's categories. She wept tears of love while standing outside the sepulchre, because the body of her beloved Christ had been removed from her sight.⁶⁸ Among the preachers, the most common metaphor for love was fire, but it could also be associated with water. Jacobus de Voragine maintained that the Magdalen's love was strong, like water. In this case, the strength of water was its ability to extinguish carnal love in the saint, the evidence of which was that after her conversion she lived out her life most chastely.⁶⁹ Strained as the analogy is, it was nevertheless important because it was incumbent on medieval preachers to establish the Magdalen's post-conversion chastity. In other words, it was satisfaction made for her formerly wanton life.

By virtue of her identification as the unnamed sinner of Luke 7:37, preachers believed Mary Magdalen had been a prostitute before her conversion.⁷⁰ Although the evangelist had not specified the sin of his *peccatrix*, nonetheless there was no doubt in the minds of medieval exegetes that hers was a sin of the flesh. Sins of the flesh were not all sexual in nature, of course, but a woman's sin was inevitably

⁶⁶ For the cycle at San Domenico, Spoleto, see Roberto Quirino, 'Un argomento di pittura spoletina fra tre e quattrocento: Il Maestro dei Cavalari,' *Esercizi: Arte, Musica, Spettacolo* 5 (1982) 20–33.

⁶⁷ *Holy feast and holy fast: The religious significance of food to medieval women* (Berkeley, 1987); *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1991).

⁶⁸ *Sermones Aurei*, 254.

⁶⁹ [C]haritas fuit in ea fortis sicut aqua, quae fortis est in extinguendo. Exstinxit enim in ea carnalem amorem, quia postea castissime vixit. *Sermones Aurei*, 258.

⁷⁰ Pope Gregory I is responsible for this identification. He maintained: 'We believe that this woman [Mary Magdalen] is Luke's female sinner, the woman John calls Mary, and that Mary from whom Mark says seven demons were cast out.' *Homily 33, Homiliarum in evangelia*, Lib. II, PL, vol. 76, 1257. In other words, Gregory the Great's Magdalen was a composite figure cobbled together from three separate scriptural figures: an unnamed female sinner (Luke 7), Mary of Bethany (John 11), and the demonically possessed Mary of Magdala (Mark 16:9). Gregory the Great's exegetical authority in the Middle Ages cannot be overstated; as such, it was his composite Magdalen that the friars inherited.

represented as such.⁷¹ Sins of sexuality such as public display of one's body, fornication and prostitution were categories of sin primarily reserved for women. Medieval moralists and jurists (frequently one and the same) did not always distinguish between them. Canon law defined a *meretrix*, a female prostitute, in both legalistic and moralistic terms. Drawing on Roman law, a woman was considered a prostitute if she offered her body in return for remuneration. A Franciscan preacher from Marseille, embroidering the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 3:3), suggested that "a prostitute is someone who keeps herself from no one, offers herself to everyone, and sells herself for a price."⁷² But canon law also regarded a woman as a prostitute if she made any sort of public display of herself, exhibited *luxuria* in any way, or even if she simulated love.⁷³ Thus the concept of *luxuria* was linked inescapably to prostitution.⁷⁴

Mary Magdalen's reputation suffered the consequence of this rather capacious view of prostitution. Identified as Luke's *peccatrix*, she was often mistaken for the woman taken in adultery (John 8: 3–11), or more often than not, through the sheer force of the "association of ideas," transformed into a *meretrix*. In her guise as prostitute, Mary Magdalen gave medieval preachers yet another theme on which to preach: the folly of women. In *de tempore* sermons for the lenten season, which took their theme from the Magdalen's anointing of Jesus in the house of the Pharisee (Luke 7: 36–50), preachers frequently took the opportunity to preach on the theme of vanity and its consequences, employing Mary Magdalen as their leading lady. Lingering on perfumes and make-up, hairstyles and fashion, often provoked *contra vanitatem* sermons, themselves no more than smokescreens for invectives against women. Savonarola is notorious for such sermons, but he was by no means the only perpetrator, he was merely the celebrated heir to a venerable medieval tradition.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Ruth Mazo Karras, 'Holy harlots: Prostitute saints in medieval legend,' *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1.1 (1990) 3–32. A selected list of studies on medieval prostitution includes: Vern Bullough, 'The prostitute in the middle ages' in: *Studies in medieval culture*, vol. 10, ed. J.R. Sommerfeldt and Thomas H. Seiler (Kalamazoo, MI, 1977), 9–17; E. Pavan, 'Police des mœurs, société et politique à Venise à la fin du moyen âge,' *Revue Historique*, 264 (1980) 241–88; Richard Trexler, 'La prostitution florentine au XVe siècle: patronages et clientèles,' *Annales ESC* 6 (1981) 983–1015; Leah Lydia Otis, *Prostitution in medieval society. The history of an urban institution in Languedoc* (Chicago, 1985); Jacques Rossiaud, *Medieval prostitution*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (New York, 1988); Romano Canosa and Isabella Colonnello, *Storia della prostituzione in Italia dal quattrocento alla fine del settecento* (Rome, 1989); and Maria Serena Mazzi, *Prostituzione e lenoni nella Firenze del quattrocento* (Milan, 1991).

⁷² *Frons meretricis est que nulli se prohibet et modico omnibus se offert. Pretio se vendit.* BAV, MS Vat. Burgh. 138, f. 150r.

⁷³ James A. Brundage, 'Prostitution in the medieval canon law,' *Signs* 1.4 (1976) 825–845.

⁷⁴ For the medieval discourse concerning women and *luxuria* see Mario Pilosu, *La donna, la lussuria e la chiesa nel Medioevo*, (Genoa, 1989).

⁷⁵ It is a subject I take up more fully in Chapter 2 of my forthcoming doctoral dissertation, 'Mary Magdalen and the mendicants: women, preaching and politics in late medieval Italy.' See A. Lecoy de la Marche, *La chaire*, 428–449, and Thomas M. Izbicki, 'Pyres of vanities: Mendicant preaching on the vanity of women and its lay audience,' in: *De ore domini. Preacher and word in the middle ages*, ed. Thomas L. Amos et al. (Kalamazoo, MI, 1989), 211–234.

Luxuria, beauty and frivolity, were regarded as a lethal combination by medieval preachers. They argued that such a dangerous admixture could lead, as it had in Mary Magdalen's case, to the brothel. Salvation was at hand, however. For those unlucky souls who had once fallen into prostitution, but who were now seeking refuge from its claims, a new charitable institution emerged in the thirteenth century. This was a convent, usually administrated by one of the mendicant orders, that aimed to rehabilitate 'fallen women.' The home for *convertite* frequently placed itself under the patronage of Mary Magdalen, the prostitute's spiritual sister in sin. In Avignon the fourteenth-century statutes of such a convent emphasized the perilous relation between beauty and *luxuria*. They stated that the convent would accept "only young women of the age of twenty-five years who in their youth were lustful, and who by their beauty and formliness could still be prompted by worldly fragility and inclined to worldly pleasures and to attract men to the same."⁷⁶

In the event, the asylums for *convertite* gave young women a chance to make satisfaction, just as the Magdalen had done. Indeed, her satisfaction was an extremely popular theme in sermons. It was frequently remarked by the preachers that she made satisfaction on account of her great love for the Lord, and because she loved much, her sins were forgiven.⁷⁷ Thus her ardent love for the Lord purified her and moved her to making reparation for her sins.⁷⁸

Adumbrating the scholastic fondness for rhetorical symmetry, Gregory the Great established the paradigm for describing her satisfaction. Inasmuch as she had once sinned with her eyes by casting them on the things of this world, in restitution she cast them on the feet of the Lord, weeping copious tears upon them. Her hair, which she had formerly used to adorn herself, she now used to dry her master's feet; her lips, which had once spoken words of pride, she used now to kiss her savior's feet; and the oil, with which she had in previous times perfumed her body, she now used to anoint Jesus Christ.⁷⁹ Or, as Honorius

⁷⁶ Cited in Rossiaud, *Medieval Prostitution*, 36. There are no studies of this institution for medieval Italy. Chapter 4 of my doctoral thesis attempts to fill up this lacuna. For France see, P. Pansier, *L'Oeuvre des Repenties à Avignon du XIIIe au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris and Avignon, 1910), and Leah Lydia Otis, 'Prostitution and repentance in late medieval Perpignan,' in: *Women of the medieval world*, ed. J. Kirshner and S. Wemple (Oxford, 1985), 137–160. For Germany see A. Simon, *L'ordre des pénitents*. *Convertite* foundations in the early modern period in Italy have been fruitfully studied by Sherill Cohen, 'Convertite e malmaritate: donne "irregolari" e ordini religiosi nella Firenze rinascimentale,' *Memoria: Rivista di Storia della Donna*, 5 (1982) 46–63, and *The evolution of women's asylums since 1500. From refuges for ex-prostitutes to shelters for battered women*. (New York and Oxford, 1992).

⁷⁷ See, for example, Aldobrandinus de Cavalcantibus, BAV, MS Vat. Burgh. 175, f. 28r: Unde dimissa sunt ei peccata multa quoniam dilexit multum. Gloriosa ardor amoris rubiginem peccatorum in ea consumpsit. Guy d'Evreux, BAV, MS Vat. Burgh. 66, f. 175: Unde cantamus remittuntur ei peccata multa qui dilexit multum.

⁷⁸ Jacobus de Voragine, *Sermones Aurei*, 260–261: [F]ecit in ea mentis purgationem. Gregorius in homil. Tanto amplius rubigo peccati consumitur, quanto peccatoris cor magno caritatis igne concrematur. Ista autem purgatio peccatorum est illud magnum debitum.

⁷⁹ Gregory the Great, *Homily 33, Homiliarum in evangelia*, Lib. II, PL vol. 76, 1240.

Augustodunensis would later have it: “All things which previously she had done lustfully for the service of the flesh, she now, in grief, turned toward the service of the Lord.”⁸⁰ Aldobrandinus de Cavalcantibus appreciated the symmetry of her atonement, remarking that it was an *exemplum congrue satisfactionis*.⁸¹ In fact, the Magdalen’s harmonious satisfaction, canonized by Gregory the Great, became a leitmotif in most medieval preachers’ 22 July sermons.⁸² The particulars of this conceit, however, were open to individual interpretation. Jacobus de Voragine, for example, suggested that the sins she had committed with her mouth were speaking lustful words, giving indecent kisses, and eating lasciviously.⁸³

When we pursue Mary Magdalen’s satisfaction further, we find that not only did she atone for her own sins, but also for those committed by womankind as personified by Eve. Augustine had commented on the Eve–Magdalen relation asserting, *per feminam mors, per feminam vita*,⁸⁴ and this was the line taken by most subsequent preachers to explain why Christ had chosen Mary Magdalen to announce the news of the resurrection to the apostles.⁸⁵ By the time we reach the late Middle Ages, her designation as the *apostolorum apostola* had become such a commonplace that it needed very little explanation.⁸⁶ Her role as apostle was enlarged as legendary material augmented the scriptural account of her life. When in the thirteenth century, Jacobus de Voragine took up the task of collecting saints lives for *The Golden Legend*, it had long been established that the Magdalen, after the ascension, took up a ministry in Marseilles, preaching successfully amongst the pagans. “And all wondered at her, not only for her beauty but for her eloquence, which eloquence was not indeed a matter of surprise on lips that had touched the Lord’s feet.”⁸⁷ Here was an eloquent female preacher, and not one of her late medieval brethren tried to belittle her position as the *apostolorum apostola*, or to rationalize away her ministry. It was an axiomatic fact and

⁸⁰ *Speculum Ecclesiae*, ‘de Sancta Maria Magdalena,’ PL, vol. 172, 980. For Honorius, who may well have been from Augsburg rather than Autun, see Valerie I. Flint, ‘The Career of Honorius Augustodunensis,’ *Revue Bénédictine* 82 (1972) 63–86.

⁸¹ BAV, MS Vat. lat. 1255, f. 114r, a sermon for the Friday of the fifth week of Lent. See also, Aldobrandinus, [F]uit congrua non inordinata, BAV, MS Vat. Burgh. 175, f. 29r.

⁸² See for example, *Sermones Aurei*, 258–260, and *Sermones Quadragesimales*, 158–161. See also Aldobrandinus de Cavalcantibus, BAV, MS Vat. Burgh. 175, f. 28r, 29r.

⁸³ [O]ffendit Deum ore suo: sive verba lasciva dicendo, sive lasciva oscula dando, sive lascive comedendo. *Sermones Quadragesimales*, 160.

⁸⁴ Sermon 232 (*In diebus Paschalibus III: De resurrectione Christi secundum Lucam*), PL vol. 38, 1108.

⁸⁵ Mark 16:10; John 20:17–18. See for example, Gregory the Great, *Homily 25, Homiliarum in evangelio*, Lib. II, PL vol. 76, 1194; Odo of Cluny, *In veneratione Sanctae Mariae Magdalenae*, PL vol. 133, 721; and Peter Chrysologus, who had to turn conceptual somersaults to deny the importance of this role to the Magdalen, *Sermon* 82, PL vol. 52, 452.

⁸⁶ See, for example, Jacobus de Lausanne, BAV, MS Vat. lat. 1261, f. 271v: Qui ei dominus post primum resurrectionem dignatus est aperere unde canta ecclesia resurrectionem Christi appostolis est nuntiando appostolorum appostola.

⁸⁷ *The Golden Legend*, 357.



Fig. 4. Ministry in Marseille. Magdalen Chapel, San Domenico, Spoleto. Photo: Hutzell Collection, Getty Center, Resource Collections.

therefore acceptable, a tribute to the magnanimity of medieval preachers.⁸⁸ Pictorial representation also gave currency to the legend of her ministry. The Magdalen Master represented her *apostolate* in Marseilles, and many Italian fresco cycles (such as the one in the Magdalen chapel at San Domenico in Spoleto) devoted one section of their narratives to this episode of her life⁸⁹ (Fig. 4).

Another piece of legendary material which entered the medieval sermon tradition, and returns us to our penitential theme, is the Magdalen's retreat into the 'desert' of La Sainte-Baume.⁹⁰ Although the original legend cited more

⁸⁸ Michel Lauwers, "'Noli me Tangere'" Marie Madeleine, Marie d'Oignies et les pénitents du XIIIe siècle,' *MEFRM*, 104/1 (1992) 209–268 argues that the Magdalen was 'exhorting' rather than preaching. I find his argument interesting, but ultimately unconvincing. Both textual and pictorial evidence points to preaching. Nicole Bériou, 'La Madeleine dans les sermons parisiens du XIIIe siècle,' in the same volume, 269–340, is far more persuasive.

⁸⁹ For the Magdalen Master see fn. 37 above. For the cycle at San Domenico, Spoleto, see fn. 66 above.

⁹⁰ See fn. 47 above. The desert theme comes from a ninth-century *vita* known as the *vita eremitica*, the provenance of which is most certainly southern Italy, *BHL*, vol. 2, n. 5453–5456. It mentions a retreat into the desert (probably a conflation with Mary of Egypt's *vita*), but the desert is unnamed. Only in later centuries is the grotto of La Sainte-Baume named as the desert.



Fig. 5. Mary Magdalen, penitent. Pietro Cavallini, Brancaccio Chapel, San Domenico Maggiore, Naples. Photo: I.C.C.D., Rome.

eremitic reasons for renouncing the world – the need for solitude, contemplation, *contemptus mundi*, and the like – preachers of the late medieval period suggested that the thirty years she spent in the desert were penitential in character, even going so far as to imagine her daily regime of abstinence and vigils.⁹¹ Out of all the legendary material available to preachers, this was the episode of her post-conversion life they found most compelling. The episode was a favorite with artists and patrons as well. Pietro Cavallini painted it in 1308 in what is now known as the Brancaccio chapel in San Domenico Maggiore in Naples. Here the penitent Magdalen, covered only in her own long hair, prays alone in her cave, except for the company of an angel (Fig. 5). The patron was Charles II of Anjou,

⁹¹ Nicholas of Aquaville, BAV, MS, Vat. lat. 1251, f. 16r: Et multas abstinentias et multas vigilias fecit in hoc usque ad mortem perservavit.

who in 1279 had unearthed her relics. Still an avid devotee of the Magdalen, he was now ruler of the kingdom of Naples.⁹²

In the event, we have seen that the friars, and the new emphasis on preaching penance in the wake of the Fourth Lateran Council, helped to rejuvenate the cult of Mary Magdalen in the thirteenth century. Likewise, the Magdalen helped to diffuse the cult of penance. By employing the saint as the symbol and exemplar of penance, the preachers gave the notion solid form, indeed a most vibrant form. The masterful stroke of endowing the concept of penance with corporeal existence enabled them to conceptualize, schematize, define, and discuss it — in all its various configurations — without drifting too far off into airy abstractions, which would inevitably be lost on an audience hungry for *exempla* rather than scholastic virtuosity. We know of at least one auditor of the Friars Minor who took their sermons on the Magdalen and penance to heart. In 1277, Margherita da Cortona, after leading a somewhat scandalous life, put on the habit of a Franciscan tertiary and lived out her life in penance. Her confessor thought of her as “*la seconda Maddalena*.”⁹³ Others did too: she was canonized on 27 May 1728.

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⁹² For the decoration and patronage of the chapel see F. Bologna, *I pittori*, 115–143.

Charles had in fact re-dedicated the church to Saint Mary Magdalen in 1283, as an eighteenth-century description of the church relates: ‘Benché detto serenissimo Re facesse intitolare la detta chiesa col nome di S. Maria Magdalena, questo titolo però non lo ritenne, ma perserverò sempre col nome di Chiesa di S. Domenico, stante l’uso già fatto antecedentemente di chiamarla così.’ Archivio di Stato di Napoli, Monasteri Soppressi, fasc. 25, f. 8. The re-dedication, however, never took hold among the Neapolitans. They continued to refer to the church as San Domenico.

⁹³ Fra Giunta Bevegnati, *Leggenda della vita e dei miracoli di Santa Margherita da Cortona*, trans. P. Eliodoro Mariani (Vicenza, 1978), 329–330.