

9 September, 2021

Media Release

Scripture scholar delivers compelling address and dispels “fake news” about Mary Magdalene

Dr Margaret Beirne RSC spoke with a group of almost 100 people on Friday 3 September in a successful Zoom seminar organised by the Archdiocese of Canberra Goulburn Women’s Taskforce.

(<http://womenstaskforceacg.org>)

The address, *Mary Magdalene, Fake News and the Gospel*, noted centuries of ‘fake news’ that treated this woman as a reformed prostitute through art, sculpture, novels, musicals and movies.

Margaret addressed the following questions: How did this fake news of Mary Magdalene as a reformed prostitute arise? At what point in the long history of the Church and why?

Starting with the Gospel accounts, it was shown how the conflation of the various characters called “Mary”, and the stories of a woman anointing Jesus, came to be wrongly attached to the person of Mary Magdalene in Luke’s account of “Mary Magdalene out of whom Jesus cast seven demons” (Luke 8:2).

This total misreading of the Gospels and assigning to Mary Magdalene the role of a prostitute is never mentioned in early church writings where she is consistently honoured as the first witness of the resurrection. It was not until the 6th century, in a homily given by Pope Gregory I, that this ‘fake news’ came to replace the true Gospel image of Mary Magdalene.

Despite this false portrait prevailing for the next 14 centuries, Church figures such as St Thomas Aquinas accepted and expanded on a 3rd century phrase that identified her as “apostle to the apostles”.

In 1969 Pope Paul VI acknowledged that the Scriptures do not support equating Mary Magdalene with either Mary of Bethany or the Lukan “sinful woman” and he removed the tag ‘penitent’ from her name in the liturgical calendar. Building on this, Pope John Paul II wrote approvingly of Mary Magdalene as “apostle to the apostles” (*Mulieris Dignitatem*, n.16).

On 3 June 2016, Pope Francis raised the liturgical celebration of Mary Magdalene on 22 July from a memorial to a feast day to be celebrated universally throughout the Church on the same level as that of the apostles; and formally named her “Apostle to the Apostles.”

There has been some recognition in the Australian Church of this welcome papal restoration of Mary Magdalene to the true Gospel account of her that prevailed in the early Church.

As examples, the annual Mary of Magdala lecture held at Boston College has been widely acclaimed, as has the practice in the Maitland-Newcastle Diocese of honouring women in ministry with a Magdalene Award.

Andrea Dean, Chair of Archdiocesan Women’s Taskforce said that this seminar was a wonderful opportunity to educate and inform about the place of women in the early church, right up to today.

“Following on from this wonderful Zoom event. We will look at how we too can dispel the ‘fake news’ and highlight the truth of the real Mary Magdalene. Surely Mary Magdalene will guide and inspire us as we reflect on the role of women in the Church into the future.”

For media enquiries or information about ongoing events, please contact Beth Doherty on 0432608310 or Elisabeth_doherty@hotmail.com or visit our website <http://womenstaskforceacg.org>