

Erroneous or Improbable Opinions Regarding Mary Magdalen and Mary of Bethany

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Table of Contents

THE MODERN-DAY COMMON OPINIONS ARE ERRONEOUS OR IMPROBABLE.....	2
THE WOMEN	2
THE ERRONEOUS OR IMPROBABLE OPINIONS.....	2
<i>Mary Magdalen was certainly a notorious sinner because she was possessed by devils – erroneous.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Hence Mary Magdalen was the sinful woman who anointed Jesus’ feet - improbable</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Or Mary Magdalen was the woman caught in adultery – improbable.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Or Mary Magdalen was both the sinful woman and the adulterous woman – erroneous.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Mary Magdalen had to be a notorious sinner or else God’s mercy would be undermined – erroneous ..</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Mary of Bethany was Mary Magdalen and thus was a notorious sinner – erroneous</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Mary of Bethany was the sinful woman who anointed Jesus’ feet in the beginning of his ministry – erroneous.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Mary of Bethany was the woman who anointed Jesus’ head two days before his death – erroneous</i>	<i>9</i>
Mary of Bethany anoints Jesus’ feet a day before Palm Day	9
An unnamed woman anoints Jesus’ head two days before his death.....	10
<i>Mary Magdalen moved to France and died there – improbable</i>	<i>12</i>
It has no link with tradition	12
It is unseemly	13
It upholds the improbable opinion that Mary Magdalen was a notorious sinner.....	13
It is stoic	14
CHURCH FATHERS REGARDING MARY MAGDALEN AND MARY OF BETHANY.....	14
<i>Beware of lies about what the Church Fathers taught</i>	<i>15</i>
MUST NOT DENOUNCE MEN AS SINNERS WITHOUT EVIDENCE THAT IS CERTAIN	16

The Modern-Day Common Opinions Are Erroneous or Improbable

1. Mary Magdalen was a notorious sinner – improbable.
2. Mary of Bethany, the sister of Lazarus and Martha, was the same person as Mary Magdalen and therefore Mary of Bethany was a notorious sinner – erroneous.
3. Mary of Bethany was not Mary Magdalen but she was the sinful woman mentioned in Luke 7 who anointed Jesus' feet – erroneous.
4. Mary Magdalen moved to France and died there – improbable.

From the information I have, these opinions did not become common until the 12th or 13th century. Hence these opinions were not common in the days of the Church Fathers.¹

The Women

1. An unnamed sinful woman who washed, kissed, and anointed Jesus' feet in Galilee at the beginning of his ministry when John the Baptist was alive; Jesus forgave her because of her great love for him (Lk. 7:36-48).
2. An unnamed woman who was caught in adultery in Judea when John the Baptist was dead; Jesus forgave her and told her to sin no more (Jn. 8:1-11).
3. St. Mary Magdalen, who had seven devils cast out of her (Mk. 16:9; Lk. 8:2).
4. St. Mary of Bethany (aka Bethania), sister of Lazarus and Martha, who anointed Jesus' feet the day before Palm Day (Jn. 12:1-8).
5. An unnamed woman who anointed Jesus' head two days before his crucifixion (Mt. 26:6-13; Mk. 14:2-9).

The Erroneous or Improbable Opinions

Mary Magdalen was certainly a notorious sinner because she was possessed by devils – erroneous

There is no explicit evidence in the Bible that says that Mary Magdalen was a notorious sinner. Instead, there is good evidence that proves that she was not a notorious sinner. However, many believe with certainty that Mary Magdalen had to be a notorious sinner because Jesus cast out seven devils from her:

“But he rising early the first day of the week appeared first to Mary Magdalen, out of whom he had cast seven devils.” (Mk. 16:9)

The belief that Mary Magdalen had to be a sinner because seven devils were cast out of her is erroneous because devils also possess holy people and afflict them with physical and mental infirmities. God allows devils to possess holy men either 1) to test their faith, 2) to keep them humble, 3) to increase their trust in God, 4) to gain grace for themselves or others, or 5) to punish them for the sins of others. And God allows devils to possess evil men 6) to punish them for their own sins:

¹ See in this article [Church Fathers Regarding Mary Magdalen and Mary of Bethany](#), p. 14.

Malleus Maleficarum, 15th century: “We shall rehearse five reasons why God allows men to be possessed... For sometimes a man is possessed for his own greater advantage; sometimes for a slight sin of another; sometimes for his own venial sin; sometimes for another’s heavy sin; and sometimes for his own heavy sin. For all these reasons let no one doubt that God allows such things to be done by devils...”²

The Bible contains several examples in which God allows holy men or at least non-notorious sinners to be possessed by devils who afflict them with physical or mental infirmities. For example, God allowed devils to possess and obsess holy Job and inflict physical infirmities upon his flesh and mental infirmities upon his mind:

“And it came to pass when on a certain day the sons of God came and stood before the Lord, and Satan came among them and stood in his sight, that the Lord said to Satan: Whence comest thou? And he answered and said: I have gone round about the earth and walked through it. And the Lord said to Satan: Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a man simple and upright and fearing God and avoiding evil, and still keeping his innocence? But thou hast moved me against him, that I should afflict him without cause. And Satan answered and said: Skin for skin, and all that a man hath he will give for his life: But put forth thy hand, and touch his bone and his flesh, and then thou shalt see that he will curse thee to thy face. And the Lord said to Satan: Behold he is in thy hand, but yet save his life. So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord and struck Job with a very grievous ulcer, from the sole of the foot even to the top of his head.” (Job 2:1-7)

Because Job was possessed and obsessed by devils who afflicted him with grievous physical and mental infirmities, his friends thought that he had to be a notorious sinner and cursed by God, just as many say about Mary Magdalen:

“Eliphaz the Themanite answered and said [to Job]: God...reprove[d] thee...for thy manifold wickedness and thy infinite iniquities...” (Job 22:1-5)

But Job was holy and highly blessed by God:

“And after the Lord had spoken these words to Job, he said to Eliphaz the Themanite: My wrath is kindled against thee and against thy two friends because you have not spoken the thing that is right before me, as my servant Job hath. Take unto you therefore seven oxen and seven rams, and go to my servant Job and offer for yourselves a holocaust, and my servant Job shall pray for you: his face I will accept, that folly be not imputed to you, for you have not spoken right things before me, as my servant Job hath.” (Job 42:7-8)

Hence God allowed holy Job to be possessed and obsessed and thus tormented by devils to test his faith. The same, then, could have been the case with Mary Magdalen.

We read of another holy man, or at least a non-notorious sinner, from whom Jesus cast out devils that caused the man to be blind and dumb:

“And when they were gone out, behold they brought him a dumb man, possessed with a devil. And after the devil was cast out, the dumb man spoke, and the multitudes wondered, saying, Never was the like seen in Israel.” (Mt. 9:32-33)

“Then was offered to him one possessed with a devil, blind and dumb, and he healed him so that he spoke and saw.” (Mt. 12:22)

The man born blind whom Jesus healed is another proof that God allows holy men to be possessed by devils that cause physical infirmities:

² *Malleus Maleficarum* (also known as *The Witches’ Hammer*), by the apostate Professors of Theology and Inquisitors Heinrich Kramer, O.P., and James Sprenger, O.P., authorized by a Bull from apostate Antipope Innocent VIII on December 9, 1484. Second Part, pt. 2, q. 1. c. 2.

“And Jesus passing by saw a man who was blind from his birth; and his disciples asked him: Rabbi, who hath sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind? Jesus answered: Neither hath this man sinned nor his parents, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. I must work the works of him that sent me whilst it is day; the night cometh when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. When he had said these things, he spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle and spread the clay upon his eyes and said to him: Go, wash in the pool of Siloe, which is interpreted, Sent. He went therefore and washed, and he came seeing.” (Jn. 9:1-7)

Conversely, we have an example of a man whose demonic possession and thus his infirmity were caused by his own sins:

“A certain man...had been eight and thirty years under his infirmity. Him, when Jesus had seen lying and knew that he had been now a long time, he saith to him: Wilt thou be made whole? The infirm man answered him: Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pond. For whilst I am coming, another goeth down before me. Jesus saith to him: Arise, take up thy bed and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and he took up his bed and walked... Behold thou art made whole: sin no more, lest some worse thing happen to thee.” (Jn. 5:2-14)

Another proof that devils also possess holy men is the holy woman who was possessed by devils that caused her to be bent over. When Jesus cast out the devils, she was able to walk upright:

“And he was teaching in their synagogue on their sabbath. And behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years and she was bowed together, neither could she look upwards at all. Whom when Jesus saw, he called her unto him and said to her: Woman, thou art delivered from thy infirmity. And he laid his hands upon her, and immediately she was made straight and glorified God. And the ruler of the synagogue (being angry that Jesus had healed on the sabbath) answering, said to the multitude: Six days there are wherein you ought to work. In them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day. And the Lord answering him, said: Ye hypocrites, doth not every one of you on the sabbath day loose his ox or his ass from the manger and lead them to water? And ought not this daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?” (Lk. 13:10-16)

Here, then, are some examples of holy men or at least non-notorious sinners who were possessed by devils and tormented with physical or mental infirmities. The same can be said of Mary Magdalen. Good evidence indicates that this is true. The only other quote in the Bible that mentions that Jesus cast out seven devils from Mary says that the devils were cast out to heal the infirmities caused by them and says nothing about sins being the cause of her infirmities or that she was a sinner or a repentant sinner:

“And it came to pass afterwards that he travelled through the cities and towns, preaching and evangelizing the kingdom of God, and the twelve with him: And certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary who is called Magdalen, out of whom seven devils were gone forth...” (Lk. 8:1-2)

Other evidence which indicates that Mary Magdalen was holy or at least not a notorious sinner when she was possessed by devils is that nowhere in the Bible does it say or even hint that she was a notorious sinner.

Hence Mary Magdalen was the sinful woman who anointed Jesus' feet - improbable

Even if Mary Magdalen were a notorious sinner, no one can say for certain that she was the sinful woman who washed, kissed, and anointed Jesus' feet at the beginning of his ministry because this sinful woman is unnamed. Note that this event took place in Galilee in the house of Simon the Pharisee in the beginning of Jesus' ministry, when John the Baptist was alive, and Jesus forgave the sinful woman because of her great love for him, as recorded in Luke 7:

“And it came to pass afterwards that he went into a city that is called Naim [in Galilee], and there went with him his disciples and a great multitude.” (Lk. 7:11)

“And John [the Baptist] called to him two of his disciples and sent them to Jesus, saying: Art thou he that art to come, or look we for another?” (Lk. 7:19)

“And one of the Pharisees desired him to eat with him. And he went into the house of the Pharisee and sat down to meat. And behold a woman that was in the city, a sinner, when she knew that he sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment; and standing behind at his feet, she began to wash his feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. And the Pharisee, who had invited him, seeing it, spoke within himself, saying: This man, if he were a prophet, would know surely who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him, that she is a sinner. And Jesus answering, said to him: Simon, I have somewhat to say to thee. But he said: Master, say it. A certain creditor had two debtors, the one owed five hundred pence and the other fifty. And whereas they had not wherewith to pay, he forgave them both. Which therefore of the two loveth him most? Simon answering, said: I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And he said to him: Thou hast judged rightly. And turning to the woman, he said unto Simon: Dost thou see this woman? I entered into thy house, thou gavest me no water for my feet; but she with tears hath washed my feet and with her hairs hath wiped them. Thou gavest me no kiss; but she, since she came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint, but she with ointment hath anointed my feet. Wherefore I say to thee: Many sins are forgiven her because she hath loved much. But to whom less is forgiven, he loveth less. And he said to her: Thy sins are forgiven thee.” (Lk. 7:36-48)

Because this woman was unnamed, no one can say for certain who she was, let alone that she was certainly Mary Magdalen.

Or Mary Magdalen was the woman caught in adultery – improbable

Even if Mary Magdalen were a sinner, no one can say for certain that she was the woman caught in adultery because this woman is unnamed. Note that this event took place in Judea in the temple when John the Baptist was dead and thus some time after the sinful woman (mentioned in Luke 7) anointed Jesus' feet and Jesus forgave her sins. And Jesus also forgave this adulterous woman and told her to sin no more:

“And Jesus went unto mount Olivet. And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came to him, and sitting down he taught them. And the scribes and Pharisees bring unto him a woman taken in adultery, and they set her in the midst and said to him: Master, this woman was even now taken in adultery. Now Moses in the law commanded us to stone such a one. But what sayest thou? And this they said tempting him, that they might accuse him. But Jesus, bowing himself down, wrote with his finger on the ground. When therefore they continued asking him, he lifted up himself and said to them: He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again, stooping down, he wrote on the ground. But they hearing this went out one by one, beginning at the eldest. And Jesus alone

remained, and the woman standing in the midst. Then Jesus lifting up himself said to her: Woman, where are they that accused thee? Hath no man condemned thee? Who said: No man, Lord. And Jesus said: Neither will I condemn thee. Go, and now sin no more.” (Jn. 8:1-11)

Because this woman is unnamed, no one can say for certain who she was, let alone that she was certainly Mary Magdalen.

Or Mary Magdalen was both the sinful woman and the adulterous woman – erroneous

It is certain that Mary Magdalen could not have been the same person as the sinful woman mentioned in Luke 7 who anointed Jesus’ feet and the adulterous woman mentioned in John 8 because the sinful woman and the adulterous woman could not be the same person. The sinful woman mentioned in Luke 7 had her sins forgiven by Jesus at the beginning of his ministry when John the Baptist was alive, and she lived in Galilee. The adulterous woman was caught sinning some time after that in Judea near the temple when John the Baptist was dead. It is not likely that the sinful woman who anointed Jesus’ feet returned to her sinful ways and not likely that she moved her residence from Galilee to Judea.

Mary Magdalen had to be a notorious sinner or else God’s mercy would be undermined – erroneous

This opinion is illogical because if there were only one just person (such as the Blessed Virgin Mary or St. Joseph) that was not guilty of any actual sins, then God’s mercy would be undermined because they would have no actual sins to be forgiven and remitted and thus God would not have a chance to manifest his mercy toward them in this regard. And most of all, God’s mercy would be undermined in heaven because no one in heaven is guilty of any sins.

Also, this opinion is erroneous because if the purpose of Mary Magdalen was to show forth the great mercy of God in forgiving notorious sinners, then why didn’t God see to it that she would have been mentioned at least once in the Bible as a notorious sinner, as was the case with the sinful woman mentioned in Luke 7 and the adulterous woman mentioned in John 8. If Mary Magdalen was to be the foremost example of God’s great mercy in forgiving notorious sinners, then why wasn’t she mentioned once in the Bible as a sinner while many others were! This fact alone is one good proof that Mary Magdalen was not a notorious sinner because if she were it would have been mentioned in the Bible.

To conclude, there are many examples in the Bible of God’s great mercy in forgiving notorious sinners. One does not need to make a just man a sinner in order to show God’s mercy. In fact, God would be unjust if he forgave a just man of a sin he was not guilty of.

Mary of Bethany was Mary Magdalen and thus was a notorious sinner – erroneous

Mary of Bethany lived in Judea in Bethany and was the sister of Lazarus and Martha:

“Now there was a certain man sick named Lazarus, of Bethania, of the town of Mary and of Martha her sister... And many of the Jews were come to Martha and Mary to comfort them concerning their brother.” (Jn. 11:1, 19)

Because some hold the improbable opinion that Mary Magdalen was a notorious sinner and the error that Mary of Bethany was Mary Magdalen, they hold the error that Mary of Bethany was a notorious sinner.

However, Mary of Bethany was not Mary Magdalen. Mary of Bethany lived in Judea in Bethany. Mary Magdalen lived in Galilee in Magdala.

Nominal *Catholic Encyclopedia*, “Magdala”: “The existence of a Galilean Magdala, the birthplace or home of St. Mary Magdalen (i.e., of Magdala), is indicated by Luke 8:2; Mark 16:9; Mt. 27:56, 61; Mt. 28:1; and in the parallel passages, John 20:1, 18... Christian tradition sought there the home of Mary Magdalen.”

Nominal *Catholic Encyclopedia*, “St. Mary Magdalen”: “Mary Magdalen was so called from Magdala near Tiberias, on the west shore of Galilee...”

The *Apostolic Constitutions* teaches that Mary Magdalen is not the same person as Mary the sister of Lazarus and Martha:

The *Apostolic Constitutions*, 1st to 4th centuries: “We do not permit our ‘women to teach in the Church,’ 1 Corinthians 14:34, but only to pray and hear those that teach; for our Master and Lord, Jesus Himself, when He sent us the twelve to make disciples of the people and of the nations, did nowhere send out women to preach, although He did not want such. For there were with us ...also Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Martha and Mary the sisters of Lazarus, Salome, and certain others.”³

And nowhere in the Bible when Mary Magdalen is mentioned is it said that she was the sister of Lazarus or Martha. One would expect this to be mentioned at least once if it were true. And nowhere in the Bible when Mary, the sister of Lazarus, is mentioned does it say that she was Mary Magdalen. One would expect this to be mentioned at least once if it were true.

Mary of Bethany was the sinful woman who anointed Jesus’ feet in the beginning of his ministry – erroneous

Some hold the error that even though Mary of Bethany was not Mary Magdalen she was nevertheless a notorious sinner. They believe that Mary of Bethany was the sinful woman who anointed Jesus’ feet in Galilee in the beginning of his ministry when John the Baptist was alive, as recorded in Luke 7. Hence they believe that Mary of Bethany was a notorious sinner who repented and then anointed Jesus’ feet again in Judea in Bethany a day before Palm Day, as recorded in John 12.

Some base this error upon the fact that a woman anointed Jesus’ feet in both events. Well, many men and women anointed Jesus’ feet, as it was a custom for Jews to wash or anoint the feet of visitors and to greet them with a kiss. Hence the opinion that Mary of Bethany was the sinful woman is unfounded because there is no way of knowing with certainty who was the unnamed sinful woman mentioned in Luke 7.

And this opinion is erroneous because the sinful woman mentioned in Luke 7 lived in Galilee and Mary of Bethany mentioned in John 12 lived in Judea.

Also, some base the error that Mary of Bethany was the sinful woman mentioned in Luke 7 by taking out of context John 11:2. Because John 11:2 says that Mary of Bethany anointed Jesus’ feet before John 12 mentions the actual event of her doing so, some believe that John 11:2 is referring to an event that already occurred and thus Mary of Bethany was the sinful woman who anointed Jesus’ feet in the beginning of his ministry, as recorded in Luke 7.

John 11:1-2 says,

“Now there was a certain man sick named Lazarus, of Bethania, of the town of Mary and of Martha her sister. (And Mary was she that anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.)” (Jn. 11:1-2)

John 12:3 says,

³ b. 2, s. 1, n. 6.

“Mary therefore took a pound of ointment of right spikenard, of great price, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.” (Jn. 12:3)

In John 11:2, St. John is merely mentioning an event that many knew about in order for them to better identify Mary of Bethany—she was the one who anointed Jesus’ feet a day before Palm Day:

The Jerome Biblical Commentary, Commentary on Jn. 11:2: “This verse has often been misunderstood. John refers to an event that he supposes his readers to know well, though he himself has not yet mentioned it. He speaks of the anointing at Bethany (12:3); there is no reason to think that he attempted to identify Mary, the sister of Lazarus, with the unnamed Galilean woman in the similar narrative recounted only by Lk. 7:37f.”⁴

In John 11:2, St. John uses the word “was” (“And Mary was she that anointed the Lord”) because when he wrote his gospel, this event indeed had already occurred. But he did not mean that this event occurred before Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Many events are mentioned in the Bible before they occurred. I call these “out-of-sequence events.” For example, Luke 3:19-20 says that John the Baptist was shut up in prison. Yet Luke 3:21-22 says that Jesus was baptized and thus by John the Baptist and hence John was not in prison:

“But Herod the tetrarch, when he was reproved by him for Herodias, his brother’s wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, he added this also above all, and shut up John in prison. Now it came to pass, when all the people were baptized, that Jesus also being baptized and praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily shape, as a dove, upon him; and a voice came from heaven: Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.” (Lk. 3:19-22)

Here, then, is an example of an out-of-sequence event because John the Baptist was not shut up in prison until *after* he baptized Jesus. In the same way, St. John mentions in John 11:2 the anointing of Jesus’ feet by Mary of Bethany before it actually occurred as mentioned in John 12:3.

Another proof that the anointing mentioned in Luke 7 is not the same event as the anointing mentioned in John 11:2 but rather the anointing mentioned in John 11:2 is the one mentioned in John 12:3 is that the anointing mentioned in John 11:2 more accurately matches the anointing mentioned in John 12:3 than the one in Luke 7.

John 11:2 and John 12:3 only say that the woman, Mary of Bethany, anointed Jesus’ feet:

“And Mary was she that anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.” (Jn. 11:2)

“Mary therefore took a pound of ointment of right spikenard, of great price, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.” (Jn. 12:3)

But in Luke 7 the sinful woman washed, kissed, and anointed Jesus’ feet:

“And standing behind at his feet, she began to wash his feet with tears and wiped them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.” (Lk. 7:38)

⁴ *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, edited and Nihil Obstat by Raymond E. Brown, S.S.; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J.; Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm. Imprimatur: + Lawrence Cardinal Shehan, Archbishop of Baltimore, June 6, 1968. Forward by His Eminence Augustin Cardinal Bea, S.J. Published by Prentice Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, USA. *The Gospel According to John*, 63, 124, 2, p. 446.

Lastly, even if John 11:2 means that Mary of Bethany had anointed Jesus' feet previous to anointing them the day before Palm Day mentioned in John 12, one cannot infer with any certainty that she was the unnamed sinful woman mentioned in Luke 7 who anointed Jesus' feet.

Mary of Bethany was the woman who anointed Jesus' head two days before his death – erroneous

Mary of Bethany anoints Jesus' feet a day before Palm Day

John 12 records the anointing of Jesus' feet by Mary of Bethany six days before the beginning of Passover and one day before Palm Day:

“Jesus therefore, six days before the pasch, came to Bethany, where Lazarus had been dead, whom Jesus raised to life. And they made him a supper there and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of them that were at table with him. Mary therefore took a pound of ointment of right spikenard, of great price, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Then one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, he that was about to betray him, said: Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor? Now he said this, not because he cared for the poor but because he was a thief, and having the purse, carried the things that were put therein. Jesus therefore said: Let her alone, that she may keep it against the day of my burial. For the poor you have always with you, but me you have not always. A great multitude therefore of the Jews knew that he was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. But the chief priests thought to kill Lazarus also because many of the Jews, by reason of him, went away and believed in Jesus. And on the next day a great multitude that was come to the festival day, when they had heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees and went forth to meet him, and cried: Hosanna, blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord, the king of Israel.” (Jn. 12:1-13)

Hence Mary of Bethany anointed Jesus' feet in Bethany at supper, most probably in the house of Lazarus because Martha served, six days before the beginning of Passover and a day before Palm Day. The beginning of Passover is on Nisan 14, which that year fell on the 5th day of the week called Maundy Day. Hence this event occurred seven days before Jesus' death. Judas complained that the expensive ointment was wasted on Jesus and could have been sold for the poor, not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief. Jesus said that this anointing was to prepare his body for his upcoming burial. It is almost certain that all the apostles were present at this supper. Hence it can be presumed with good probability that they did not complain. After this event, as recorded here in John 12, it does not say that Judas went out to betray Jesus.

As a side note, it seems very probable that the event of Mary of Bethany's anointing of Jesus mentioned in John 12 is the same event mentioned in Luke 10:38-42:

“Now it came to pass as they went that he entered into a certain town, and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sitting also at the Lord's feet, heard his word. But Martha was busy about much serving. Who stood and said: Lord, hast thou no care that my sister hath left me alone to serve? Speak to her, therefore, that she help me. And the Lord answering, said to her: Martha, Martha, thou art careful and art troubled about many things: But one thing is necessary. Mary hath chosen the best part, which shall not be taken away from her.” (Lk. 10:38-42)

If it is the same event, then St. Luke recorded this event out of sequence.

An unnamed woman anoints Jesus' head two days before his death

Matthew 26 and Mark 14 record the anointing of Jesus' feet by an unnamed woman two days before his death and burial:

“And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended all these words, he said to his disciples: You know that after two days shall be the pasch, and the son of man shall be delivered up to be crucified. Then were gathered together the chief priests and ancients of the people into the court of the high priest, who was called Caiphas: And they consulted together that by subtilty they might apprehend Jesus and put him to death. But they said: Not on the festival day, lest perhaps there should be a tumult among the people. And when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, there came to him a woman having an alabaster box of precious ointment and poured it on his head as he was at table. And the disciples seeing it had indignation, saying: To what purpose is this waste? For this might have been sold for much and given to the poor. And Jesus knowing it, said to them: Why do you trouble this woman? For she hath wrought a good work upon me. For the poor you have always with you, but me you have not always. For she in pouring this ointment upon my body hath done it for my burial. Amen I say to you, wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, that also which she hath done shall be told for a memory of her. Then went one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, to the chief priests and said to them: What will you give me, and I will deliver him unto you? But they appointed him thirty pieces of silver. And from thenceforth he sought opportunity to betray him.” (Mt. 26:1-16)

“Now the feast of the pasch and of the Azymes was after two days, and the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might by some wile lay hold on him and kill him. But they said: Not on the festival day, lest there should be a tumult among the people. And when he was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, and was at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of precious spikenard; and breaking the alabaster box, she poured it out upon his head. Now there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said: Why was this waste of the ointment made? For this ointment might have been sold for more than three hundred pence and given to the poor. And they murmured against her. But Jesus said: Let her alone, why do you molest her? She hath wrought a good work upon me. For the poor you have always with you, and whensoever you will you may do them good, but me you have not always. She hath done what she could; she is come beforehand to anoint my body for the burial. Amen, I say to you, wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, that also which she hath done shall be told for a memorial of her. And Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests to betray him to them.” (Mk. 14:1-10)

Hence at this event, an unnamed woman anointed Jesus' head in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper two days before Jesus' death. It is almost certain that all the apostles were present. It does not say that Judas complained because Judas had already complained and was reprimanded four days previously when Mary of Bethany anointed Jesus' feet. However, it does say that some disciples complained. Now the apostles were also disciples, but not all the disciples were apostles. It is certain that these disciples who complained were not apostles and were not present four days previously when Mary of Bethany anointed Jesus' feet. If they were, they would not have complained again. After they complained, Jesus said the same thing to them as he did to Judas. It can be presumed that these disciples, unlike Judas, had good motives because they really did care for the poor. But, nevertheless, they were wrong on this occasion. After this anointing of Jesus' head by the unnamed woman, Judas went out to betray Jesus to the chief

priests. The Catholic Church calls this day Spy Day, which is on the 4th weekday, two days before Jesus died on the 6th weekday.

We also know that this event occurred two days before Jesus' death and thus not six days before the beginning of Passover (the day before Palm Day) because the events that occurred on Palm Day are recorded in Matthew 21 and Mark 11 while the anointing of Jesus' head by the unnamed woman is recorded in Matthew 26 and Mark 14:

“And when they drew nigh to Jerusalem and were come to Bethphage, unto mount Olivet, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them: Go ye into the village that is over against you, and immediately you shall find an ass tied and a colt with her: loose them and bring them to me. And if any man shall say anything to you, say ye that the Lord hath need of them and forthwith he will let them go. Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: Tell ye the daughter of Sion: Behold thy king cometh to thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of her that is used to the yoke. And the disciples going, did as Jesus commanded them. And they brought the ass and the colt, and laid their garments upon them, and made him sit thereon. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way, and others cut boughs from the trees and strewed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before and that followed, cried, saying: Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest.” (Mt. 21:1-9)

“And when they were drawing near to Jerusalem and to Bethany at the mount of Olives, he sendeth two of his disciples and saith to them: Go into the village that is over against you, and immediately at your coming in thither you shall find a colt tied, upon which no man yet hath sat: loose him, and bring him. And if any man shall say to you, What are you doing? say ye that the Lord hath need of him, and immediately he will let him come hither. And going their way, they found the colt tied before the gate without, in the meeting of two ways, and they loose him. And some of them that stood there said to them: What do you loosing the colt? Who said to them as Jesus had commanded them, and they let him go with them. And they brought the colt to Jesus, and they lay their garments on him and he sat upon him. And many spread their garments in the way, and others cut down boughs from the trees and strewed them in the way. And they that went before and they that followed, cried, saying: Hosanna, blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Blessed be the kingdom of our father David that cometh: Hosanna in the highest.” (Mk. 11:1-10)

Hence the anointing of Jesus' head by the unnamed woman (as recorded in Matthew 26 and Mark 14) had to occur *after* Palm Day (as recorded in Matthew 21 and Mark 11). And we know that this anointing occurred four days after Palm Day and two days before Jesus died (as recorded in Matthew 26 and Mark 14).

Thus we know that the anointing of Jesus by Mary of Bethany a day before Palm Day (as recorded in John 12) is not the same event as the anointing of Jesus by the unnamed woman three days after Palm Day (as recorded in Matthew 26 and Mark 14).

It was the custom of faithful Jews to anoint those who visited their homes (as recorded in Luke 7) and to anoint faithful Jews before their death and burial (as recorded in John 12, Matthew 26, and Mark 14). So it is not unusual but usual to presume that more than one woman anointed Jesus before his death and burial. In this case, we know of at least two women who did so, Mary of Bethany and the unnamed woman, and there were probably more. And it is not unusual that if the ointment used was worth a lot of money that some would complain about the waste of money which could have been used for the poor or other good causes. Thus it was not unusual that Jesus would have given them the same reprimand.

Mary Magdalen moved to France and died there – improbable

Nowadays it is a common belief that Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha moved to France and died there. Hence those who hold the error that Lazarus' sister Mary of Bethany was Mary of Magdalen believe that Mary Magdalen moved to France and died there. While some who do not believe that Mary of Bethany was Mary Magdalen also believe that Mary Magdalen moved to France and died there along with Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha. Hence they have all four moving to France and dying there. However, this opinion is improbable for the following reasons:

1. It has no link with tradition.
2. It is unseemly.
3. It upholds the improbable opinion that Mary Magdalen was a notorious sinner.
4. It is stoic.

It has no link with tradition

It has no link with tradition because this legend did not exist until the 11th century. Before that, it was believed that Mary Magdalen moved to Ephesus to live with the Blessed Virgin Mary and died there:

Nominal *Catholic Encyclopedia*, "St. Mary Magdalen": "The Greek Church maintains that the saint retired to Ephesus with the Blessed Virgin and there died, that her relics were transferred to Constantinople in 886 and are there preserved. Gregory of Tours (*De miraculis*, I, xxx) supports the statement that she went to Ephesus. However, according to a French tradition (see LAZARUS OF BETHANY, SAINT), Mary, Lazarus, and some companions came to Marseilles and converted the whole of Provence. Magdalen is said to have retired to a hill, La Sainte-Baume, nearby, where she gave herself up to a life of penance for thirty years."

Nominal *Catholic Encyclopedia*, "St. Lazarus of Bethany": "Reputed first Bishop of Marseilles, died in the second half of the first century. According to a tradition, or rather a series of traditions combined at different epochs, the members of the family at Bethany, the friends of Christ, together with some holy women and others of his disciples, were put out to sea by the Jews hostile to Christianity in a vessel without sails, oars, or helm, and after a miraculous voyage landed in Provence at a place called today the Saintes-Maries. It is related that they separated there to go and preach the Gospel in different parts of the southeast of Gaul. Lazarus of whom alone we have to treat here, went to Marseilles, and, having converted a number of its inhabitants to Christianity, became their first pastor. During the first persecution under Nero he hid himself in a crypt, over which the celebrated Abbey of St.-Victor was constructed in the fifth century. In this same crypt he was interred, when he shed his blood for the faith. During the new persecution of Domitian he was cast into prison and beheaded in a spot which is believed to be identical with a cave beneath the prison Saint-Lazare. His body was later translated to Autun and buried in the cathedral of that town. But the inhabitants of Marseilles claim to be in possession of his head, which they still venerate.

"Like the other legends concerning the saints of the Palestinian group, this tradition, which was believed for several centuries and which still finds some advocates, has no solid foundation. It is in a writing contained in an eleventh century manuscript, with some other documents relating to St. Magdalen of Vézelay, that we first read of Lazarus in connection with the voyage that brought

Magdalen to Gaul. Before the middle of the eleventh century, there does not seem to be the slightest trace of the tradition according to which the Palestinian saints came to Provence. At the beginning of the twelfth century, perhaps through a confusion of names, it was believed at Autun that the tomb of St. Lazarus was to be found in the cathedral dedicated to St. Nazarius. A search was made and remains were discovered, which were solemnly translated and were considered to be those of him whom Christ raised from the dead, but it was not thought necessary to inquire why they should be found in France...

“The question, however, deserved to be examined with care, seeing that, according to a tradition of the Greek Church, the body of St. Lazarus had been brought to Constantinople, just as all the other saints of the Palestinian group were said to have died in the Orient, and to have been buried, translated, and honoured there. It is only in the thirteenth century that the belief that Lazarus had come to Gaul with his two sisters and had been Bishop of Marseilles spread in Provence.”

One tradition also says that St. Mary Magdalen traveled to Rome and performed a miracle for the Emperor Tiberius Caesar:

Food, Feasts, and Faith: An Encyclopedia of Food Culture in World Religions, by Paul Fieldhouse: “Images of Saint Mary Magdalene frequently depict her holding a red egg. Mary Magdalene was a devout Jewish woman who became a disciple of Jesus. According to the Bible, she was the first person to whom Jesus appeared after his resurrection and was the first to pass on the ‘good news’ to others that she had ‘seen the Lord.’ ... She traveled to Rome to spread the news and obtained an audience with Roman emperor Tiberius Caesar. Tradition demanded that visitors brought the emperor a gift. Mary Magdalene gave the emperor an egg as a symbol of the resurrection, proclaiming ‘Christ is risen!’ The emperor responded that rising from the dead was as likely as the egg turning red. The egg did indeed turn red, and since then it has been a tradition for Christians, especially in the Eastern Orthodox Church, to dye eggs red and crack them open at Easter, exchanging the good news that ‘Christ is risen!’ At the Church of St. Mary Magdalene in the Garden of Gethsemane in Jerusalem the scene of Mary giving Tiberius a red egg is depicted in a large canvas that hangs above the iconostasis.”⁵

It is unseemly

It is unseemly that women so close to Jesus would move to barbarous France and make it their permanent home instead of moving to a thriving ancient Jewish community, such as Ephesus in Asia Minor. Even when Catholic men, such as the apostles, were sent to these barbarous areas, they went there to evangelize and not set up a permanent home. They appointed converts to rule the church in those areas.

It upholds the improbable opinion that Mary Magdalen was a notorious sinner

This legend has Mary Magdalen doing penance for thirty years and thus presents her as a onetime notorious sinner.

⁵ ABC-CLIO Publishing, Santa Barbara, CA, 2017. P. 158.

It is stoic

This legend is influenced by the stoic heresy. Even if Mary Magdalen were a notorious sinner, she did not have to do penance in a cave or on a hill for thirty years. This type of extreme penance is stoic in nature and not Catholic. Her best penance would be to help in Christian communities and be a witness to the faith. Imagine if after King David repented from his mortal sins of adultery and murder he would have gone into a cave for thirty years and ceased to rule the kingdom of Israel! His so-called penance would have been the easy way out as he would have shirked his duty of ruling the kingdom, which requires many more sacrifices and trials and thus much more penance than hiding in a cave.⁶

Church Fathers Regarding Mary Magdalen and Mary of Bethany

From the information I have, the first Church Father who taught that Mary Magdalen was a notorious sinner was Pope St. Gregory the Great in the year 591. He believed that she was the sinful woman mentioned in Luke 7 who washed, kissed, and anointed Jesus' feet:

Pope St. Gregory the Great, *Homilies on the Gospel*, 591, Homily 33: "She whom Luke calls the sinful woman, whom John calls Mary⁷, we believe to be the Mary from whom seven devils were ejected according to Mark. What did these seven devils signify, if not all the vices? It is clear, that the woman previously used the unguent to perfume her flesh in forbidden acts. What she therefore displayed more scandalously she was now offering to God in a more praiseworthy manner. She had coveted with earthly eyes, but now through penitence these are consumed with tears. She displayed her hair to set off her face, but now her hair dries her tears. She had spoken proud things with her mouth, but in kissing the Lord's feet, she now planted her mouth on the Redeemer's feet. For every delight, therefore, she had had in herself, she now immolated herself. She turned the mass of her crimes to virtues in order to serve God entirely in penance."

And from the information I have, the first Church Father who taught that Mary of Bethany was a notorious sinner was St. Augustine in 400. He taught that she was the sinful woman who anointed Jesus' feet, as mentioned in Luke 7:

St. Augustine of Hippo, *The Harmony of the Gospels*, 400, c. 79: "154. That is not, however, to suppose that the woman who appears in Matthew was an entirely different person from the woman who approached the feet of Jesus on that occasion in the character of a sinner, and kissed them, and washed them with her tears, and wiped them with her hair, and anointed them with ointment, in reference to whose case Jesus also made use of the parable of the two debtors, and said that her sins, which were many, were forgiven her because she loved much. But my theory is, that it was the same Mary who did this deed on two separate occasions, the one being that which Luke has put on record, when she approached Him first of all in that remarkable humility and with those tears, and obtained the forgiveness of her sins. For John, too, although he has not given the kind of recital which Luke has left us of the circumstances connected with that incident, has at least mentioned the fact, in commending the same Mary to our notice, when he has just begun to tell the story of the raising of Lazarus, and before his narrative brings the Lord to Bethany itself. ... 'It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.' By this statement John attests

⁶ See RJMI book *The Hellenization of Christianity by the Anti-Church Fathers and Scholastics: The Stoic and Epicurean Philosophies*.

⁷ John 11:2: "And Mary was she that anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick."

what Luke has told us when he records a scene of this nature in the house of a certain Pharisee, whose name was Simon. Here, then, we see that Mary had acted in this way before that time. And what she did a second time in Bethany is a different matter.”

But St. Augustine did not teach that Mary Magdalen was a notorious sinner. And from my research so far, I have found no other Church Father who taught that Mary Magdalen or Mary of Bethany was a notorious sinner.

It is claimed by some that St. Ephrem the Syrian (c. 306-373) was the first to teach that Mary Magdalen was a sinner. However, the sources they cite teach no such thing. In the following quote, he teaches that Mary of Bethany anointed Jesus’ head but does not say she was a sinner:

St. Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on Virginity*, 4th Century, Hymn 6: “7. ...Mary, with good oil instead of a leaf portrayed the symbol of the Son’s death. The oil jar she poured on him emptied out a treasure of types on Him. In that moment the symbols of oil took shelter in the Anointed, and the treasurer of the symbols of oil completed the symbols for the Lord of symbols.”

And the second source that is used is his *Homily on Our Lord*. However, if read carefully, he is clearly distinguishing between Mary the sister of Martha and the “sinful woman,” and again is not even referring to St. Mary Magdalen:

St. Ephrem the Syrian, *Homily on Our Lord*, 4th Century, 46-47: “And the Nature which none can handle, clothed itself in a body, altogether in order that all lips (Isaiah 6:7) might kiss his feet as the sinful woman did. For the sacred soul was hidden within the veil of flesh, and so touched all unclean lips and sanctified them. Thus he whom his appetite was supposed to invite to feasting, his feet invited to tears; he was the good Physician, who came forth to go to the sinful woman who was seeking him in her soul. She then anointed the feet of our Lord, who (anointed) not his head — she who was trodden down in the dust by all. For those Pharisees who justified themselves and despised all (else), trod her down. But he the Merciful, whose pure body sanctified her uncleanness, had pity on her.

“47. But Mary anointed the head of our Lord’s body (Matthew 26:7) as a token of the better part which she had chosen. And Christ prophesied concerning that which her soul had chosen. While Martha was cumbered with serving, Mary was hungering to be satisfied with spiritual things by him who also satisfies us with bodily things. So Mary refreshed him with precious ointment, as he had refreshed her with his exalted teaching. ...Thus the sinful woman, by the flood of her tears, in full assurance was rewarded with remission of sins from beside his feet... But Mary received blessing openly from his mouth as a reward of the service of her hands upon his head.”

Beware of lies about what the Church Fathers taught

Hence beware of the lie which says that many Church Fathers taught that Mary Magdalen and Mary of Bethany were notorious sinners. For example, the nominal *Catholic Encyclopedia* lies when it says that “most of the Latins” hold that Mary Magdalen and Mary of Bethany and the sinful woman mentioned in Luke 7 were the same person:

Nominal *Catholic Encyclopedia*, “St. Mary Magdalen”: “The Greek Fathers, as a whole, distinguish the three persons: 1) the ‘sinner’ of Luke, vii, 36-50; 2) the sister of Martha and Lazarus, Luke, x, 38-42, and John, xi; and 3) Mary Magdalen. On the other hand most of the Latins hold that these three were one and the same.”

Two books in the Catholic University of America's *The Fathers of the Church* series⁸ lie by one adding a title and the other an index that says that a Church Father teaches that Mary Magdalen was a sinner, when the work itself teaches no such thing.

In Volume 17 on the translation of *Saint Peter Chrysologus' Selected Sermons and Saint Valerian's Homilies*, the translator added to two of St. Chrysologus' sermons titles that mention that Mary Magdalen was the sinful woman in Luke 7. But in those letters, St. Chrysologus never names the sinful woman.

The title for Sermon 93 on page 143 is "The Conversion of Magdalen (On Luke 7.36-38)." But the sermon itself never names the sinful woman.

The title for Sermon 95 on page 147 is "The Conversion of Magdalen Allegorically Interpreted (On Luke 7.36-50)." But the sermon itself never names the sinful woman.

The Index of Volume 26 on its translation of *Saint Ambrose's Letters* says the following:

Index, p. 506. "Magdalen, Mary, 386, 390, 392."

When one goes to that letter and those pages, St. Ambrose does not mention the name of the sinful woman and thus does not teach that Mary Magdalen was the sinful woman:

St. Ambrose, *Letter 62*, A brother to his sister, 388: "These thoughts may be gathered from the reading of the Prophet. Let us also consider what is contained in the reading of the Gospel: 'One of the Pharisees asked the Lord Jesus to dine with him; so he went into the house of the Pharisee, and reclined at table. And behold, a woman in the town, who was a sinner, upon learning that Jesus was at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment; and standing behind him at his feet, she began to bathe his feet with her tears.' And then I read on to the words: 'Thy faith has saved thee; go in peace.' How simple, I went on to say, in words, how deep in meaning is the reading of the Gospel! Therefore, since they are the words of the great Counselor, let us consider their depth."

Must Not Denounce Men as Sinners without Evidence That Is Certain

It is part of the natural law and supernatural law that men cannot rightly judge and denounce a person as a sinner unless they have evidence that is certain. To judge and denounce a man as a sinner without certain evidence is the sin of calumny for those who know that there is no sufficient proof of certain guilt. But those who follow this rash judgment, trusting in the persons who made it, are not guilty of any sin or fault as long as they did not study the evidence. However, they would be guilty of rash judgment if they did not study the evidence when they had good reason to, which is called affected ignorance. Hence St. Gregory the Great and St. Augustine are guilty of the venial sin of calumny because they did not have sufficient proof to judge and denounce as sinners Mary Magdalen (in the case of St. Gregory) and Mary of Bethany (in the case of St. Augustine). St. Augustine's case had some evidence but not sufficient evidence. He should have said, "The sinful woman in Luke 7 may have been Mary of Bethany, but I cannot say for certain."

Make no mistake, even some of the greatest of saints, such as St. Moses and St. Peter, committed sins and some died guilty of venial sins or faults that needed to be remitted:

"For a just man shall fall seven times and shall rise again, but the wicked shall fall down into evil." (Prv. 24:16)

"And if the just man shall scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1 Pt. 4:18)

⁸ *The Fathers of the Church, A New Translation*, founded by apostate Ludwig Schopp. Editorial Director: apostate Roy Joseph Deferrari. The Catholic University of America.

That is why there is a purgatory so that the faithful who die in a state of grace but are guilty of venial sins or faults can have their sins or faults remitted and the punishment due to their sins remitted. Hence even some of the greatest saints had to go to purgatory before they entered heaven, unless they died as martyrs, in which case they would have had all their sins, faults, and punishments due to their sins instantly remitted and enter heaven without having to go to purgatory. Therefore, I still believe that Gregory the Great and Augustine were among the greatest of the saints and Church Fathers. We must all thank God, even the greatest saints, for his great mercy!

For the glory of God, the honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the angels and saints, and the salvation of men.

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