

A 'STERRE OF þE SEE TO 3YUE LY3T TO MEN' AND
 'MYRROURE TO ALLE SINFUL': A COMPARATIVE
 ANALYSIS OF BIBLICAL WOMEN IN THE *ENGLISH*
WYCLIFFITE SERMONS WITH JOHN MIRK'S *FESTIAL*

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A late medieval English sermon penned during the last two decades of the fourteenth century describes Mary Magdalene as preaching. Her sermon was inspired after she witnessed a local lord in Marseilles offering sacrifices in a pagan temple.

Whan see Magdaleyn grete pepul comyng towarde þis tempul and þe lorde of þe cuntre to hau done offering and sacrifice to here mawmentis, but Mag//daleyne was so ful of grace of þe holy goste . þt scheo be hur gracious wordys turned hem alle a3eyne hom. And for þis lorde sethe hyr ful of alle swet//nesse and gentryes. He had grete luste to heren hyr spekyn and sayde thus to hur. If thi God þt þai prechyst of is so grete of mythe as þu sayste pray to hym þt I may haue a chyles be my wyf þt is bareyne. And I will leven on hym.

Mary Magdalene acquiesced to the pagan lord's request and his barren wife conceived a child, which Mary Magdalene – through another miracle – saved along with his newly delivered mother. The sermon concludes this story with a description of Mary Magdalene as a dynamic and persuasive preacher whose prayers not only produced miracles but whose words helped convert France to Christianity.

and whan þei [the lord and his newly saved wife and child] comyn hom . þei foundon Magdaleyne prechyng þe pepul and þan a none þei felon donn to hur fette . and thanked hyr wt alle here mythe and prayd hur to telle hem whatte þei schulde done and þei wolde wt glade herte. þan Magda//leyn bad hem distroy þe tempulles of þt londe. And make þhe schyrches and revon fonts þt þe pepul myghte be cristened. And so in schorte tyme alle þe londe was turnyd to Cristen feyth þan for Magdaleyne.¹

This account of Mary Magdalene's preaching is often associated with Lollardy, the English heresy conceived in the aftermath of John Wyclif's

¹ BL, MS Cotton Claudius A. II, fols 92v–93r.

reform movement.² Indeed, the Lollard William Brut used Mary Magdalene as evidence of female preaching in his late fourteenth-century heresy trial.³ The connection between Lollardy and Mary Magdalene has become such accepted currency that Katherine Jansen has simply stated: 'Lollards, then, justified women's preaching by invoking the example of Mary Magdalen's public apostolate in Marseilles.'⁴ Theresa Coletti likewise, after recalling Brut's use of Mary Magdalene as a defence for female preaching, has described Mary Magdalene as a 'touchstone for thinking about women's access to spiritual authority as preachers and teachers'. Safely building on this foundation, David Lavinsky recently has argued that the emphasis in Wycliffite sermons on Mary Magdalene's 'pryuylegie' granted by Christ lends support to female preaching within Lollardy.⁵

The sermon describing Mary Magdalene as preaching, however, is not a Lollard text.⁶ It is from John Mirk's *Festial* – the most popular vernacular sermon collection in late medieval England. In other words, this text which so clearly describes a woman as 'preaching' is from an orthodox sermon, not a heretical one.⁷ In contrast, the *English Wycliffite Sermons* – written

² Although John Wyclif did not die until 1384, Lollardy was established by the 1380s and 1390s. The starting place for scholarship on Lollardy is A. Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford, 1988). See also *Lollards and their Influence in Late Medieval England*, ed. F. Somerset, J. Havens and D. Pitard (Woodbridge, 2003); R. Lutton, *Lollardy and Orthodox Religion in Pre-Reformation England: Reconstructing Piety* (Woodbridge, 2006); *English Wycliffite Sermons*, ed. A. Hudson and P. Gradon, 4 vols (Oxford, 1983–96). For women and Lollardy, see: M. Aston, 'Lollard Women Priests?', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 31 (1980), 441–61; C. Cross, "'Great Reasoners in Scripture': The Activities of Women Lollards, 1380–1530", *Studies in Church History, Subsidia* 1 (1978), 359–80; S. McSheffrey, *Gender and Heresy: Women and Men in Lollard Communities* (Philadelphia, 2011); F. Somerset, 'Eciam mulier: Women in Lollardy and the Problem of Sources', in *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. L. Olson and K. Kerby-Fulton (Notre Dame, 2005), pp. 245–60; K. Kerby-Fulton, 'Eciam Lollardi', in *Voices in Dialogue*, ed. Olson and Kerby-Fulton, pp. 261–78. Following the established practice, I use the term *Lollard* to denote the English reform movement that originated with John Wyclif and the term *Wycliffite* mostly in regards to the sermon collection and other literature produced by the followers of Wyclif.

³ Several of the previously listed scholars have discussed this. Alcuin Blamires includes portions of some of Brut's reputed claims in BL, MS Harley 31 as well as the trial transcript in *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts* (Oxford, 1992). A. Blamires and C. Marx, 'Women not to preach? A Disputation in British Library MS Harley 31', *The Journal of Medieval Latin* 3 (1993), 34–63. See also: A. Minnis, 'Respondet Walterus Bryth ...: Walter Brut in Debate on Women Priests', in *Text and Controversy from Wyclif to Bale: Essays in Honor of Anne Hudson*, ed. H. Barr and A. Hutchison (Turnhout, 2005), pp. 229–49.

⁴ 'In theory at least, Lollards believed that both men and women were able to ascend the pulpit': K. Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, 2001), p. 273.

⁵ T. Coletti, *Mary Magdalene and the Drama of Saints: Theater, Gender, and Religion in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia, 2004), p. 142. D. Lavinsky, "'Knowynge Cristes Speche": Gender and Interpretative Authority in the Wycliffite Sermon Cycle', *The Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 38 (2012), pp. 60–83, at pp. 66–70.

⁶ A variation of the word 'preach' is used three times within the sermon to describe Mary Magdalene's actions. BL, MS Cotton Claudius A II, fols 91v–93v. For the printed edition, see John Mirk's *Festial*, Volumes I–II, ed. S. Powell, EETS OS 334–5 (Oxford, 2009).

⁷ I use the term *orthodox* in the sense of conforming to established medieval Christianity – regulated

by followers of the Lollard movement – never depict Mary Magdalene as preaching. While she is described as ‘a sterre of þe see to 3yue ly3t to men’, Mary Magdalene’s prowess as an evangelist is not discussed.⁸

A contradictory situation thus exists. On the one hand, scholarship continues to nurse the attractive idea that Lollardy afforded women special privileges.⁹ Margery Kempe and Alice Rowley fit this assumed image of preaching Lollard women (although Margery herself was only accused of being a Lollard).¹⁰ William Brut’s words, as quoted in BL MS Harley 31, applaud women for preaching when men lacked the courage to do so: ‘multe mulieres constanter predicaverunt verbum quando sacerdotes et alii non audebant verbum loqui et patet de Magdalena et Martha.’¹¹ It is in this same manuscript that Mary Magdalene is reputedly described by Lollards as an ‘apostle of the apostles’.¹² On the other hand, when the *English Wycliffite Sermons* are compared with contemporary orthodox sermons like John Mirk’s *Festial*, renderings of women in Lollard sermons appear less radical than has often been assumed. Female models within Wycliffite sermons fit comfortably with those found in orthodox sermons like *Festial*.¹³ Moreover, when gendered differences do arise, it is often *Festial* which affords women greater privileges.

by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, headed by the archbishops of Canterbury and York in England and the papacy in Rome.

⁸ *English Wycliffite Sermons*, i, 430–1, lines 30–1.

⁹ For example, a recent textbook reader states, ‘Lollards preached a reformed doctrine based on Wycliffe’s writings. They promoted the popular reading of Holy Scripture in the vernacular and promoted equality of the sexes, including women preachers.’ *Radical Christian Writings: A Reader*, ed. A. Bradstock and C. Rowland (Oxford, 2008), p. 56. Scholars such as Shannon McSheffrey and Fiona Somerset have cautioned that Lollardy may not have been as friendly towards women as has often been assumed. McSheffrey, *Gender and Heresy*; Somerset, ‘*Eciam Mulier*’.

¹⁰ See *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. H. Allen, EETS OS 212 (London, 1940), p. 28, lines 28–9, for an example of Margery Kempe accused of being a Lollard.

¹¹ BL, MS Harley 31, fol. 219r; as quoted by Aston, ‘Lollard Women Priests?’, 452 n. 14.

¹² BL, MS Harley 31, fol. 195r. ‘Confirmatur, nam legitur de beata Maria Magdalena quod publice predicavit in Marcilia et in regione adiacente quam sua predicacione ad Christum conuertit. Quare vocatur apostolorum apostola gratia etc.’ See Blamires and Marx, ‘Women Not to Preach?’, 55–6 nn. 81–91.

¹³ My argument fits with a growing movement studying the continuity between Wycliffite sermons and orthodox sermons. Mary Raschko has argued that Lollard interpretations of biblical parables share similarities with their late medieval contemporaries. ‘While Lollard authors differ from many of their contemporaries by addressing the whole text of the parable, their interpretations resemble more mainstream sermons insofar as they encourage contrition and virtuous living and promote an idealized social structure. More specifically, Lollard authors join other preachers in applying contemporary social theory to the biblical text so that it encourages particular types of physical and spiritual work.’ M. Raschko, ‘“To þe Worschiþe of God and Profite of His Peple”: Lollard Sermons on the Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard’, in *Wycliffite Controversies*, ed. M. Bose and J. Hornbeck (Turnhout, 2011), pp. 175–92, at p. 176. In a similar fashion, Jennifer Illig, a doctoral student at Fordham University, recently delivered the paper ‘Making Mary a Model: Teaching about Mary in *English Wycliffite Sermons*’ at the 2013 International Congress on Medieval Studies at Western Michigan University, in which she highlighted significant parallels between the presentation of Mary in *English Wycliffite Sermons* and the Northern Homily Cycle.

In short, attitudes about women within Lollard sermons can be better understood from the vantage point of contemporary orthodox sermons. The last quarter of the fourteenth century witnessed the birth of the two most prolific and popular sermon compilations in late medieval England, John Mirk's *Festial* and the *English Wycliffite Sermons*. Both collections were written in the vernacular, survive in more than thirty manuscripts, and were intended at least in part for preaching to lay audiences. John Mirk, an Augustinian prior from Lilleshall Abbey in Shropshire, produced *Festial* – a practical compilation containing approximately seventy-four sermons which staunchly promote orthodoxy.¹⁴ Produced most probably under the direction of a single scriptorium and written for the purpose of spreading heretical ideas (namely the teachings of John Wyclif), the English Wycliffite cycle contains 294 sermons which challenge many of the beliefs and rituals endorsed by *Festial*.

Regarding women, however, the *English Wycliffite Sermons* promote female models that often mirror *Festial*. Indeed, the Canaanite woman who called out to Jesus and Mary Magdalene who dared kiss Christ's feet were considered suitable exemplars for heretical and orthodox Christians alike. Yet, despite continuity in the biblical women they emphasize, the Wycliffite sermons often diverge from *Festial* in how they use these female exemplars. This difference can be connected to the pastoral programme flourishing in fourteenth-century England: namely, its acceptance by *Festial* and its rejection by the *English Wycliffite Sermons*. Initiated by the reforms of Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, outlined by Archbishop Pecham in 1281, and reinforced by both Archbishop Thoresby in 1357 and Archbishop Arundel in 1409, the pastoral programme developed from an initial focus on the basics of medieval Christianity into sweeping advice covering all aspects of pastoral care.¹⁵ Orthodox sermons like *Festial* fulfil the pastoral programme by teaching parishioners how to meet the necessary requirements for salvation, often through using narrative models. Close examination of biblical women in the Wycliffite sermons as compared with *Festial* reveals that while the Wycliffite sermons adhere closely to the biblical text, their female exemplars mostly serve as passive models who – like Mary Magdalene's star – do little more than illuminate the general direction.¹⁶ In contrast, female exemplars

¹⁴ The most complete manuscript is BL, MS Cotton Claudius A II. For more information, see *John Mirk's Festial*, ed. Powell, pp. xix–cxxvii.

¹⁵ Many scholars have discussed the pastoral care programme. See L. Boyle, 'The Fourth Lateran Council and Manuals of Popular Theology', in *The Popular Literature of Medieval England*, ed. T. Heffernan (Knoxville, 1985), pp. 30–43; J. Hughes, *Pastors and Visionaries: Religion and Secular Life in Late Medieval Yorkshire* (Woodbridge, 1988); L. Boyle, *Pastoral Care, Clerical Education, and Canon Law, 1200–1400* (London, 1981); W. Pantin, *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century*, repr. (Toronto, 1989); H. Spencer, *English Preaching in the Late Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1993); B. Barr, *The Pastoral Care of Women in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2008).

¹⁶ I am indebted to Jennifer Illig for this metaphor of illumination. Although she used it in reference

in *Festial* represent active models who tread the path that male and female parishioners are encouraged to follow. Thus, without detracting from the significance of the Wycliffite sermons identifying women with special privileges and spiritual insight, the extraordinariness of these statements fades into the ordinary when they are compared with similar accounts in *Festial*.¹⁷ Even the privilege granted 'vnto wommannys kynde' when the resurrected Christ first appeared to Mary Magdalene in the Wycliffite sermons is outshone by the Magdalene in *Festial*, as Christ 'aperud to hur bodyly furste of alle othyr, and suffred hur to touche hym an cussyn hys fette'.¹⁸ While her presence is limited in the Wycliffite sermons to (mostly) the biblical accounts, Mary Magdalene in *Festial* is able to carry her message beyond the apostles and even have her public preaching blessed by Peter.

When the representations of women within the *English Wycliffite Sermons* are compared with orthodox sermons, striking similarities emerge. One obvious parallel stems from the Wycliffite use of the female exemplars found in orthodox sermons – even to the extent of including extra-biblical traditions.¹⁹ Mary Magdalene, the most recognizable female saint in the late medieval world (next only to the Blessed Virgin Mary) provides a case in point.²⁰ She plays a similar role in both sermon cycles. The tradition conflating Mary Magdalene with Mary of Bethany and the sinful woman in Luke 7:36–50 began authoritatively with Gregory the Great's sermon in

to the Virgin Mary at Candlemas, it seems appropriate as well for the Magdalene reference as a 'star'.

¹⁷ Coletti, *Mary Magdalene and the Drama of the Saints*, p. 145, highlights another oft-cited Wycliffite example that becomes much more ordinary when compared with *Festial*. She remarks how Mary Magdalene's unspoken confession supports Lollard rejection of auricular confession. Orthodox sermons accept the legitimacy of such private confessions, however, as numerous exempla attest (some of which pre-date Lollardy). See Barr, *Pastoral Care of Women*, pp. 114–20. The example of Mary Magdalene's tearful (and unspoken) confession while washing Christ's feet in *Festial* also demonstrates this.

¹⁸ *English Wycliffite Sermons*, i, 430, lines 25–9; BL, MS Cotton Claudius A II, fol. 92r.

¹⁹ Lollards often are assumed to reject extra-scriptural tradition, but this is not accurate. See M. Dove, *The First English Bible: The Text and Context of the Wycliffite Versions* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 192–7. For more discussions of Wyclif and the Bible, see: K. Ghosh, *The Wycliffite Heresy: Authority and the Interpretation of Texts* (Cambridge, 2002). Ghosh remarks that 'Lollardy is therefore not just an anti-intellectual heresy advocating a fundamentalist return to the Bible', p. 2; see also ch. 4 for a specific discussion of the *English Wycliffite Sermons*; M. Dove, 'The Lollards' Threefold Biblical Agenda', in *Wycliffite Controversies*, ed. Bose and Hornbeck, pp. 211–26; Raschko, 'To be worshipec of God and profite of his peple', pp. 175–92.

²⁰ Eve, the Blessed Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene are by far the most frequently occurring female saints in late medieval English sermons, recorded as appearing in well over a hundred sermons each. In the seventy-four sermons of *Festial* alone, these women appear in at least twenty-six. Although my research is still ongoing in the *English Wycliffite Sermons*, these women appear in at least thirty-three of the 177 sermons in Volumes I and II (12, 24, 29, 32, 39, 46, 47, 177, 180, 184, 186, 187, 188, 189, 79, 100, 95, 75, 35, 89, 90, 93, 94, 96, 97, 99, 102, 113, 116, E1, E4, E10, E39). This is in stark contrast to the sixteenth-century *Certain Sermons or Homilies* in which Eve, Mary and Mary Magdalene seem to appear only a sparse fourteen times (eight of which are the Virgin Mary) in the much longer thirty-three homilies composed between 1547 and 1571. This research is part of my current book project.

591 and was continually reinforced, such as by the popular rendering of the Magdalene story in the late thirteenth-century *Golden Legend* (which, by this point, also combined aspects from the Mary of Egypt legend and an extra-biblical account of the Magdalene's apostolic work in Provence).²¹ Hence, by the fourteenth century, the tradition of Mary Magdalene as a former-prostitute, former-demoniac, contemplative sister of Martha, tearful penitent who washed Christ's feet, and even itinerant preacher who lived in the wilderness, was a pillar of medieval English Christianity.²² Both sermon cycles reflect the composite biblical image of Mary Magdalene, discussing her in the same presumed biblical context: as a demoniac (Luke 8), anointing Jesus (Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 7, John 12), attending the death and resurrection (Matthew 27–8, Mark 15–16, Luke 24, John 19–20), and accompanying her family Martha and Lazarus (Luke 10, John 11–12). An Ember Days sermon in the Wycliffite Ferial Gospels (Luke 7:36–50) names the sinful woman without hesitation as Mary Magdalene:

Bis gospel tellip hou Crist dide mercy to Mary Maudelen. Luk tellip hou o pharisee preyede Iesu to ete wip hym; and Crist entride [into] þe pharisees hous, and satt down to þe mete. And lo, a synful womman þat was in þe citee, whanne she knew þat Iesu restide in þe pharisees hous, she brouȝte a box of oynement, and stood bihynde biside þe feet of þe lord Iesu, and bigan wip teeris to waysshe his feet and wipte hem wip þe heeris of her hed, and kisside his feet, and anoyntide hem wip þe oynement.²³

This parallels *Festial*: 'þan/ answerid Magdaleyne and sayde þt scheo was a synful womman þt þe gospel spake/ of, þt whesse Crystes fette.'²⁴ Mary the mother of Jesus provides another clear case of Wycliffite sermons perpetuating established orthodox traditions. Since the time of the early church, theologians drew from scriptural interpretation (such as provided by Augustine, Jerome and Ambrose) and extra-scriptural sources, such as the *Protoevangelium of St James*, to argue that Mary remained a virgin until her death.²⁵ Religious tales, dramas and sermon stories, like the narrative of the doubting

²¹ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. and ed. W. Granger, i (Princeton, 1993), p. 374; L. Tracy, *Women of the Gilte Legende: A Selection of Middle English Saints' Lives* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 1–25 and 68–79.

²² Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, pp. 33–46.

²³ *English Wycliffite Sermons*, iii, 298, lines 1–7.

²⁴ BL, MS Cotton Claudius A II, fols 93r–v. Although traditions were mixed about conflating the identity of Mary Magdalene with various other biblical Marys, tradition in England between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries mostly identified her with the sinful woman in Luke and the sister of Martha. It was not until the mid-sixteenth century in England that Mary Magdalene, at least in sermon literature, began to see some separation. The 1547 *Certain Sermones or Homilies*, for example, still identifies the woman in Luke 7 with Mary Magdalene. It treats Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus, however, as a separate woman from Mary Magdalene. See also G. Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 1–142.

²⁵ J. Pelikan, *The Growth of Medieval Theology, 600–1300* (Chicago, 1978), pp. 72–7 and 160–74.

midwife whose shrivelled arm testified to the miraculous virginity of Mary, attest to the widespread acceptance of Mary's perpetual virginity by the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Wyclif, as we know, did not question this doctrine. Anne Hudson has claimed: 'No Lollard sermon contains any story material from outside the Bible – no classical anecdote, no pious saint's life story.'²⁶ Yet the authors of the *English Wycliffite Sermons* follow Wyclif's lead in not questioning the medieval tradition of Mary's perpetual virginity, despite general understanding about the extra-scriptural sources that helped formulate the doctrine. The Wycliffite Sermon for the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary (March 25, Luke 1) records that: '*And þis maydon was weddud to Iosep, þe whiche was of Dauibhus hows; and name of þe virgine was Maria, and wel sche is clepud a virgyne soo ofte in þis gospel, for sche was virgyne whan sche was weddud, and virgyne aftur to hire dep.*'²⁷ *Festial* states in a similar, albeit more colourful, fashion:

Pus oure Lady/ þat was as clene as any cristall at þe hotte love of þe Holy Goste oponeth hure/ herte and resevyoth þe vertu of þe Holy Goste and at þe nyne moneth ende/ was delyuered of hyre Sone Ihesu Cryste and scheo aftur as clos a maydon as/ scheo was before.²⁸

Of course, regarding the sacraments and ecclesiastical authority, Helen Spencer would have been correct in her observation that 'if Mirk and the compiler (or compilers) of the Wycliffite sermons could ever have been brought face to face, the resulting exchanges would have been exceedingly acrimonious'.²⁹ In respect of the biblical women who appear in the *English Wycliffite Sermons* and *Festial*, however, it seems that both owe much to the familiar – and often extra-scriptural – traditions of late medieval Christianity.

Wycliffite sermons also echo orthodox sermons in the ways they discuss biblical women: from emphasizing female weakness to ascribing female authority. A Wycliffite Easter Sunday Sermon (Mark 16:1–7) makes a tantalizing suggestion about Lollard attitudes towards women:

Furst Crist aperude to þese hoolye wymmen [including *Mary Magdalene*] for to graunten a pryuylegie vnto wommannys kynde, for hit is seyð comunly þat Crist aperude ten tymes from howr of his rysyng to his stezyng into heuene.³⁰

Further investigation into the Wycliffite sermons dampens this sentiment when this 'pryuylegie' is clarified in a Ferial Sermon for Easter (John 20:11–18) as due to feminine weakness: 'þis gospel telliþ hou Crist aperide to

²⁶ Hudson, *Premature Reformation*, p. 270.

²⁷ *English Wycliffite Sermons*, ii, 256, lines 21–4.

²⁸ BL, MS Cotton Claudius A II, fol. 51r.

²⁹ Spencer, *English Preaching*, p. 278.

³⁰ *English Wycliffite Sermons*, i, 430, lines 25–9.

Mary Maudelen, for Crist wolde þat womman kynde hadde þis priuylegie bifore man þat he shewide hym aftir his deþ raþere to womman þan to man, for wymmen ben freele as water and taken sunnere prynte of bileue.³¹ In other words, Jesus's choice of a woman for his inaugural resurrection appearance was not an attempt to emphasize woman's worth or spiritual equality; it was simply because women – as the weaker sex – were more impressionable. *Speculum Sacerdotale*, an orthodox sermon compilation contemporary with the Wycliffite sermons and *Festial*, mirrors this backhanded compliment. It explains that the candle representing Jesus during the Easter service should be blessed of the deacon and not of higher ranking clergy because it honours the actions of Christ: 'Crist firste after his resurreccion schewyd hym vnto wymmen and denuncied and schewid his resurreccion to his disciples by the same wymmen, that were of febler and lasse kynde.'³² Both the Wycliffite sermon and *Speculum Sacerdotale* emphasize the 'priuylegie' that Christ showed to women by appearing first to 'womankind' after his resurrection; both also temper the significance of this privilege by explaining it as due to female weakness.

Just as Wycliffite sermons and orthodox sermons mirror discussions of female weakness, they similarly mirror ideas about female authority. The Wycliffite Easter Sunday Sermon (Mark 16:1–7) points towards Mary Magdalene's pedagogical authority by describing her as a 'sterre of þe see to 3yue lyzt to men, and to putten hire fro dispeyr of hire furste synnes.'³³ Because of its open air arena and its intentional didactic modelling of the Magdalene, Lavinsky argues that this description 'legitimizes the public sphere as a scene of female preaching and instruction – in short, of female pedagogic authority'.³⁴ Yet this praising of Mary Magdalene as a public model whose story serves as a guide to other sinners is a sentiment also found in *Festial*, which opens the sermon dedicated to Mary Magdalene by emphasizing how she is a model for all sinners:

For scheo/ was þe furste in tyme of grace þt dud penaunce for hyr synnes, and so/ recoured azeine grace be doing of penaunce and repentyng þt scheo hadde/ loste be luste of þe flesse and so synnyng þe wyche is made a myrroure/ to alle synful to schewon how alle þt wollon leuon hur synne and done pe/naunce for hur trespase þei schul recoure grace azein þt þei haue loste/ and ofte myche more, and so dude þis womman.³⁵

In the same way that a mirror reflects our true image, Mary Magdalene

³¹ *English Wycliffite Sermons*, iii, 199, lines 1–4.

³² *Speculum Sacerdotale*, ed. E. Weatherly, EETS OS 200 (London, 1936), p. 115.

³³ *English Wycliffite Sermons*, i, 430, lines 30–1.

³⁴ Lavinsky, "'Knowynge Cristes Speche'", 69.

³⁵ BL, MS Cotton Claudius A II, fol. 91v.

reflects the actions of a sincere penitent who has confessed, performed penance, and dedicated himself or herself to the work of God. The Wycliffite Magdalene too serves at least as a distant mirror for 'how men schal come to serue Crist'.

And hit is seid comunly þat, as þese hooly wymmen [Mary Magdalene and the women attending the tomb of Christ] hadden left þer formere synne and take þeir fresch deuocion, so men schulden come to þe chirche to take þis hooly sacrament, and þus come wiþ þese wymmen wiþ lyzt of þe sonne.³⁶

Regardless of their orthodoxy, the sermons imbue Mary Magdalene with the pedagogical authority to instruct the hearers of the sermons to emulate her behaviour (her exact behaviour in *Festial* – sorrowing for sin, penance, and service to God, and her symbolic behaviour in the Wycliffite text – showing devotion by going to church). Late medieval Christianity, Lollard and orthodox alike, was a communal affair. Mary Magdalene represents in both sermons a true believer who motivates those around her to become involved in communal Christian devotion. From similar inclusion of extra-biblical traditions about Mary Magdalene and the Blessed Virgin Mary to parallel descriptions about female weakness and women's ability to serve as pedagogical models, *English Wycliffite Sermons* drew from the familiar Christianity of fourteenth-century England to produce images of women that – in many ways – looked much like their orthodox counterparts.

From the vantage point of contemporary orthodox sermons, extraordinary statements about women in Wycliffite sermons appear more ordinary. Even the seemingly provocative comments about women as having special spiritual insight – such as 'knowynge Cristes speche' – are similar to accounts of women in *Festial*.³⁷ The *Festial* sermon for Mary Magdalene describes her as given special 'grace' by Christ to 'knowyn hyr self'. 'þan for it was often/ seyne þt Cryste of þe gresteyste synnerres, he made þe moste holy

³⁶ *English Wycliffite Sermons*, i, 430, lines 40–1, and 431, lines 62–6.

³⁷ *English Wycliffite Sermons*, i, 402, line 18. Lavinsky has emphasized this, arguing that Wycliffite sermons highlight women's spiritual insight which gives them interpretative agency. He focuses on biblical women in the Sunday Gospels (primarily sermons 41, 42, 46 and 47 in Volume I) who understand spiritual teachings in ways that others do not. Since Lollards were 'Bible men', as Pecock called them (R. Pecock, *The Repressor of Over Much Blaming of the Clergy* [1449], ed. C. Babington [London, 1860], pp. xxi, 36–7 and 85–7), it is not surprising to see biblical patterns like this. Women are often noted for their spiritual understanding in the Bible, such as their ability to recognize Christ when others do not. In John chapters 5–12, in which Jesus attempts to impress his identity as the Son of God on his followers, only a blind man and two women (Mary and Martha) recognize him. In words similar to Peter's declaration, Martha claims, 'I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world' (John 11:27). Of course, this is also a pattern that we find in *Festial*, which contains many references to women especially attuned to Christ's words and spiritual teachings. For example, in addition to the references given, Mary Magdalene is described as having 'chosyn þe/ best parte' because she 'herde hys wordys þt comyn owte of Cristes mouthe'. BL, MS Cotton Claudius A II, fol. 100v.

aftyr./ wherfor whan he seygh tyme he 3af þis womman grace to knowyn hyr self/ and repentaunce of hur mysdedus.³⁸ Just as Mary Magdalene had the spiritual wisdom to recognize her own sin, the *Festial* sermon for St Thomas shows a female minstrel in India displaying the spiritual insight to recognize Thomas as an apostle of Christ. There was 'a woman a mynstrel þt undurstod Thomas wordes'. She fell down at his feet, and 'cryed þt alle men herdon, Oþer þou art God or/ ellus Goddes dycypul, ffor ryght as þu say dost hyt be fallen.'³⁹ She was the first in this pagan land to recognize an apostle of Christ. Women in *Festial* exhibit spiritual discernment just as their Wycliffite counterparts, and this spiritual discernment extends beyond biblical exemplars to even ordinary women like the minstrel listening to St Thomas.

Ironically, the ways that the Wycliffite sermons parallel *Festial* accentuates the gendered differences between the sermon cycles. Much has been made of Mary Magdalene as an inspiration for Lollard women preachers. Yet by contextualizing Wycliffite discussions of the Magdalene within orthodox sermons, two points become clear. First, the Wycliffite version of the Magdalene is less radical than what is found in orthodox sermons. Indeed, it is in *Festial* that the Magdalene's didactic authority as a model actually translates into the public authority of a preacher. Second, the influence of the pastoral programme in *Festial* makes it more inclined than the *English Wycliffite Sermons* to fashion women as active rather than passive models whose specific behaviour should be emulated. Mary Magdalene not only preaches in *Festial*, but she also serves as the first penitent – setting the pattern for future Christians.

Although Mary Magdalene appears often in the *English Wycliffite Sermons*, many of her appearances are lacklustre. The Ferial Sermon for the sixth week of Lent (John 12) relates the story of Mary Magdalene anointing Christ's feet. Aside from the biblical text, it mostly ignores her, focusing instead on the sin of covetousness and its (predictable) connection to medieval priests.

Iesu cam to Bethanye, where Lazar was deed, whom Iesu reiseide. And þere þey maden hym a soper, and Martha seruyde hem, and Lazar was one of hem þat eetyn wip Crist. Mary Ma[u]delen tok a pounde of trewe oynement and precious, and anoyntid Iesues feet; and she wipte wip her heer his feet; and þe hous was fillid of smel of þe oynement. And so one of Cristis disciplis seyde, Iudas Scariotis sone þat was for to traye Crist, 'Why is not þis oynement soold for þre hundrid pens, and 3ouen to pore men?' But he seyde þis, not for he þou3te of þe nedy men, but for he was a þef.

The commentary follows the rendering of Judas' comment '3ouen to pore men', both in its mirroring of the masculine 'men' and its focus on covet-

³⁸ BL, MS Cotton Claudius A II, fol. 92r.

³⁹ Ibid., fol. 14r.

ousness. The sermon teaches that 'eche man' who treats God's property like Judas is a thief and that focusing on 'gostly almes' like the perfume is better than focusing on physical alms: 'And Crist tauzte his apostelis to chese þis betere and leue þe w[o]rse. And þis ipocrisie is in prestis þat colouren þer coueytise by almes.'⁴⁰ The sermon never returns to Mary Magdalene. The sermon for the Assumption of the Virgin Mary (August 15, Luke 10:38-42) treats the account of Mary Magdalene and her sister Martha in a similar fashion: it centres less on the women and more on how their encounter with Christ has been misinterpreted by church teachings. The sermon states that Martha fed Christ's body while he fed Mary spiritually, and thus Jesus 'tawte þe chirche in þes wymmen'. Instead of emphasizing the importance of the contemplative life (Mary) over that of the active life (Martha), the sermon claims that there is a third better life: 'þe þridde lif is þe beste, as Crist seiþ þat may not lye. And þis is somewhat here in erþe, but fully in þe blisse of heuene. And here dowten monye men wheþur of þes two lyues is betture. But men þat holdon byleue of Crist wyton þat þis þridde lyf is beste.'⁴¹ An encounter between Jesus and two women laid the foundation for this sermon, but women are mostly absent from it. The conclusion makes it clear that Mary and Martha and even Christians in general are not the main concern of the sermon; it is concerned with the problems in the medieval church stemming from the pope and priests choosing the wrong 'lif'. Although a Ferial Sermon for the third week after Easter (Luke 24:1-2) stays focused on the women who first saw the resurrected Christ, it does so to emphasize feminine weakness. It implies that, because the women were so afraid by what they saw at the tomb, their foolish (hysterical?) words caused the apostles to initially disbelieve the resurrection. 'And þes wordis weren semyng to þes men as þei weren fonned wordis, for wymmen whanne þey ben afrayed speken ofte wordis out of witt. And þes disciplis trowiden hem not.' Even though Jesus appeared first to women, the sermon concludes with a statement endorsing masculine apostolic authority over the 'pryuylegie' granted to the women at the tomb: 'Petre and Ion passiden þes wymmen soone aftir in many poyntis.' It also reminds us that even as Mary Magdalene 'trowiden to þe aungelis þat Crist was risun and was alyue' before the apostles, Mary Magdalene still shared many of the faults of her peers: 'Mary Maudelen wiste not ȝit alle þe treupis of þis uprisyng, but hadde doute of many opere, as it semep of lones gospel.'⁴² In spite of the the attention given to Mary Magdalene for inspiring Lollard women preachers, her presence in these Wycliffite sermons is uninspiring.

It is actually the presentation of Mary Magdalene in *Festial* that seems more likely to have encouraged public female preaching. Instead of empha-

⁴⁰ *English Wycliffite Sermons*, iii, 164-5, lines 2-11 and 25-8.

⁴¹ *English Wycliffite Sermons*, ii, 289-92, lines 34-5, 60-4, and 84-93.

⁴² *English Wycliffite Sermons*, iii, pp. 209-10, lines 26-41. This is a reference to Mary Magdalene in John 20.

sizing her fear and weakness as in the Wycliffite sermons, the *Festial* sermon celebrates her bravery for going to the tomb. The Wycliffite Sabbath sermon for Easter week (John 20:1–9) contrasts the fear displayed by Mary Magdalene when she found the empty tomb with the fearlessness of the male apostles Peter and John: 'T[h]is gospel of Ion telliþ hou Mary Maudelen was afrayed in sekyng of Iesues body, and hou Petre and Ion didnen.'⁴³ The *Festial* text has a different emphasis, stating that while:

in hys passion þere as hys disciplus flowen away from hym for/ drede
of þe deth scheo lafte hym neure tyl scheo wth othyr hadde layde/ hym
in hys tombe. And whan no man durste go thyddur for þe armye/ knythus
þt kep þe tombe, scheo spared for no drede of lyf, ne deth, bot/ in þe
dark dawying toke wt hur swete bawms and 3od þider to haue baw/met
Crystus body. Pus scheo louud Crste bope leuyng and dede.⁴⁴

The Wycliffite sermons note the authority of the masculine apostles surpassing that of Mary Magdalene. *Festial* does the opposite. It points out how Mary Magdalene's belief surpasses even that of an apostle and equates her authority with that of Peter. *Festial* records in the sermon for St Thomas the Apostle how St Gregory remarked that 'Me/che more Thomas of Ynde help me to þe feyth þt wold not byleue tyl/ he hadde hondeled and groput þe wondes of Cryst þen Mary Madele/yn þt byleued anon at þe forme syght.' When Peter in the *Festial* sermon is told of Mary Magdalene's preaching adventures, he sends his blessing to her and bids her friends to 'grete wel Mary Magdaleyne and alle hyre ferus'.⁴⁵ The *Festial* sermon presents Mary Magdalene as a missionary of Christ who is affirmed by Peter, preaches openly, performs miracles that parallel those of the apostles, converts a new land to the Christian faith, and shares a spiritual connection with Jesus that surpasses the spoken word.

Even when the Wycliffite sermons suggest the possibility of didactic authority for women, they refrain from showing women as exercising public authority. From her quiet study at Christ's feet to her silent and tearful confession, the traditional biblical accounts of Mary Magdalene emphasize her reticence and spiritual bond with Christ.⁴⁶ Only the accounts of her at the tomb show her speaking, and even then her words are verified by the apostles before they are believed. The Wycliffite sermons adhere closely to these biblical accounts. Mary Magdalene has a special connection with Christ, but

⁴³ *English Wycliffite Sermons*, iii, 204, lines 1–2.

⁴⁴ BL, MS Cotton Claudius A II, fol. 92r.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, fols 13v and 93r.

⁴⁶ To be fair, *Festial* also emphasizes that women should be known by their reticence, in the sermon for the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. *Festial* does not rescue medieval women from their patriarchal and misogynist world. Yet, as the sermon for the Assumption of the Virgin Mary also highlights the Virgin as teaching the Apostles, it does seem to offer women at least limited ways that they can exercise religious authority. BL, MS Cotton Claudius A II, fols 100v–103r.

still mostly serves as a silent and passive model. Even the Easter Sunday sermon which praises her so highly ('Furst Crist aperude vnto Marie Maghdeleyn, and made hire sterre of þe see to 3yue lyzt to men, and to putten hire fro dispeyr of hire furste synnes') still spiritualizes her as a 'lessoun' for how men are to 'serue Crist' and be ready to partake in the sacrament: with 'fresch deuocion' and clothed in the 'vertewys' of 'byleue, hope and charite'.⁴⁷ In stark contrast, Mary Magdalene mirrors her description in *Festial* – stepping off the pedestal of a model and into the shoes of a penitent, preacher and apostle.

The Magdalene sermon in *Festial* suggests a reason for this different, yet still familiar, Magdalene:

whan scheo herde þt Cryste was/ atte þe mete yn a manns houce, þt was kalled Symond þe pharasen, scheo/ toke a boyste wt oynement, such as men vsendon in þt cuntre for hete/ of þe sonne and 3ode þider, but for scheo durste note for schame gon befo/re Cryste scheo 3ode behynde hym and toke hys fette in hyr hands, and for/ sorow þt scheo hadde in hur herte, scheo wepte so tendurly þt therus of hur/ heyen woschon Cristes fette. þan wt hyr fayre fax sche wypud hem aftur, and/ þan wt alle þe loue þt was in hyr herte scheo cussyd hys fette and so wt hyr/ box anoyntyd hem. Bot no worde spake scheo þt man myght here, bot sof/tely in hyr herte heghly scheo cred to Cryst of mercy and made a vow/ to hym þt scheo wolde neure trespase more. þan hadde Criste compassion/ of hur an clensed her of vii fendes. þe whyche scheo had withinne hur/ and for3af hur alle hur gylte of synne.⁴⁸

While the Wycliffite account of John 12 focuses on the crime of Judas, the *Festial* account of Luke 7 focuses on Mary Magdalene's contrition for her sin. Her story was meant to encourage sinful parishioners to express contrition and repent so that they could receive absolution. She thus serves as an active model: 'a myrroure to alle sinful to schewon how alle þt wollon leuon hur synne and done pe/naunce for hur trespase, þei schul recoure grace a3eyn þt þei haue loste and ofte myche more'.⁴⁹ In other words, the Magdalene in *Festial* supports the pastoral programme. She provides an example of contrition, confession and penance for parishioners to emulate, as well as to bring to mind that they were all eligible, just the like sinful Magdala, to receive the grace of Christ. Like the Magdalene sermon, a primary goal of *Festial* was to teach parishioners the basic components of their faith and to encourage them to participate in the sacramental system.⁵⁰ Priests – as the only instruments

⁴⁷ *English Wycliffite Sermons*, i, 430–1, lines 29–31, 40–1 and 62–6.

⁴⁸ BL, MS Cotton Claudius A II, fol. 92r.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, fol. 91v.

⁵⁰ *John Mirk's Festial*, ed. Powell, pp. xix–xliii. See also Barr, *Pastoral Care of Women*, and Spencer, *English Preaching*. Spencer demonstrates how the pastoral programme was translated

with the sacerdotal authority to teach about doctrinal issues and to administer the sacraments – had to pay attention to all parishioners, men and women. This responsibility was staunchly supported by the fourteenth-century church, in accordance with the decrees of Fourth Lateran Council of 1215: 'Omnis utriusque sexus fidelis, postquam ad annos discretionis pervenerit, omnia sua solus peccata confiteatur fideliter, saltem semel in anno proprio sacerdoti.'⁵¹ This responsibility echoes in the accounts of the female exemplars in *Festial*, who, like Mary Magdalene, serve as reminders to priests and parishioners alike that women were just as much a part of the pastoral programme as their male counterparts.

The *English Wycliffite Sermons* reject priestly authority, and – consequently – reject this pastoral programme. The sermon for the Common of Many Confessors (Luke 12:35–40) states that if penitents 'axe we God mercy in oure þowȝt, and haue we sorwe for þis synne, and God is redy to forȝyu it, howeuere þat preestus faylon'. Further stressing that ecclesiastical authority is unnecessary for administering the sacraments, a Ferial sermon for the fourth week in Lent (John 11:1–45) states that 'it is an opyn blasfemye þat prestis forȝyuen þis synne in God, but ȝyue God forȝyue it first and seye to prestis þat [þei] shewen it'.⁵² By rejecting the mediatory role of the priesthood, Lollards lessened the need for priests to perform sacerdotal roles while accentuating the role of the laity in salvation. It is no surprise that exhortations found in sermons like *Festial* for people to come to confession before they receive Eucharist, as well as the instructions and encouragement given to priests to make sure they properly fulfil their sacerdotal duties towards all parishioners, are absent from Lollard sermons. As it is at these moments that *Festial* sermons are most gender-attentive, perhaps it should not be surprising that *English Wycliffite Sermons* are much less so.⁵³ Even when specifically discussing biblical women like Mary Magdalene, the Wycliffite sermons still seem to firmly support Shannon McSheffrey's assessment of Lollardy: that it was made by and for men.⁵⁴ The Ferial sermon for the fourth week of Lent (John 11:1–45) shows this well. The text focuses on the grief of Mary Magdalene and Martha and their interactions with Jesus, culminating in the miraculous resurrection of their dead brother Lazarus. Aside from the scriptural references to the sisters, women are completely absent from the sermon. Indeed, the whole story is spiritualized into a lesson about how

from constitutions and instructional handbooks (mostly in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries) to sermons (later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries), pp. 196–227.

⁵¹ *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*, ed. J. Algerigo et al., 3rd edn (Bologna, 1973), p. 245.

⁵² *English Wycliffite Sermons*, ii, 158, lines 108–9; iii, 144, lines 99–101.

⁵³ *Festial* manuscripts consistently contain gender-inclusive language when preaching *pastoralia*. See Barr, *Pastoral Care of Women*, pp. 36–61. A cursory examination of the *English Wycliffite Sermons* immediately reveals that they rely mostly on masculine generic and androcentric nouns and pronouns.

⁵⁴ McSheffrey, *Gender and Heresy*, p. 149.

Christ – without clerical assistance – can ‘reyse a soule fro synne to grace’. The nouns and pronouns used for the ‘soul’ are exclusively masculine. As the text reads: ‘Þes boondis in whiche þis man cam forþ shewen þe myracle of Crist, hou he mouyd þis body þat was deed to come forþ þus al boundyn; and it bitokeneþ also þat men þat ben vnbounden of prestis ben bifore quykened of God.’ Far from the grief of Mary and Martha, the sermon concludes by denouncing priests who dare to forgive sin in ‘men’ as blaspheming against God.⁵⁵ When the androcentric perspective of Wycliffite sermons is compared with the orthodox sermons of *Festial*, the rejection of the pastoral programme by Lollardy takes on a gendered significance. The resurrection of Lazarus is used in a similar way in *Festial*, but with a gendered difference clearly connected to the pastoral programme. The *Festial* sermon for Palm Sunday opens with a call for ‘Gode Cryston Men and Wommen’ to hear how Lazarus, the brother of Mary Magdalene and Martha, was raised from death to life. As in the Wycliffite sermon, *Festial* compares parishioners to Lazarus: ‘for yere bene many of 3ow raysyd frome dethe to lyue./ þt hath lyne dede fowre dayes, þt bene synful thoutus, synful speches,/ synful werkys, in synful customes.’ Unlike the Wycliffite sermon, *Festial* specifically references these parishioners as both men and women and attributes their resurrection to their success in following the pastoral programme: ‘Where fore iche Cristen man and wom/man schal þis day beron palmes in procession schewing þt he hape fogh/ton wt þe fend, and hape þe vuctery of hym be clene schryuing of/ mowþe, repentaunce of herte, and mekely done his penaunce, and/ in þis wyse ouercomyn is oure enmye.’ Wycliffite sermons were not concerned with motivating individual souls to participate in the sacraments. Hence they lacked the reason provided by the pastoral programme to reach out specifically to ‘iche Cristen man and womman’.⁵⁶

John Mirk's *Festial* and the *English Wycliffite Sermons* have much in common, including the religious and patriarchal traditions of fourteenth-century England which informed them both. Despite theological differences, the two sermon collections incorporate many of the same female exemplars, the same traditions about biblical women, and the same strengths and weaknesses about women. In fact, statements about women in the Wycliffite sermons which might otherwise seem extraordinary appear less so when compared with contemporary sermons. A noticeable gendered difference, however, exists. *Festial*, committed to reinscribing orthodoxy, actively uses its female exemplars to help teach the pastoral programme to both male and female parishioners. *The English Wycliffite Sermons*, which rejects the pastoral programme, renders its female exemplars (including Mary Magdalene) more passively – calling into question, yet again, the persistent idea that Lollardy was hospitable towards female religious authority.

⁵⁵ *English Wycliffite Sermons*, iii, 140–4, lines 78–9, 96–9 and 102.

⁵⁶ BL, MS Cotton Claudius A II, fols 54r–v.

A final comparison encapsulates the gendered significance made by the pastoral programme. The sermon for the Second Sunday in Lent in both *Festial* and the Wycliffite Sunday Gospels includes the Woman of Canaan's encounter with Christ from Matthew 15. In this familiar story, Jesus responds to the woman's plea for a miraculous healing of her daughter by telling her, 'Hit is not good to take [þe] breed þat falluþ to children and ȝyuen hit to howndes to ete fro þese children.' When the womman responds that even dogs are allowed to eat table crumbs, Jesus proclaims, 'O womman! greet is þi feip.' The Wycliffite text explains the woman as 'knowynge Cristes speche' – she understands the spiritual import of Jesus's words that even pagans (the dogs) may become God's children. Yet for a sermon which revolves around this scripture passage, it is striking how absent the woman is from the message. The text spiritualizes the woman as 'þe substaunce of mannys sowle' that is miraculously transformed from pagan into Christian and emphasizes the ecclesiastical establishment which is 'werren vpon' Christian 'men'.⁵⁷ Thus, although recognizing the Woman of Canaan's spiritual insight, the sermon does little else to address women.

The *Festial* sermon uses the Woman of Canaan differently. It contextualizes the story within a larger discussion of the pastoral programme: how 'Gode Men and Wommen' need to cleanse their souls during Lent through confession and penance. It too sees the Woman of Canaan as a representative, albeit in this instance, of a successful penitent. Instead of leaving her in the spiritual realm as a disembodied and genderless soul, as in the Wycliffite sermon, *Festial* channels this biblical woman into the medieval parish through telling the story of an ordinary woman. This female exemplum character was too ashamed to confess her sin until she met Christ. He put his hand into the wound in his side and asked her: 'Whatte felys *yu* and scheo/ quakyd for fer and sayde Lorde I fele yure herte. þan sayde Cryste, Be *yu* no more aschamyd to schew me yure herte þan I am to suffyr ye to felon myn herte.' The woman confessed her sin to a priest and the sermon concludes that she was then forgiven.⁵⁸ The Woman of Canaan becomes in *Festial* a successful penitent who actively models participation in the sacraments. In contrast, the Woman of Canaan in the Wycliffite sermon is passive. Her story is a backdrop to show how the conversion of a soul is based on Christ's grace and not the tyranny of priests.

Each sermon, of course, is teaching a lesson. The *Festial* sermon is encouraging parishioners to participate in the sacraments and the Wycliffite sermon is emphasizing the role of the individual over ecclesiastical authority. These different emphases have gendered implications. The Woman of Canaan in both sermons signifies something larger than herself, but it is only in *Festial* that she directly connects to ordinary medieval women through her trans-

⁵⁷ *English Wycliffite Sermons*, i, 401–6, lines 11–24, 65 and 84–91.

⁵⁸ BL, MS Cotton Claudius A II, fols 46r–47v.

formation into a female parishioner. In this way, the spiritual insight of the Woman of Canaan – that she too can share in Christ's grace – becomes accessible to female parishioners who also, through contrition and confession, can know Christ's heart. This portrayal of the Woman of Canaan in both *Festial* and the Wycliffite sermon parallels how each portrays Mary Magdalene. In the *English Wycliffite Sermons*, the women are passive guides: the Woman of Canaan illustrates the process of salvation and Mary Magdalene illuminates the path to the resurrected Christ. In *Festial*, the women are active models: the Woman of Canaan mirrors the actions of a female penitent while Mary Magdalene becomes the first penitent by washing Christ's feet with her tears. Indeed, it seems that while Mary Magdalene may have shone brightly for Lollards as a familiar and even spiritually insightful exemplar, it is the reflection of the Magdalene in *Festial* that provided medieval women with a practical role model that they were called to follow as well as to admire.