

Titled '*Apostola Apostolorum*,' this painting explores the Johannine gospel's post resurrection periscope of Magdalene's encounter with Christ (Jn 20:10-18). It was inspired by attending two classes last semester, One at Regis College on John's Gospel and the other at St. Mike's on James Fowler's *Stages of Faith Development*.¹ While the latter pays particular attention to the role that crisis plays in initiating a development of faith, Fowler and the Fourth Gospel define faith in terms that relate to each other in one significant respect: Both consider faith as active.² It is also significant that both approach faith with a conscious respect for the universal struggle with "death as the central power with which we must deal."³

Magdalene's encounter with the resurrected Jesus inaugurates a development of faith that must now "yield to the call of a more radical actualization."⁴ Her commission from the risen Christ, to go to the Apostles and inform them of his forthcoming ascension earned her the title 'Apostle to the Apostles' since early Christian times, albeit credited to Augustine in the Fourth Century. The painting places its emphasis on movement, suggesting a movement from one panel to the next, one stage of faith to the next, crossing through the vertical line of crisis that divides the two panels.

'*Apostola Apostolorum*' is a large-scale diptych in oil (96" x 60") painted in Toronto in March-April 2015. The term "diptych"—originating from the Greek words *di* (two) and *ptyche* (fold)—refers to a pair of panels, usually small enough to be held in the hand, made of wood or ivory and hinged together to open like a book. Adapted for religious subject matter in early Christian art, diptychs would later feature in Roman Catholic tradition from the early Gothic period (Twelfth Century), through to the Renaissance (Fourteenth to Seventeenth Centuries). Larger scale contemporary diptychs are occasionally produced by artists for works consisting of two paintings that are not physically joined but displayed side-by-side as a pair. The choice of colour in this work (buff titanium) alludes to the origin of diptychs as an art discipline from Sixth Century Rome in which matching ivory panels were carved in low relief.

Traditionally the two panels of a diptych relate figuratively: An image of the donor on the left, religious theme on the right; figure(s) on the left directing attention to figure(s) on the right. Here Magdalene's figure fills the right panel to contrast with the lack of any figural representation in the other. The lack of figuration in the left canvas suggests what Walter Kasper emphasises in relation to divine revelation as "supracategorical occurrence"⁵ in which mystery discloses a whole new reality; a new way of seeing, beyond conventional imagery.

Encountering the risen Jesus (recognized by Magdalene only when hearing him speak her name, as referenced in her exposed ear) heightens Magdalene's sense of crisis by her realization that she can no longer relate physically to Jesus.

Magdalene's figure in the painting is blown forward; the energy of the Spirit drives her onwards to announce Jesus' resurrection to the Apostles. Her posture highlights her active responsiveness to Christ's commission. It suggests a sense of purpose, a "leaning into the future of God for all being."⁶

The position of Magdalene's hand in relation to her mouth represents her evangelizing role. The resurrected Christ has commissioned her to articulate the truth of his resurrection by the power of speech. Her right hand remains open, suggesting both an active response to the commission she receives and that this commission will in turn be passed on to others.

Magdalene's crossed arms mirror a gesture often associated with several of Fra Angelico's (1395-1455) most frequent works depicting *The Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary*. Here it represents Magdalene's embrace—not of the risen Christ who is now no longer carnally embraceable—but of the commission she receives and the impact this has on her new understanding of faith. Like ours, Magdalene's witness to her commission must be evident not only in her words but in her actions.

Her left hand rests upon the robe she wears. The figure's clothing is composed of both an inner robe and an outer garment, common in traditional representations of Biblical figures. However its suggestion of the darker 'capa' and white habit of the Dominican Friars honours Magdalene's position as patron of the Dominican Order while referencing the evangelizing vocation in which the Dominican sisters participate within the Order of Preachers. Moreover, this image of Magdalene also acts as a visual reminder to the Church that in the Johannine tradition Christ first entrusted the commission to announce his resurrection to this woman. While the role of evangelisation is one the Toronto Dominicans seek to underline and reclaim for its women members, this painting is also intended as a summons to those who now represent the Apostles to engage and listen carefully to the voice of women in the Church.

I think Magdalene's facial expression in '*Apostola Apostolorum*' reflects the sense of focus and resolution that Fowler evokes when he writes that "the most precious thing we have to offer each other...is our honest, unexaggerated and nonpossessive sharing of what we take to be moments of absoluteness in the particular faith traditions in which we live as committed participants."⁷

¹ James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1981.

² *Ibid*, 16, 19; Robert Kysar, *Voyages with John; Charting the Fourth Gospel* (Texas: Baylor University Press, 2005), 111.

³ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 21.

⁴ *Ibid*, 198.

⁵ Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company; New edition (1986), 117.

⁶ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 211.

⁷ *Ibid*, 209.