

Marriage would not change Jesus' divinity

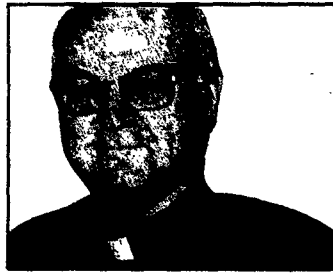
Earlier this month the ABC television network aired a controversial documentary entitled, "Jesus, Mary and Da Vinci." The "Mary" of the piece was Mary Magdalene, and the reference to Leonardo Da Vinci was prompted by the best-selling novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, by Dan Brown. Without giving away the entire plot, the book suggests that Jesus may have been married to Mary Magdalene.

While I am generally reluctant to personalize any of these columns, I cannot avoid doing so in this instance because I had been interviewed at some length for the program, and significant excerpts from that interview were included in the documentary.

What is of interest is the reactions I received from a wide assortment of viewers. Those reactions, although mostly positive, tell us much about the broad diversity in the Catholic Church today. At the same time, they underscore the special challenge that pastoral leaders face in trying to maintain unity without suppressing legitimate pluralism or foreclosing the discussion of controversial questions.

Before getting to a sample of the reactions, I will summarize my own position on the matter.

Could Jesus have been married? Yes. But wouldn't this possibility compromise his divinity? No, because, as St. Paul reminded us in the Letter to the Hebrews, Jesus



Father Richard McBrien

Essays in Theology

was like us in all things except sin (4:15). The sexual expression of love within marriage is not sinful.

Was Jesus married? There is no evidence in the New Testament or in Christian tradition that he was, and there are at least two other credible arguments, based on the New Testament, that he was not married.

First, the anti-erotic bias of New Testament churches came into Christianity very early, and it can be supposed that if Jesus had been married, that tendency would have been checked.

Second, when Paul invoked his right to marry a believing woman "as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas" (1 Cor. 9:5), he did not appeal to Jesus' own marriage to support his argument.

Now to some reactions.

Here is the exchange I had with a priest: "Your views about Jesus and Mary Magdalene are wrong and contrary to Holy Scripture. There is no room in the Catholic Faith for men like you. You are no Catholic theologian. I hope that you can

set the record straight about what you said about Jesus and Mary Magdalene. Shame on you."

My reply: "I assume that you are writing about this evening's ... documentary. I haven't seen the program, have you? It doesn't even air until 8 o'clock EST."

"If, in the meantime, you want to see my published view on the question posed in the novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, consult my book, *Catholicism* (HarperSan-Francisco, 1994). I make it clear on page 559 that I do not, in fact, believe that Jesus was married and I give three reasons, all based on the New Testament.

"I suspect, however, that your position is that there are certain questions that may never even be asked. On that point, we shall remain in fundamental disagreement.

"... you might also consult *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nn. 2477-78, on the sin of rash judgment."

This came from a professor of law: "I watched because I had read in *The New York Times* that you were involved with it. Hard to believe that ABC did a show on this but your remarks were very enjoyable. Very moderate — how could any conservative complain?"

When one's mind is already made up, it's not really that difficult.

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.



Crosiers/CNS

The season of Advent marks the period of joyful expectation ahead of Christmas. Advent begins Nov. 30 this year.

Seeks update, lay obituaries

To the editor:

I am writing to ask for small changes in the features and news of the *Courier*.

Each day many local Catholics die, yet the *Courier* rarely includes an obituary. The local clergy and religious often are mentioned. The laity are rarely mentioned.

The recent agenda for the meeting of the Bishops in Washington, D.C., made no mention of the sex abuse scandal. Can this be possible? There is nothing more important than this item, yet no mention was written

in the *Courier* of Nov. 13.

Members of the Rochester Diocese wonder where we are with reference to those that were involved in the local sex abuse scandal. Has the local committee of the laity made recommendations? If they have, what are they? Please consider a follow-up report to the pews each month.

M. Romson
 Rugby Avenue
 Rochester

EDITOR'S NOTE: The *Courier* publishes obituaries — at no cost — whenever asked to do so. Priests and religious dominate our obituary columns because the diocese and religious orders inform us when these people die. However, family members need only write, fax or e-mail us the details, and we will gladly include obituaries of lay people.

The fall meeting of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops began one day before the *Courier* went to press for its Nov. 13 issue. That issue did contain an overview of the meeting's early proceedings (page 4), including mention of two presentations about sexual abuse. Further coverage of the bishops' meeting appeared in last week's issue.

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