

Revelations: Why Mary Magdalene gets a bad rap



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

In "The Passion of the Christ," Mel Gibson includes a scene in which religious leaders are about to stone a woman for adultery.

The attackers walk away after Jesus shames them with the line, "He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone."

In the film, the woman is Mary Magdalene, played by Monica Bellucci, but there's no biblical evidence that Magdalene is the adulteress in the Gospel of John. Nor, for that matter, is she Luke's repentant prostitute, her most storied cultural role.

Instead, the Gospel writers

paint a more glorified portrait, placing Magdalene at the Crucifixion with Mary, Jesus's mother, and at the empty tomb the morning after the resurrection.

Some historians believe the loose-woman stereotype originated in the 6th century, when Pope Gregory the Great tried to resolve disputes over New Testament characters by proclaiming Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany and Luke's prostitute to be the same person.

The Catholic Church reversed that teaching in 1969, but the myth lives on in many minds, Protestant and Catholic alike.

GOP has got more religion

Recent Gallup polls support the notion that Republicans are more likely than Democrats to cast votes according to their religious beliefs. The surveys also show that the divide is becoming more pronounced.

In its annual analysis of religious practices and beliefs, released Tuesday, Gallup gave Republicans a score of 722 on a 1,000-point scale and Democrats a score of 653. In seven categories — including church attendance, confidence in organized religion and whether religion is "important in life" — Republicans consistently scored higher than Democrats.

Over the past decade, Republicans' scores have risen, from 711 to 722, and Democrats' scores have fallen, from 671 to 653. A November Gallup poll showed that 48 percent of GOP voters said religion was important to their vote, up from 37 percent in 2000, compared with 28 percent of Democrats, down from 31

percent in 2000.

Healing power of pets

What can an outreach ministry do to gain the trust of 4- and 5-year-olds whose lives have been marked by fear, hunger and despair? One answer is to bring them a pet to play with.

That approach has worked well for United Methodist Outreach Ministries in Phoenix, according to the director, Darlene Newsom. Every other week, an organization called Gabriel's Angels brings dogs to the ministry's day-care center, where children from homeless and low-income families are allowed to hug and romp with the animals.

"There is a special connection between children and animals," Gabriel's Angels founder Pam Gaber told United Methodist News Service. "We can help develop that compassion and empathy and trust because animals and children are very much alike."

Gabriel's Angels has about 100 volunteer teams of dogs and owners that provide pet therapy almost every day in

the Phoenix area, Gaber said.

Heavyweight awakening

George Foreman, former heavyweight champion and grill guru, this week revealed a spiritual epiphany that turned him into an evangelist.

In 1977, after losing a 12-round decision to Jimmy Young, Foreman returned to his dressing room and tried to cool down. But his thoughts turned dark before he passed out and was taken to the hospital.

"I smelled death. I was in the darkest place I had ever been in my life," Foreman told the Dallas Morning News. "Multiply all the sor-

rows you have ever felt in your life, and it won't come close to what I was feeling."

Foreman, 55, said he tried to bargain with God, saying he was famous and had plenty of money to give to the Lord. "Then God said, 'I don't want your money. I want you.'"

Foreman said he awoke to a new calling that led — after a break from boxing and a brief but successful comeback — to his starting the nondenominational Church of the Lord Jesus Christ in Houston.

He preaches there most Sundays and travels the country, giving speeches and promoting his latest inspirational CD.

A New Direction for contemporary gospel

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New Direction is the direction contemporary gospel should go. These young folks know about the roots of gospel and they've infused those roots into the group's style. That's a blessing indeed.

Ratings

- Classic; ☆☆☆☆☆
- Excellent; ☆☆☆☆
- Good ☆☆☆
- Fair ☆☆☆
- Why? ☆
- No stars - A

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