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Critical Analysis of Leonardo Da Vinci’s Mary Magdalene

Pablo Picasso once said, “Painting is a blind man’s profession. He paints not what he sees, but what he feels, what he tells himself about what he has seen”. Leonardo Da Vinci painted some of the historically iconic paintings of all time which describe him as a naturalistic person. His paintings including ‘Last Supper', ‘Mona Lisa' and ‘Mary Magdalene' talk to people. A masterpiece, ‘Mary Magdalene', when created, became the reason of criticism as people had their reservations on Mary Magdalene who was one of the apostles of Jesus Christ. Considering all the researches on Mary Magdalene, it is important to understand the claim that she was an apostle without any prostitution background, and Leonardo did the painting to describe his understanding of her controversial character. The painting is one of his most celebrated artworks and has driven criticism since its production. This paper will thus analyze arguments based on an individual's interpretations of the painting, who consider Mary Magdalene as an immoral person, and will also describe her character as a controversial figure.

Mary Magdalen was a Jewish woman who was one of Jesus Christ's apostles who traveled with him and supported his ministry throughout his mission. She was also among those people who witnessed the crucifixion, burial and resurrection of Jesus, and for this reason, she has also been called the Apostle of all apostles. Though she had been with Jesus through all his sufferings, there are no shreds of evidence of them being involved in any kind of sexual relationship. Ehran states that there is no such evidence that can prove their relationship as a married couple.

According to Da Vinci, Mary Magdalene was the most beloved friend of Jesus and his apostles, and was very close to Jesus which resulted in criticism throughout history. She was the one who witnessed Jesus’s crucifixion, resurrection, burial and helped him stabilize his ministry as researchers believe her to be a wealthy woman. As an artist, Leonardo wanted his audience to have their interpretation of the painting but this does not give them the right to question the morality of the woman portrayed in the painting (Leonardo-da-vinci). The painting is of a woman who is showing off her breasts and is a bold depiction of Mary Magdalene. Such images of woman were not acceptable to the people of that era because it was considered as immoral. But it does not mean that Da Vinci has tried to show her as a prostitute in this painting. Da Vinci, using his aesthetic sense, has portrayed her beautifully and instead of focusing on the outer surface which is not appealing to many, one has to understand the deep meaning of the painting. This painting displays great artistic qualities of Leonardo which is what the audience needs to focus on.

The painting shows her love for Jesus, her passion to support him throughout his journey, her spiritual connection and her relationship as his true follower. The Bible too rejects these faulty claims of her being a prostitute and describes her as a disciple of Jesus who was the first one to witness Jesus's resurrection: the foundation of Christianity. Her role as Gospel became the reason for women's leadership positions as priests, and in 1969 Catholic Church admitted its mistake of identifying Mary Magdalene as a sex worker (Pruitt). Taylor states that a lot of women look to Mary Magdalene as an authority for women's leadership within the church. Leonardo has framed her as the only follower who truly understands Jesus's vision for humanity along with his spiritual message.

Leonardo was a Renaissance artist and the Renaissance artists had this ability to play safely with their works. They expressed their ideas very safely because one cannot go against the church values and this painting challenged the morals values of the church. It is through their art, they left a hidden message. Likewise, Leonardo never tried to challenge the religious doctrines because it could have put him under serious problems and his belief of Mary Magdalene as a beloved apostle was only limited to him and his close friends (Jusino). However, the message was totally ignored at that time because people could not look at a naked woman who was supposed to dress properly. It was later in the centuries that the message became clear to people and to the church as well because her image as a true apostle was restored by the church (Buchanan). The manipulation of her image as a prostitute was promoted by men of that time who could bear her as a powerful figure in the life of Jesus Christ. This also shows male dominance over women.

It is therefore confirmed that the woman in this painting has been a controversial person who in no way was proved to be a prostitute rather it is artistic creativity of Leonardo Da Vinci. Being naked does not make a woman prostitute as The Bible itself expressed its regard on this matter. She was nothing but a true follower who understood and preached the spiritual message of Jesus Christ.

# Works Cited

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