

Commentary for 2/2 by Dwight A. Moody: Breaking the DaVinci Code_12604

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COMMENTARY: Breaking the DaVinci Code

By Dwight A. Moody

Dan Brown wrote a book, and for weeks it has been at the top of the New York Times bestseller list.

I understand why: I could not put it down.

If you like architecture, history and religion mixed into a crime story, this book is for you. But if you demand historical accuracy, be careful.

The basic premise of the book is what Brown calls “the greatest cover-up in human history.” Jesus was not celibate: He married Mary Magdalene, who was with child at the time of the crucifixion. Mary escaped to France, gave birth to a daughter named Sarah and lived under the protection of the Jewish community. The remains of Mary Magdalene are stored in the Holy Grail, supposedly hidden somewhere in England.

All of this seems preposterous. No historian or theologian of any reputation puts any stock in such a flight of fancy. But on a corollary theme, there is much truth—namely, that Roman and Christian authorities of the fourth

and fifth centuries suppressed minority traditions and assigned to them the word “heresy.” It was, in part, an effort to centralize power for political effect for both church and state.

As regards other elements of this best-selling who-done-it, I am in the dark—Masons, Knights Templar, Priory of Sion, Opus Dei; to say nothing of cryptology, religious symbolism in medieval art, and the Louvre in Paris.

Seems the company of the curious is a large crowd indeed. Book clubs and research groups have sprung up to look into these things.

Two new movies are likely to do the same.

“The Gospel of John” opens Jan. 23. It follows word for word the biblical text—not the Greek, of course, but Today’s English Version. This modern text is more widely known as the Good News Bible. (It is the work of Robert G. Bratcher, a 1941 graduate of Georgetown College. He spent a career as translator for the American Bible Society.)

“The Passion of Christ” hits the big screens Feb. 25. Mel Gibson is the writer, director and producer of this movie. He weaves material from a medieval mystic into the biblical narrative of the last 12 hours of Jesus’ life.

The Gibson movie has received much more attention than the Bratcher movie. Many Catholic and Evangelical leaders have attended preview showings and have come away with glowing endorsements.

Others are not so sure.

Passion plays have a long history of anti-Jewish bias. For centuries, the worst time to be a Jew in a Christian community was during Holy Week, when passion plays incited the religious fervor of the people. Too often this fervor was directed against the Jews who were called “Christ killers.” About a decade ago, the Vatican released new guidelines on passion plays,

including a prohibition on assigning blame for the death of Jesus.

But once again, works of art will force the reading and viewing public to seek the truth, to sort the facts from the fictions presented to us by books and films.

Even NBC news is getting into the groove, with a documentary exploring the question, Who killed Jesus?

There are, of course, four answers to such a question. Jewish and Roman authorities plotted against Jesus; Roman soldiers did the nasty deed of arresting, taunting, scourging, and crucifying. But neither of these is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

The classical answer of Christian theology is simple: We killed Jesus. Jesus died because of our sin; he died for our sin. His blood is upon our hands.

But there is (as C.S. Lewis said about Narnia) a deeper magic. Here I quote Jesus himself: "Nobody takes my life; I lay it down."

Jesus foresaw his death; Jesus moved toward the conflict that precipitated his death; Jesus embraced his death as fulfilling his mission in the world; Jesus accepted responsibility for his crucifixion.

But public discussion on these matters is a good thing as is artistic expression of them. A large part of the freedom of religion is the liberty to explore these things in the public arena without interference from any media, political or religious authority.

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