



STATEMENT DH028

Holy Blood, Holy Grail

If someone were to sit down and write a book that discussed the life of Jesus and completely disregarded the accepted historical material available about His Life, what would be the result? No doubt it would be something along the lines of the new book written by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln entitled *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*.

Lincoln, a writer and television producer for the BBC in England; Leigh, a novelist and Ph.D.; and Baigent, a sometime teacher with a degree in psychology have pooled their talents to produce a new book that will undoubtedly bring them some measure of notoriety. The book, the outgrowth of research for a series of specials for BBC television, has been creating controversy both locally and abroad.

The tale begins with the account of a poor French priest in the small, somewhat obscure French village of Rennes-le-Chateau. In 1891, while restoring the church, this little clergyman came across some strange parchments. Dated from the 13th, 17th, and 18th Centuries, these parchments are the beginnings of a historical detective story, not leading to the usual “who done it,” but, ultimately, to an international “what is it?” And, what *it* is, is a supersecretive politico-religious order called The Priory of Sion.

The basic theory of the book is simple. The authors allege that Jesus was a well-to-do Jewish opportunist who had a legitimate claim to the Jewish throne. Supposedly arranging His life to correspond to Old Testament messianic prophecies, He married Mary Magdalene for dynastic reasons, had a child (or children) by her, and staged his Own crucifixion.

They go on to insist that after an uproar in Israel, Mary, with Jesus’ offspring, escaped to the south of France where their descendants became the early French kings, the Merovingians, who ruled from 500 until 750 A.D. Although the Merovingians were finally deposed, their various royal claims (to the French and other European thrones) have been kept alive by a secret society that has preserved the “true” history of Jesus.

Starting with the most current events, the authors work backward into history, drawing on a wide range of subject matter in an effort to substantiate their claims. The reader, following a continuous chain of “what-ifs” and ingenious speculations, is encouraged to see the sensibility in the authors’ efforts. But the attempt fails; the book is an unscholarly approach to history and is far from conclusive, as we will attempt to make clear.

To understand this book, it is of great importance to recognize the approach the authors take in looking at history. If there were a school of study we could call the “speculative school,” this work would be a prime example of such a style. But, let’s allow the authors to speak for themselves.

What is necessary is an interdisciplinary approach to one’s chosen material — a mobile and flexible approach that permits one to move freely between disparate disciplines, across time and space. One must be able to link data and make connections between people, events, and phenomena widely divorced from each other.¹

The result of this approach to history is that any report, rumor, or legend is given credence and is accepted with equal historical value as documentable fact. Indeed, facts themselves become overshadowed by their own “ramifications”:

Finally, it is not sufficient to confine oneself exclusively to facts. One must also discern the repercussions and ramifications of facts, as those repercussions and ramifications radiate through the centuries — often in the form of myth and legend.²

This leads us to a school of thought where the facts of history are not as important as what the authors “discern” their impact and effect to have possibly been. Myths stand on equal footing with facts. Rather than taking the facts that are known, there is apparent freedom to make assumptions about history and then seek to validate these by attempting to get the facts and their

CRI, P.O. Box 8500, Charlotte, NC 28271
Phone (704) 887-8200 and Fax (704) 887-8299

“ramifications” to fit. Rather than building from the events of past history toward an understanding of today, these authors would encourage us to take an event, concept, or theory of modern history and attempt to superimpose it on history — highlighting where there is overlap, assuming correlations where there is divergence, and ignoring plainly contradictory material.

In short, one must synthesize — for only by such synthesis can one discern the underlying continuity, the unified and coherent fabric, which lies at the core of any historical problem. Such an approach is neither particularly revolutionary, in principle, nor particularly controversial. It is rather like taking a tenet of contemporary church dogma - the Immaculate Conception, for instance, or the obligatory celibacy of priests - and using it to illumine early Christianity. In much the same way the Grail romances [legends of the Middle Ages] may be used to shed some significant light on the New Testament — on the career and identity of Jesus.³

This is a dangerous approach to history, for if one’s assumptions are wrong in building from the contemporary (since there is no need to start with facts), just about any conclusions can be rendered as “plausible.” And, this is exactly what Baigent, Leigh, and Lincoln have done. They have taken a hypothesis, built it upon speculation, assumption, and guesswork and offered it as scholarly research. And what if the facts of history contradict the hypothesis? Obviously, since it is not built on facts, facts will have little effect upon it (if any). Once one has made up his mind, there is no reason to be confused by the facts. The authors themselves make this clear:

We have formulated a hypothesis of a bloodline, descended from Jesus, which has continued up to the present day. We cannot, of course, be certain that our hypothesis is correct in every detail. But even if specific details here and there are subject to modification, we are convinced that the essential outlines of our hypothesis are accurate.⁴

This statement appears to be ludicrous in light of the fact that they admit to being able to find little, if any, substantial evidence. For example, when confronted with the dearth of information that would substantiate their views concerning the early French kings, the Merovingians, and one of the royal heirs specifically, they resort to all sorts of convoluted reasoning and arguments from silence.

We could find little verifiable information about the true origins of the Merovingians.⁵

In the absence of any decisive or conclusive testimony [about the origins of the Merovingians and their supposed descent from Jesus] we had to proceed cautiously. We had to evaluate fragments of circumstantial evidence and try to assemble these fragments into a coherent picture.⁶

And specifically, when trying to explain away the absence of any valid historical information concerning a certain descendant of the Merovingian line, they write:

There is no record whatever of Sigisbert’s death. Nor is there any record — apart from the evidence in the “Priure documents” [a collection of cryptically written, mostly anonymous material that has mysteriously appeared in the archives of the National Library of France] — of his survival [after Dagobert II’s death].⁷

But why, we wondered, should Dagobert II have been excised from history? [Note the logic here: there is little mention of Dagobert in history, therefore his name must have been excised.] What was being concealed by such an excision? Why should one wish to deny the very existence of a man? One possibility, of course, is to negate thereby the existence of his heirs. If Dagobert never lived, Sigisbert cannot have lived either. But why should it have been important, as late as the seventeenth century, to deny that Sigisbert had ever lived? Unless he had indeed survived, and his descendants were still regarded as a threat.⁸

Where does this approach to history lead us? If historians were to adopt the Baigent/Leigh/Lincoln theory of historical research, most of history could (and would) be rewritten. After all, the matter would no longer be whether something was factual and could be proved, but whether we liked the idea and whether we could create a scenario that would render our hypothesis plausible.

Again, while we could not prove the claims in the “Priure documents,” we could not discount them either. Certainly there was enough evidence to render them at least plausible.⁹

And with such an approach to history, what sort of information provides validation for one’s hypothesis? This example should make that clear:

We had already guessed that the references to viticulture [the cultivation of grapes] throughout our investigations symbolized dynastic alliances. On the basis of our hypothesis viticulture now seemed to symbolize the process whereby Jesus — who

identifies himself repeatedly with the vine — perpetuated his lineage. As if in confirmation, we discovered a carved door depicting Jesus as a cluster of grapes. This door was in Sion, Switzerland.¹⁰

Conjecture, assumption, speculation, and an unbelievable gullibility characterize the authors' approach, and nowhere is this more clearly seen than when they turn to the Grail legends - from which comes the title of their book.

The Grail legends are those tales found in the stories of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table that deal with the "Holy Grail." The Grail is described in the legends as being the cup used by Jesus at the Last Supper and subsequently used by Joseph of Arimathea to catch the blood that flowed from the Savior's side as He hung on the cross. In the tales, it is sometimes seen as "a censer, small and golden, carried in the mouth of a white dove; sometimes a much larger reliquary carried between the hands of a beautiful maiden; . . . sometimes it appears to be a precious stone; sometimes the blood of Christ in a dish, the dish itself being small and sometimes big enough to carry a man's severed head."¹¹

The trio of authors rightly note that "It would seem inconceivable that the Grail romances could in any way elucidate the mysteries surrounding the New Testament."¹² However, rather than consistently maintaining *that* view, they go on to explain how the Grail stories are actually cryptic messages about the bloodline of Jesus Himself, hidden in the legends and myths of the Middle Ages.

Perhaps one of their more imaginative flights of fancy is their discussion on the naming of the Grail itself. From this exercise they not only come up with the name for the book, but they also demonstrate, once more, their unique and surprising methodology.

In many of the earlier manuscripts the Grail is called the Sangraal; and even in the later version by Malory it is called the Sangreal. It is likely that some such form - Sangraal or Sangreal - was in fact the original one. It is also likely that the one word was subsequently broken in the wrong place. In other words, "Sangraal" or "Sangreal" may not have been intended to divide into "San Graal" or "San Greal" - but into "Sang Raal" or "Sang Real." Or, to employ the modern spelling, Sang Royal. Royal blood.

In itself such wordplay might be provocative but hardly conclusive. Taken in conjunction with the emphasis on genealogy and lineage, however, there is not much room for doubt. And for that matter, the traditional associations — the cup that caught Jesus' blood, for instance — would seem to reinforce this supposition. Quite clearly, the Grail would appear to pertain in some way to the blood and a bloodline.¹³

The conclusion that the Grail "quite clearly" pertains to "a bloodline" and therefore substantiates their hypothesis would be less than clear to one who had read only the legends themselves. The inferences drawn are hardly supported by the tales that make up the Grail romances, as a simple reading of the Arthurian legends would prove. Such a hypothesis ignores the whole setting for the legends and fails to address even adequately the issue of the "quest" for the Grail (which is the setting for the Grail discussion).

But even if there is some validity to some of their claims about the Grail legends (although the legends are hardly the reasonable place to turn in one's study of the events surrounding New Testament times), the authors even fail to be consistent with their own hypothesis. If they want to set up the Grail legends as somehow authoritative in establishing the existence of a bloodline of Jesus, it would only be reasonable for them to consider *all* that the legends have to say on the subject and not just pick and choose what they would like.

According to *Le Morte D'Arthur: The Book of King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table* by Sir Thomas Malory (to which the authors refer when speaking of the Grail accounts), Galahad finished the "quest" and found the Grail. After something of a mystical experience, both Galahad and the Grail were taken up into heaven, no more to be seen by men (*Le Morte D'Arthur*, Book XVII, Chapter XXII). Therefore, *if* we grant that the Grail legends are in some degree trustworthy in recording the existence of a bloodline of Jesus and that the Grail itself refers to that bloodline, then the legend would appear to indicate that the bloodline was removed from the earth, no more to be seen by men. Even if one grants the possibility of such a ridiculous hypothesis concerning the Grail romances, it proves to be self-defeating for Baigent, Leigh, and Lincoln.

Unfortunately, when our three presumptuous and inventive historians approach the New Testament and, specifically, the Gospels, they fail to leave behind their audacious approach to history. Nonetheless, they do recognize the need to at least acknowledge the historical value of the New Testament in validating their claims.

Our hypothetical scenario was both logically consistent and intriguing. As yet, however, it was also preposterous [note this admission]. Attractive though it might be, it was, as yet, much too sketchy and rested on far too flimsy a foundation. Although it explained many things, it could not yet in itself be supported. There were still too many holes in it, too many inconsistencies and anomalies, too many loose ends. Before we could seriously entertain or consider it, we would have to determine whether there

was any real evidence to sustain it. In an attempt to find such evidence we began to explore the Gospels, the historical context of the New Testament, and the writings of the early Church fathers.¹⁴

Recognizing the extremely shaky foundation on which their theory rested, the authors turned to the Scriptures in an effort to prove what they had, up to this point, failed to prove. However, rather than approaching the New Testament documents in an intellectually honest and historically objective way, Baigent, Leigh, and Lincoln engage in what may be one of the best examples of shallow scholarship and convoluted reasoning that their book offers.

They announce that:

The Bible, it must be remembered — and this applies to both the Old and New Testaments — is only a selection of works and in many respects a somewhat arbitrary one.¹⁵

Substantiating this simplistic, one-sentence dismissal of the process of the canonization of Scripture is their examination of what they feel are major “contradictions” in the Gospels. Citing such things as the two genealogies of Jesus, the fact that one Gospel records Jesus being visited at birth by shepherds and another by kings, the “different portraits” of Christ in the Gospels, and the differences between the Gospel writers in the details of Jesus last words on the cross, they come to the conclusion that the Gospels are unreliable and contradictory.

Given these discrepancies, the Gospels can only be accepted as a highly questionable authority, and certainly not as definitive. They do not represent the perfect word of any God; or if they do, God’s words have been very liberally censored, edited, revised, glossed, and rewritten by human hands.¹⁶

Apparently, the three investigators felt no need to consider the possibility of reconciling the supposed contradictions they found, none of which presents a problem for one taking a reasonably honest look at the Scriptures. One would think that even serious opponents of the Bible might laugh at the inadequate and uneducated efforts made by these authors to dismiss the historical reliability of the New Testament.

Obviously, for something to be a logical contradiction it would have to affirm as true two (or more) mutually exclusive concepts (i.e., insisting on both “A” and “not A” at the same time in the same place). Simple variations in the Gospel accounts are hardly contradictory. For example, just because Luke cites the fact that the shepherds visited the infant Jesus does not preclude the possibility that the magi also did, as Matthew records. For there to be a logical contradiction between the two accounts there would have to be some assertion in one account precluding the possibility of the other (e.g., Luke recording that shepherds and *only* shepherds visited the baby Jesus and no kings came to pay homage).

The next hammer that Baigent, Leigh, and Lincoln use in an effort to chip away at the historical soundness of the Gospels again demonstrates their apparent inability to be objective and fair with the available facts.

Without much explanation or accreditation, the three authors turn to Prof. Morton Smith and his theories on a “Secret Gospel of Mark.” Referring to Prof. Smith’s discovery of a letter ascribed to Clement of Alexandria (which we will discuss below), the trio underscores Smith’s conclusions that Mark actually wrote two Gospel accounts and that, based on discrepancies between the supposed secret Gospel and the one contained in the New Testament, the Gospels cannot be considered reliable. They write:

The Gospel of Mark [in comparison to the supposed “Secret Gospel”] . . . provides two instances of a sacred document - supposedly inspired by God - that has been tampered with, edited, censored, revised by human hands. Nor are these two cases speculative. On the contrary, they are now accepted by scholars as demonstrable and proven.¹⁷

They go on to conclude:

Can one then suppose that Mark’s Gospel was unique in being subjected to alteration? If Mark’s Gospel was so readily doctored, it is reasonable to assume that the other Gospels were similarly treated.¹⁸

Even if we were to grant the premise that Mark’s Gospel was altered, that is hardly grounds to “assume” that the others were similarly treated — particularly in the face of the complete absence of any evidence of alteration. However, that need not even be a concern because, contrary to Baigent, Leigh, and Lincoln’s feelings that “scholars” accept Smith’s hypothesis, the “Secret Gospel” theory is quite spurious.

Morton Smith advanced his theories in two books: *The Secret Gospel* and *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark*. Both books were based on Smith's speculations about a certain document he had discovered in 1958 when he was studying ancient texts at the Mar Saba monastery, southeast of Jerusalem. According to Edwin Yamauchi, professor of ancient history at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio and author of several books on Gnosticism, ancient magic, and related topics:

What Smith discovered was an 18th-century manuscript which contains part of a letter ascribed to Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150-211), which refers to an alleged secret gospel of Mark and quotes a few excerpts from it. The manuscript had been copied by a monk on two and a half blank sheets of a book.¹⁹

As a number of articles in various academic journals indicate,* many scholars, even some of those consulted by Smith when preparing his book, reject the idea that the letter actually originated from Clement of Alexandria. However, even if the letter *was* written by Clement, Smith disqualifies himself and his theories by resorting to a methodology similar to that of Baigent, Leigh, and Lincoln: he rejects primary evidence, relies heavily on questionable secondary sources, uses arguments from silence, and resorts to tortured reasoning to support his own a priori assumptions.

After categorically denouncing the theories advanced by Prof. Smith, Yamauchi sums up the reliability of Smith's hypothesis by writing:

It is not likely that Prof. Smith will succeed in damaging the reputation of Jesus. However, he may have irreparably harmed his own.²⁰

Needless to say, Baigent, Leigh, and Lincoln hardly succeed in damaging the reliability of the New Testament by such efforts, since they followed in the footsteps of one who held equally unreliable theories. A brief reading of any *one* of a number of good, basic books on the reliability of the Scriptures would easily produce a significant amount of solid evidence *for* their trustworthiness. This trio hardly scrapes the surface — and they even fail to do that with intelligence.

As Sir Frederick Kenyons, formerly the director and principal librarian of the British Museum, concluded:

The interval, then, between the dates of the original composition [of the New Testament] and the earliest extant evidence [the available manuscripts] becomes so small as to be, in fact, negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. *Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established.*²¹ (emphasis added)

With an unwarranted confidence that they have reduced the Gospel accounts to nothing more than highly -questionable, unreliable, reworked accounts, the authors press on.

We therefore undertook to look at them [the Gospels] more closely, to winnow through them, to disengage fact from fable, to separate the truth they contained from the spurious matrix in which that truth was often embedded.²²

They go on to conclude that there were two groups of followers of Jesus: those who were in on an esoteric secret and those who were simply following Jesus' overt teachings. This second group, whom they address as "the adherents of the message," supposedly collected stories about Jesus and reworked them into what is orthodox Christianity today. The others were the precursors of the secret Priory of Sion.

However, this fanciful theory about the "adherents of the message" just won't stand up to honest evaluation. The time interval between the writing of the Gospel records (and the rest of the New Testament) and the events of Jesus' life is far too short a span. There could hardly have been time for a communal redaction process by these "adherents." That is not to say that the New Testament writers may not have drawn upon sources. However, with such a brief interval, it would have been impossible for the adherents of the message to create a "Jesus of faith" out of the real Jesus and have their message accepted as genuine.

In addition, not only were the New Testament authors eyewitnesses, but so was the audience they addressed. In fact, some of that audience was even hostile to the message (e.g., Acts 2:22). The apostles would hardly have risked inaccuracies — not to mention deliberate fraud — if they were truly seeking to win others to their message about Jesus. A significant error or misrepresentation would have been quickly exposed, resulting in an early death for Christianity.

So, regardless of the religious importance of the New Testament, there is no ground for asserting that it is an unreliable fabrication concerning a certain Galilean. Regardless of whatever else we have in the Gospels, we definitely have an accurate, historically sound record of certain events surrounding the life of Jesus.

It becomes increasingly clear that such historical concerns carry little weight with the imaginative historians behind *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*. As they forge ahead, throwing caution (as well as sensibility and good research techniques!) to the wind, they attempt to “prove” that Mary Magdalene married Jesus at the wedding feast at Cana; that Mary of Bethany was simply another name for Mary Magdalene; that Lazarus was the “beloved disciple” of John’s Gospel; that Lazarus’ resurrection was staged and was actually an initiatory rite into a Gnostic “mystery” school; that Jesus wasn’t a poor carpenter’s son, but actually a well-to-do member of “high society”; that Barabbas was Jesus’ son; and that Jesus faked and survived His own crucifixion.

The following reference to their approach in investigating the supposed marriage of Jesus and Mary is enlightening:

It was not our intention to discredit the Gospels. We sought only to winnow through them — to locate certain fragments of possible or probable truth and extract them from the matrix of embroidery surrounding them. We were seeking fragments, moreover, of a very precise character — fragments that might attest to a marriage between Jesus and the woman known as the Magdalen. Such attestations, needless to say, would not be explicit. In order to find them, we realized, we would be obliged to read between lines, fill in certain gaps, account for certain caesuras and ellipses. We would have to deal with omissions, with innuendos, with references that were, at best, oblique.²³

Once more, they demonstrate their technique of resorting to supposed innuendos, arguments from silence, “oblique” references, and reading between the lines when the plain reading of a text or the facts surrounding it fail to fit their theory.

This apparent inability to treat the material at hand in an honest manner spills over into other areas as well, as evidenced when the authors begin to discuss Christianity, the Gospel, and Christ Himself. Their obvious lack of research into (or blatant misrepresentation of) their subject matter is clearly seen in the following passage:

Many people today speak of Christianity as if it were a single specific thing — a coherent, homogeneous, and unified entity. Needless to say Christianity is nothing of the sort. As everyone knows, there are numerous forms of Christianity: Roman Catholicism, for example, or the Church of England created by Henry VIII. There are the various other denominations of Protestantism — from the original Lutheranism and Calvinism of the sixteenth century to such relatively recent developments as Unitarianism. There are multitudinous “fringe” or “evangelical” congregations, such as the Seventh-Day Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses. And there are assorted contemporary sects and cults, like the Children of God and the Unification Church of the Reverend Moon. If one surveys this bewildering spectrum of beliefs — from the rigidly dogmatic and conservative to the radical and ecstatic — it is difficult to determine what exactly constitutes Christianity.²⁴

What is most “bewildering” in this quotation is the shallowness of the authors’ understanding of Christianity. Although there are variations within the historic biblical camp, for one to suggest that Christianity is nothing close to being coherent and unified is to ignore the doctrinal agreement between the various biblically Christian denominations. And to classify the Jehovah’s Witnesses, Unitarians, the Children of God, and the Unification Church as “Christian” in the same sense as the orthodox traditions is to betray a fundamental misunderstanding of the Christian Gospel.

The authors explain their studies regarding Jesus by stating:

... when our research led us to Jesus, we could approach him with what we hoped was a sense of balance and perspective. We had no prejudice or preconceptions one way or the other, no vested interests of any kind, nothing to be gained by either proving or disproving anything. Insofar as “objectivity” is possible, we were able to approach Jesus objectively . . .²⁵

With such a claim to objectivity, one might hope that the authors would make efforts to understand the historic Jesus. They do, in fact, declare that the view of Jesus at which they arrive enjoys “a much more valid claim to what Christianity would have him be” than the view currently held by the Christian church.²⁶

But, in spite of the authors’ claims of truly understanding the objective truth about Jesus, they make statements that reveal their lack of perception. To insist, as they do, that Jesus’ message was “neither wholly new nor wholly unique,”²⁷ and that the Gospel is simply one message among the many propagated by the major faiths (all of which have a similar “core of validity”²⁸ with no unique claim to the truth) is to evince a fundamental misunderstanding of the Christian Gospel.

A simple reading of the New Testament makes it clear that whatever, else the early Christians may have declared about the message they brought, they understood that the Gospel they preached was unique. The Christian Gospel was not (and *is* not) simply one of a myriad of options of equal validity and value. A failure to recognize that Jesus made astounding and *unique* claims about Himself and His message is incomprehensible, unless, of course, the authors have either failed to read the Gospel records themselves or are unwilling to treat them fairly. Whatever else Jesus may have claimed about Himself, it is foolish — in

light of the Gospel record — to insist that He was simply one preacher among many, bringing a message that was no different from those of His contemporaries.

The authors insist that “In order to compete [in the religious marketplace of the day], Jesus — whom nobody had previously deemed divine — had to be deified as well” and that “In Paul’s hands he was.”²⁹ They insist that Jesus was, therefore, deified to compete with the emperor worship/deification of the Roman world. However, in light of the acknowledged facts surrounding such emperor worship, Jesus just doesn’t fit the pattern. Jesus was not a conqueror with a tradition of “divine” honors typical of those emperors who were so “deified.” His first followers were not Gentiles from a polytheistic background where heroes could easily be assimilated into a pantheon of anthropomorphic gods; rather, they were Jews from a strict monotheistic tradition. In a vacuum, Baigent, Leigh, and Lincoln’s theory might be plausible, but in the appropriate cultural setting, it is most improbable.

Perhaps the greatest inaccuracy in the authors’ work is in their references to the crucifixion. They have the audacity to insist that “Modern authorities agree that Jesus, quite unabashedly, modeled and perhaps even contrived His life in accordance with such prophecies [i.e., Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah],” and they go on to say that even “the details of the Crucifixion seem likewise engineered to enact the prophecies of the Old Testament.”³⁰ They conclude that the crucifixion was a staged hoax arranged by Jesus Himself.³¹

The premise that the crucifixion was a hoax is too unreasonable to be accepted solely on the word of this team of researchers. Even non-biblical historians and writers of antiquity refer to the death and crucifixion of Jesus as established fact (e.g., Cornelius Tacitus, *Annals* 15:44; Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities* 18:33; etc.).

Although the authors, like Dr. Hugh J. Schonfield of *Passover Plot* infamy,[♦] admit that John’s Gospel is an eyewitness account,³² they discount the record which says that Jesus’ side was pierced by a Roman guard and blood and water flowed out (John 19:34). . . a certain sign of death. Schonfield cites that spear thrust as the unfortunate error that disrupted Jesus’ plan for faking the crucifixion, but the present team of investigators seems to ignore its implications altogether.

No one (including the trained executioners who presided over the crucifixion, those who took the body down, and those who laid Him in the tomb) had any doubts that Jesus was, in fact, dead. Even the Jews who so desired His death were certain of this, as evidenced by their desire to place a guard around the tomb to keep it from being robbed. But none of this seems to carry much weight with the authors, who persist with their theories without discrimination; if the facts refuse to fit, they are conveniently ignored.

And perhaps the most blatant example of this disinterest in crucial data is seen when the authors turn to the events following the crucifixion. Ignoring the resurrection accounts and eyewitness testimonies altogether, they write:

In short, we can offer no real suggestion about what became of him [referring to Jesus after His death] — any more than the Gospels themselves do.³³

For the purposes of our hypothesis, however, what happened to Jesus was of less importance than what happened to the holy family — and especially to his brother-in-law, his wife, and his children.³⁴

It is incredible that these authors could attempt to take a serious look at the beginnings of Christianity without giving any consideration to the resurrection. To dismiss the resurrection as unimportant, insisting that the Gospels don’t even offer any post-crucifixion information, is to disregard the goal and intent of the message propagated by the first Christians, to ignore the historically accepted context of the early church, and to turn a deaf ear to the most profound testimony regarding Jesus and His mission. It is impossible to even feign an objective analysis of Jesus’ life and its historical significance without addressing the details of the resurrection account, the effect of that event on the lives of the disciples, and the repercussions that the empty tomb has had on all of human history.

The empty tomb is a historically verifiable fact. Although one may have questions about the theological implications of the resurrection, the fact that the tomb was empty and that Jesus was reported as being alive are beyond legitimate question. To dismiss completely so profound and vital a fact is to retreat from history and move into vain speculation, myth, and fantasy.

As fiction, *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* may have some merit. As a historical study, it displays serious weaknesses. As a biography of Jesus, it is fatally flawed. The authors have resorted to flights of fancy and sophisticated speculation to advance a theory that simply cannot be intelligently aligned with reasonably documentable evidence. As a theory, it is fanciful; as an explanation of certain sociopolitical dynamics, it is — at best — contrived. But as the basis for one’s view of Jesus, it is deadly.

In his book *The Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, Richard Riss offers some very appropriate comments about the pitfalls of speculation:

Most people have undergone the experience of reasoning something out and reaching a conclusion which has later proven to be false. Men, being fallible, are capable of committing errors in logic without realizing that they have done so. Even if one's argument should be perfectly sound, one may begin with invalid presuppositions. Such is the nature of speculation. When men speculate, they are susceptible to error either in choosing their presuppositions or in the structure of the argument employed. While one is susceptible to such error in the process of speculation, one may never discover the mistakes in one's argument.³⁵

Baigent, Leigh, and Lincoln have fallen prey to both of the errors that Riss so clearly describes; not only do they resort to illogical argumentation to support their theories, but their starting point makes it impossible to come to a valid conclusion. Ignoring solid testimony to resort to man-made myths will always bear such unfruitful results. As the apostle Paul wrote:

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths.³⁶

Baigent, Leigh, and Lincoln have given us a classic example of the result of turning from truth to myth. Let us pray that few will fall prey to their errors. After all, the Jesus described in *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* is hardly the Jesus of history, the Jesus of the Scriptures.

The authors affirm that from their investigation “emerges a living and plausible Jesus”³⁷ — but sadly, it's not the *real* Jesus. As such, their Jesus is not truly living, but is only alive in their own imaginations; although plausible, their Jesus is hardly historical. In the final analysis, the Jesus one meets in *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* is a shallow counterfeit.

The true Jesus is alive and offers His Gospel to those who turn to Him. And although Baigent, Leigh, and Lincoln may not like the historical Jesus because He doesn't fit their theories, if they would but turn to Him in faith, they would undoubtedly find a great deal more to trust in than their own imaginings.

Brian Onken

NOTES:

- * Edwin M. Yamauchi, “A Secret Gospel of Jesus as ‘Magnus’?” *Christian Scholar's Review* 4:3 (1975), pp. 238-251.
- * Paul J. Achtemeier, reviews of Smith's works, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 93:4 (1974), pp. 625-658.
- * Pierson Parker, “On Professor Morton Smith's Find at Mar-Saba,” *Anglican Theological Review* 56:1 (1974), pp. 53-57.
- * Robert M. Grant, “Morton Smith's Two Books,” *Anglican Theological Review* 56:1 (1974), pp. 58-64.
- ◆ A tract which succinctly refutes some of the errors in Dr. Schonfield's theory is available from CRI.
- 1. *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1982), p. 283.
- 2. *Ibid.*, p. 284
- 3. *Ibid.*, pp. 283-284,
- 4. *Ibid.*, p. 380.
- 5. *Ibid.*, p. 212.
- 6. *Ibid.*, p. 362.
- 7. *Ibid.*, p. 231.
- 8. *Ibid.*, pp. 231.232.
- 9. *Ibid.*, p. 249.
- 10. *Ibid.*, p. 286.
- 11. *Le Morte D'Arthur*, p. viii.
- 12. *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, p. 283.
- 13. *Ibid.*, p. 277.
- 14. *Ibid.*, p. 286.
- 15. *Ibid.*, p. 289.
- 16. *Ibid.*, p. 289.
- 17. *Ibid.*, p. 293.
- 18. *Ibid.*, p. 293.
- 19. Edwin Yamauchi, “A Secret Gospel of Jesus as ‘Magnus?’ ” *Christian Scholar's Review*, 4:3 (1975), p. 239.

CRI, P.O. Box 8500, Charlotte, NC 28271
Phone (704) 887-8200 and Fax (704) 887-8299

