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**The *Da Vinci Code* as New Age Apologetic:
 The Jesus Bloodline Mythology and New Age Cosmology**

Introduction / Backdrop

There is no doubt that Dan Brown's recent novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, has been a significant publishing event. Unless you've spent the last year in Plato's cave you know that Brown's cryptic thriller sent shockwaves through the Christian Church, evangelical and otherwise.

These days, one sees the Turin Shroud more frequently than the name of a credentialed biblical scholar in a Christian bookstore. Not so in the wake of *The Da Vinci Code*. Scholars from all parts of Christendom were unusually quick to respond to the book's misinformed and agenda-driven plotline. Rebuttals by Darrell Bock, Ben Witherington, Bart Ehrman, and Peter Jones have been sighted across the country by reliable witnesses.¹ We of course have seen these men often, and I personally appreciate their foray into the wacky world of para-babble and "alternative history," a world with which I have been fascinated since childhood. It's nice to finally have some company, even if it's only for a while.

My comments may be tongue-in-cheek, but there is a genuine concern behind them. I'm thrilled that scholars of stature and skill have stepped up to the plate to carefully and coherently bring their specialized knowledge to the lay public. This is rare, though. What I mean by this is not that evangelical scholars have failed to do theology for the masses. Indeed, there has been much good material produced in all areas of biblical study for the interested layperson. But while the efforts of Bock, Witherington, and others are most welcome, their excellent critiques do not address material that needs to be covered. Correcting the Christological buffoonery of *The Da Vinci Code* is necessary, but it is only half the task. When it comes to esoteric subjects like the myth of a Jesus bloodline, the centerpiece of *The Da Vinci Code*, evangelical scholars have failed to get involved.² Granted, the subject matter is weird and certainly no help in obtaining tenure, but Christian scholarship should be about helping the Church preserve and pass on the truth, not to mention serving the public interest. My aim today is to encourage you to become more acquainted with what literally tens of millions of people are reading—including those in your church and classroom—and to convince your Christian colleagues in other fields to do the same. You may not realize it, but the world of alternative history and "ancient mysteries" covers a considerable range of academic disciplines.

¹ Darrell L. Bock and Francis Maloney, *Breaking the Da Vinci Code: Answers to the Questions Everybody's Asking* (Nelson, 2004); Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel Code, Novel Claims About Jesus, Mary Magdalene and Da Vinci* (Intervarsity, 2004); Bart Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction in the Da Vinci Code* (Oxford, 2004); Peter Jones and James Garlow, *Cracking Da Vinci's Code* (Cook, 2004).

² The one exception I know of in terms of evangelical scholarly engagement of modern esotericism as a system is the newly-published book by James Herrick, a communications professor at Hope College (*The Making of the New Spirituality: The Eclipse of the Western Tradition* [Intervarsity, 2004]). Herrick's title requires some definition. By "western tradition" he refers to Judeo-Christian orthodoxy. Alternative western spiritualities are hardly in decline. His bibliography has significant omissions, but the coverage is admirable. Virtually everything under the umbrella of esoteric tradition gets some comment. As such, it is a good introduction (broad, not deep) for evangelicals and is highly recommended.

I'm probably a bit more sensitive to this failure of scholarship to serve the public and lay interests because of my background. I was never involved in any New Age or occult groups or practices, but I have had a fascination with all things paranormal and esoteric since my junior high years. I have read widely in paranormal subjects and esoteric occult history. For the last ten years, adjacent to my doctoral program and teaching load, I have spent a good deal of time accumulating and reading the material of non-Christian, credentialed scholars who have ventured into areas such as European occult history, UFOs, alternate history and conspiracy theory, and Jesus bloodline mythology. In the last four years I've been providentially blessed and quite surprised to have been thrust into a ministry to people absorbed by all these subjects. I got involved because I'd never read a truly academic critique in any of these areas by an evangelical, whereas I had read titles promoting bizarre ideas in all these areas written by PhDs who currently profess Christ or at one time did.

Why the Concern Over Jesus Bloodline Myths?

In all that I have read, and in the context in which I have been able to minister, the thing that has surprised me the most is how many Christians have left the faith because of their paranormal experiences or the persuasive power of alternative history presentations like that in *The Da Vinci Code*. What makes *The Da Vinci Code* an especially potent threat in this regard is the fact that there is very old historical evidence for the *belief* that Jesus had a literal bloodline. That idea does not depend on misreading a few lines from selected Gnostic gospels from Nag Hammadi. There is a fair amount of historical, artistic, and archaeological evidence for an alternative Magdalene Christian sect passed on by demonstrably real secretive societies.

The Da Vinci Code was actually preceded by a half dozen non-fiction bestsellers in the United States and the UK devoted to assembling and revealing this material to the public.³ Most of these works are mentioned in the course of *The Da Vinci Code's* plot development, so that many who read Brown's novel will tap into these sources and others. Two bestselling books not included in the pages of *The Da Vinci Code* were written by Sir Laurence Gardner.⁴ This is no oversight on Brown's part, for one of his lead characters, Sir Leigh Teabing, an expert on the Holy Grail (*San Greal* in Old French), which is actually the Jesus bloodline (*Sang Real*), bears a striking resemblance to Gardner, widely considered the leading expert on the alleged bloodline of Christ. Gardner's method and sources are interesting in that they combine biblical literalism, classical sources, comparison of the stories of Genesis 1-11 with other ancient mythologies of the West, Nag Hammadi material, the Dead Sea Scrolls, early European art and literature, and genealogical material at his disposal. He depends heavily on the work of scholarly names that should be familiar: Robert Eisenman, Barbara Thiering, Joseph Campbell, and Sir James Frazier. This takes on significance when one realizes that Gardner is a British constitutional historian, the Royal Jacobite Historiographer, Presidential Attaché to the European Council of Princes, and an expert in royal genealogy. He is also a Knight Templar and the recipient of the UK Author of

³ For example, Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln, *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* (Random House, 1982); idem, *The Templar Legacy: Startling Evidence About Jesus Christ and a Secret Society Still Influential Today* (Dell, 1989); Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince, *The Templar Revelation: Secret Guardians of the True Identity of Christ* (Simon and Schuster, 1997); Picknett and Prince quickly came out with another book to capitalize on the popularity of *The Da Vinci Code* entitled *Mary Magdalene: Christianity's Hidden Goddess* (Carroll and Graf, 2003).

⁴ Laurence Gardner, *Bloodline of the Holy Grail: The Hidden Lineage of Jesus Revealed* (Fair Winds Press, 2002; first published in the UK in 2001); idem, *Genesis of the Grail Kings: The Explosive Story of Genetic Cloning and the Ancient Bloodline of Jesus* (Fair Winds Press, 2001).

the Year award in 1997. Very simply, Gardner asserts that he can verify a Jesus bloodline, and does so to his satisfaction in his books.

The general point here is that, while it's easy for us to read something like Brown's novel and snicker because we have PhDs in related fields, unless we produce readable, *comprehensive* material for the lay Christian, it will appear as though we either lack answers or the alternative reconstruction has just as much claim to validity. This is especially true when there is no response aimed at the non-Christian who would likely perceive Bock and Witherington as lacking objectivity due to theological commitments, or as part of the grand effort to suppress the truth about the "real" Jesus.

How Do the Bloodline Myths Relate to New Age Spirituality?

My basic contention in this paper is that many people absorb the Jesus bloodline mythology not because they hate Christianity, but because verification of this myth will lend credence to the postmodern spirituality they desire that is part and parcel of the New Age worldview. In other words, if a Jesus bloodline were proven real, it would affirm the validity of the New Age paradigm for them. Confirmation would satisfy their hunger for spirituality while dismissing the organized Church for the historically aberrant nuisance that it is. One can follow the Gnostic Christ with all his mystery and not be locked into a rational, mechanistic, dogmatic theology.

Before broadening this discussion to explore why so many people find the arguments for the Jesus bloodline persuasive, even apart from the arguments that Bock and Witherington dismantle, we need some clarification on what the New Age movement is. Most evangelical treatments of the New Age movement seem to understand it as an invasion of Eastern mystical spookery that only recently landed on western shores. As international academic experts in New Age religion, Western Esotericism, and occult history have documented for some time, the New Age movement as we know it actually has a very prestigious and powerful *Western* pedigree.⁵ Put simply, there isn't a single element of New Age spirituality that cannot be found in ancient Mediterranean religions, Jewish mysticism, the early Christian fathers, Gnosticism, Hermeticism, Neo-Platonism, and Western Esoteric occult history. The great cosmic ages of Pisces and Aquarius are always cast in New Age literature in the flow of Western history. The real threat of the New Age worldview is not the Hindu yogi, tree huggers wearing crystals, or Shirley MacLaine; it is the body of esoteric tradition that can claim Judaism and Christianity as two among many western siblings. A brief overview of New Age cosmology is necessary to contextualize these statements. (See the appendix for more detail).

One of the most influential New Age writers is Edgar Cayce. In his volume, *There is a River*, the New Age prophet describes how the "original sea of spirit" (which was God) "desired companionship [and] projected from Himself the cosmos and souls." Similarly, the New Age writer Ramtha contends that the original "burst of love" in God gave birth to a multiplicity of souls, or gods: "For each particum of light, born of the first contemplated thought, became an individual, a god, a son. Thus all became what is termed light-beings at the birthing of creation."⁶ These light-beings, sharing the creative power of God, proceeded to create the world. These pure light beings eventually became trapped in "flesh prisons," a circumstance that initiated their degradation. These imprisoned souls were termed "sons of

⁵ See the appendix and selected scholarly bibliography on western esotericism and occultism.

⁶ (Anonymous), *Ramtha*, Steve Lee Weinberg (ed.), Eastsound, 1986. As quoted in Wouter Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (SUNY Series in Western Esoteric Traditions; SUNY Press, 1998), 305-306.

man” by Cayce. Subsequently, wiser souls came to their rescue by selecting a certain species of ape and “preparing” it as a vehicle for incarnation. Once the imprisoned souls “switched vessels,” genuine human beings were the result. Cayce teaches that the new humans continued to evolve to a technologically advanced and spiritually enlightened state. They are considered enlightened in that they knew the truth of how humanity came to be, the divine substance of humanity, and were masters of a body of sophisticated knowledge in the areas of science, building, alchemy, and magic. As humanity lost this knowledge, it “descended” in its enlightenment.

If this sounds a lot like Gnosticism to you, you’re catching on. Cayce’s account has several features found in Gnosticism, thereby rooting New Age cosmology in the West. First, it is clear that soul is superior to flesh—that flesh is viewed as degeneration. Second, humans are divine in that their souls derive from those pure souls who derive from God’s essence. Third, the creation of the world is one step removed from God himself. Fourth, the notion of a special gnosis is clear. These ideas are of course very Western in that there is a strong resemblance to Gnosticism.

The greatest of the enlightened humans lived in Atlantis.⁷ After Atlantis was destroyed, small groups of survivors emigrated to various locations. Cayce refers to these small groups as the “Great White Brotherhood.” Wherever they emigrated, they took their knowledge and gradually dispensed it to successors. Not surprisingly, this esoteric gnosis found its greatest “post-Atlantean” expression in ancient Egypt. While it is fairly common in New Age sources to find the notion that the eighteen “lost” years of Jesus were spent in India or Tibet,⁸ since the fifties it has become increasingly common to link this time with the Essene settlement at Qumran. It is widely believed among New Age researchers and writers that the Essenes are the link between Jesus and Western esoteric traditions.⁹ The Essenes are considered descendants of the Cayce’s Great White Brotherhood. They believed in reincarnation (though they referred to it as “resurrection”), practiced astrology and numerology, and were fixated on the imminent incarnation of the “Christ soul” at the beginning of the astrological Age of Pisces. The Essenes were the ones who took Joseph, Mary, and the infant Jesus to Egypt. Jesus grew up under the care of the Essenes in Joseph’s absence, and eventually was taken to Egypt for training in the Egyptian esoteric traditions. It is also important to note that John the Baptist was also considered an Essene and, with Jesus, a pupil of Egyptian mystery religion (the *gnosis* of the Great White Brotherhood) under Simon Magus (see below).¹⁰ Later in life, though, Jesus and John became rivals, with the latter doubting the former’s claim to be Messiah.

From this point on, the scenario is familiar to *Da Vinci Code* readers. Jesus did not die on the cross, but lived out the rest of his life naturally after leaving Palestine with his wife / mistress, Mary Magdalene. Mary left Palestine after Jesus’ death, either with a child or pregnant with his child. Eventually, she carried on his ministry of perpetuating the ancient esoteric gnosis of Egypt. The Egyptian connection is important for Jesus bloodline mythology, to which we now turn.

⁷ Other New Age writers have different names for this city: Lemuria, Mu, Lumania.

⁸ Hanegraaff, 315.

⁹ Hanegraaff, 315-316.

¹⁰ While these ideas are humorous to us, they have had great influence in the popular culture and among Christians as well. I know of only one book written by scholars (not evangelicals) for a popular audience that specifically refutes the Jesus-John-Essene notions and the ready-made conspiracy theory that accompanies the “suppression” of these ideas: Otto Betz and Rainer Riesner, *Jesus, Qumran, and the Vatican: Clarifications* (Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994).

Gnosticism and the Jesus Bloodline: Lines of Evidence Outside Nag Hammadi and Nicean Politics

There are roughly a half dozen lines of circumstantial evidence (outside phrases in the Gnostic gospels and a contrived Constantinian Christology) put forth common to all views of the Jesus bloodline myth. I will touch on four today.

1) *The Merovingian Belief in Jewish Ancestry*

While the Secret Dossiers are shrouded in mystery, there is no doubt that the 5th–8th century AD Merovingian dynasty claimed to be descended from King David's house. The major scholarly work on this subject is the Yale University title, *The Last Descendant of Aeneas: The Hapsburgs and the Mythic Image of the Emperor*, by Marie Tanner.¹¹ Tanner's work is, frankly, a fascinating account of genealogy (links to David, Joseph, and Mary the Mother of Jesus), imperial iconography, and literary traditions. Like the biblical Nazirites, the Merovingian monarchs never cut their hair. The Merovingians also revered Mary Magdalene and John the Baptist and were considered esoteric practitioners.

Naturally, all Tanner's exemplary scholarship demonstrates is that this belief was pervasive in this dynasty and the Middle Ages, not that it corresponded to reality. Her own conclusion is that the belief was at least in part propaganda. However, two things are certain from Tanner's work (and that of others): (1) Some of the Merovingian "messianic identity" and its defense reflects a very old belief; i.e., it was not entirely contrived for political purposes at the time; (2) there existed a very old Magdalene / John the Baptist sect in the region of the center of Merovingian rule.

2) *The Evidence for a Magdalene / Black Madonna Cult in the South of France*

[\(slides / overhead\)](#)

As was the case with the Merovingian belief in the Davidic descent of their dynastic line, there is a good deal of evidence that Mary Magdalene was venerated as an apostle, preacher, and divinized figure. As Catholic New Testament scholar Raymond Brown has noted, the early church regarded Mary Magdalene as *apostola apostolorum* ("apostle of apostles") because it was she who was the first person to report the news of the resurrection.¹² The medieval church held an elevated view of Mary Magdalene for other reasons, though, all of which place her in southern France. This location resonates with the Merovingian presence.

A surviving legend¹³ tells the story that Mary Magdalene fled persecution after the crucifixion. Jacobus refers to Mary Magdalene in his account as *Illuminata* and *Illuminatrix* (the "Illuminated" and the "Illuminator")—two designations that occur much earlier in Gnostic gospel texts about Mary Magdalene. Mary went by sea with her siblings and others, namely St. Maximim (the first bishop in France, who was considered one of Jesus' 70/72 disciples), Joseph of Arimathea, and an Egyptian servant girl named Sarah. Other versions of the same tale not quite as old have divergences with these basic details. Some have a pregnant Mary making the journey; others have Mary with

¹¹ Marie Tanner, *The Last Descendant of Aeneas: The Hapsburgs and the Mythic Image of the Emperor* (Yale University Press, 1993).

¹² Raymond E. Brown, "Roles of Women in the Fourth Gospel," *Theological Studies* 36 (1975): 693; Dominican Vocations website, www.australia.op.org/voc/magdalene.php.

¹³ Written by Jacobus de Voragine, the Dominican Archbishop of Genoa.

an infant daughter named Sarah (allegedly by Jesus). The company disembarked at Saintes Marie de la Mer, whereupon Mary began a preaching ministry. Later Mary became a hermit and lived in a cave at Saint Baume, living off the land like John the Baptist, wearing animal skins.

Today Southern France bears witness to a long veneration of Mary Magdalene. There are many shrines and chapels dedicated to her. Most of the relics in such places are clearly bogus, but not all. The south of France is home to numerous enigmatic Black Madonnas, also called Black Virgins. Black Madonnas are figurines of a black woman with child. Of the scores of Black Madonnas across Europe, fully 65% are in France, and nearly all of those are in the area where Mary Magdalene allegedly preached.¹⁴ One would conclude that these figures are Mary the Mother of Jesus, but they are always connected with sites dedicated to Mary Magdalene. Most of the roughly 50 sites where Mary Magdalene was venerated that still have Black Madonnas were also associated with pagan goddess worship in Roman times.

The Priory of Sion insists that the Black Madonna is Isis, and declares that her name is *Notre Dame de Lumiere* ("Our Lady of the Lights"). The connection seems to fit the Virgin Mary in some respects, not Mary Magdalene. The Virgin with Child motif stands out as a congruence, and other Isis imagery has been appropriated by the Catholic Church for Mary the mother of Jesus.¹⁵ However, while Isis was worshipped as both Virgin *and* Mother, she was not considered a Virgin mother. For this reason (and others), Mary Magdalene is the better fit, as the Priory insists.

But what of the black skin? The Priory and other esoteric tradition contains the beliefs that either Mary Magdalene was from Egypt or met Jesus while he was in Egypt during the lost years. More interesting, however, is the Song of Solomon 3:1-4, in which the wife of the priest-king declares herself to be "black and comely" (KJV).¹⁶ This is not only the passage that is read on the feast day of Mary Magdalene in catholic churches, but some esotericists (and Marvin Pope) argue that the Song hearkens back to sacred marriage between the god and goddess (and thus high priest / priestess).

It is easy to see where this goes. The Black Madonna commemorates the "true" nature of the Church and the relationship of Jesus and Mary Magdalene: they were the latest "incarnation" of the sacred sexual union of Isis and Osiris. Jesus was therefore a teacher of ancient mystery religion preserved for time immemorial by Cayce's Atlantean descendants, the Egyptians. While this is deduced from only circumstantial evidence and may thus be a non-sequitur, the mystery of the Black Madonnas and their association with Mary Magdalene is factual and needs a coherent assessment that specifically addresses esoteric interpretations.

3) Evidence in Medieval and Renaissance art for a Counter-Christianity Focused on Mary and John the Baptist

By way of backdrop, recall that John the Baptist, Jesus, and Mary Magdalene were allegedly students of the Egyptian esoteric tradition. John and Jesus became rivals. Soon after John's death and the escape of Mary out of Palestine after the crucifixion

¹⁴ Ean Begg, *The Cult of the Black Virgin* (London: Arkana, 1985), gazetteer section.

¹⁵ For example, Mary was given titles of Isis ("Star of the Sea" and "Queen of Heaven"), and is depicted with familiar Isis iconography: standing on a crescent moon with stars around her head.

¹⁶ The reference to priest-king here reflects the status of the Israelite king as one who could offer sacrifice in given contexts.

(insert the old "Passover Plot" here), the followers of Jesus (especially Paul) departed from the esoteric Egyptian religion Jesus had preached. The figure of Jesus was overtaken and redefined by the official Church, but Mary remained true to "the faith" in France. Those who subsequently wanted the real gnosis of the original faith venerated John the Baptist and Mary Magdalene.

This line of thought, built as it is on the Black Madonna cult, is naturally quite bizarre to us. Nevertheless, these ideas have been suggested in scholarship outside evangelicalism and strict orthodoxy. There are basically "biblical" and "church-historical" lines of defense for them, at times found in the work of credentialed scholars.

In terms of biblical defense, New Testament scholar C.H. Dodd (partly to explain the odd baptism of Jesus by John) argued that the phrase in the gospels uttered by John, "*He that cometh after me is mightier than I*" (Matt. 3:11) should be translated, "*he that is a follower of me*" (i.e., that Jesus was really a disciple of John, and broke away). Irenaeus wrote in 170 AD that the Magnificat in fact came from Elizabeth's mouth after giving birth to John. She had been barren for many years, a situation that mirrors Hannah's in the Old Testament, and scholars have noticed that some of the wordings between Hannah's song and the Magnificat are very similar. In Acts 18:25 and 19:1ff., we read of certain disciples of John thought "The Way" meant *following in John's baptism*. "The Way" was a common designation for early Christianity, and may be an extraordinarily old hint at a "John as Messiah" belief.

Church history contains hints that such beliefs are very ancient. Some early church texts (*Clementine Recognitions* II:8; latter half of the 2nd century AD) state that some of John's disciples believed he was the Messiah. Origen comments that "Dositheus the Samaritan, after the time of Jesus, wished to persuade the Samaritans that he himself was the Messiah prophesied by Moses" (*Contra Celsum*, VI, ii). Origen classes him with Theodas, Judas of Galilee, and *John the Baptist* as people whom the Jews mistakenly held to be the Christ (*Hom. xxv in Lucam; Contra Celsum*, I, lvii).

Historically, the central figure in the John cult was Simon Magus according to early Christian writers. A major figure in Gnostic Christian texts and the early fathers, Simon makes one appearance in the canonical gospels (Acts 8:9-24), where he pretended conversion to learn how the disciples did their "tricks". A variety of early church fathers wrote of Simon Magus as a sort of antichrist—a pretender, a magician, who could duplicate many of Jesus' miracles, and who presented himself as the true Christ. Simon was a Gnostic, and is considered by some as the father of Gnostic Christianity. So great was his influence among early Christians that Hippolytus had to write a letter to several groups asserting plainly, "Simon is not the Christ."

According to early church sources, Simon Magus traveled with a woman named Helen, a former prostitute from Tyre. He referred to her as the First Thought, a reference to the Jewish figure of (personified) Wisdom, a divine figure. One Gnostic source also described Helen as "black as an Ethiopian," which reminds one of the Black Madonnas. The *Clementine Recognitions* report the following:

"It was at Alexandria that Simon perfected his studies in magic, being an adherent of John¹⁷ . . . through whom he came to deal with religious doctrines. John was the forerunner of Jesus . . . Of all John's disciples, Simon was the favorite, but on the

¹⁷ Many New Agers claim Simon taught John, as opposed to following him.

death of his master, he was absent in Alexandria, and so Dositheus, a co-disciple, was chosen head of the school.”

Those who believe that Jesus left a physical seed with Mary point to evidence for an alternate Christian faith in the West that esteems Mary and John—and frankly places John over Jesus in authority in contempt of the Roman Church. One example will suffice: Leonardo’s *Virgin of the Rocks*:

(slides / overhead)

The undisputed facts concerning this work are as follows. There are two versions, both painted by Leonardo. The original commissioning (April 1483 – the document still exists) was from the Confraternity of the Immaculate Conception. It called for *one* painting and specified the shape, dimensions, and theme of the work. The painting was to portray an event only found in non-canonical gospel material. During the flight to Egypt by Joseph, Mary, and baby Jesus, they took shelter in a cave and were met by the infant John the Baptist and his guardian, the archangel Uriel. The story was concocted to explain why the sinless Jesus would have allowed John to baptize him (he conferred that authority on John in the apocryphal story). Leonardo was charged with conveying this story.

The Confraternity wasn’t pleased with what they got (the left, Louvre version). In the Louvre version, there is no Joseph, the two children appear identical, the child with the angel (John in the story) is *giving* the blessing gesture to Jesus. There were other features that disturbed the commissioners. Mary’s left hand in the Louvre version has been interpreted as either a threatening gesture (a “claw”) or that it was painted as though holding a crown that is not there. Is Mary “threatening” John? Is she “assenting” to his superior status? The “angel” in the Louvre version is barely discernible as an angel (the wings are barely visible), and she is wearing red, the color associated with the “prostitute” Mary Magdalene. Note that in the Louvre version there is an arm and hand pointing toward the baby Jesus. The hand appears larger and more masculine than the angel’s left hand. Since every picture that Leonardo painted about John the Baptist includes the “pointing hand” as it is known by art historians (it is unclear what the symbolic gesture meant), this feature suggests the infant touched by the pointing “angel” (or Magdalene) is John. The subsequent version painted by Leonardo to satisfy the Confraternity “clarifies” who the characters are and eliminates the questionable features.

4) *The Mystery of Rennes Le Chataeu*¹⁸

What is known for certain:

Rennes Le Chataeu is a small village in southern France. The village parish church dates to the sixth century Visigoth era, and had been dedicated to the Magdalene in 1059. On June 1, 1885, Berenger Saunière arrived in the village to assume his post as parish priest. To his dismay, the small church was nearly in total ruin, as was the case with his parsonage home. There was little he could do to rectify the situation on his salary of 75 francs per month, which in those days put him barely above poverty.

¹⁸ Much of what follows is drawn from a larger outline of the Rennes mystery by Dr. Steve Mizrach of the University of South Florida. See <http://www.fiu.edu/~mizrachs/poseur3.html>, <http://www.fiu.edu/~mizrachs/priory-of-sion-more.html>.

By 1886 Saunière had garnered enough good will that the Countess of Chambord gave him enough money to begin renovations. During the renovation process, Saunière found three wooden tubes sealed tight with wax under the altar of the church that contained manuscripts. An adjacent statue of the demon Asmodeus guarded the location. Over the lintel was a bizarre inscription, "THIS PLACE IS TERRIBLE". The parchments were apparently written in 1781 by another priest of the parish, and were, on the face of it, Latin transcriptions of passages from the Gospels. (It is not known that one of these MS is a forgery, with subtle changes and encryption techniques, of Latin Codex Bezae). Encrypted in those Latin parchments were messages in French. The first was easily deciphered as:

"THIS TREASURE BELONGS TO DAGOBERT II KING AND TO SION AND HE IS THERE DEAD."

Dagobert II was the last king of the French Merovingian dynasty.

The discovery of the parchments and their meaning to Saunière had a profound effect on both his behavior and his fortunes. Almost immediately he began excavations within the church. He dug holes in the Aisle, Nave and the Transept. He also dug secretly in the cemetery of the church aided by his housekeeper, an activity which was in the middle of the night. In his personal diary he records for the date September 21, 1891 "Excavated a grave. Found a tomb." He also found an encrypted inscription on a tombstone. After deciphering the inscription, traveled to Carcassonne and talked to the deputy of the Bishop who resided there. Shortly thereafter Saunière began receiving vast sums of money to refurbish the church and also to build many structures in the area, the most noteworthy of which was his Tower of the Magdalene (Tour Magdala).

Saunière died in 1917. On his deathbed he whispered something into the ear of the priest hearing his final confession that caused the priest to withhold the last rites and deny him absolution. Saunière apparently left the secret of where he got his fabulous wealth to his housekeeper, Marie Dernaud, who promised to reveal it on her deathbed. Unfortunately she had a stroke that left her paralyzed and was unable to speak before her death in 1953.

What is Speculation

Speculation was rife on the source of the parish priest's money. Was it some lost treasure of the Templars or the Cathars in the area? Might it have been buried Visigothic gold? Saunière spent a fortune refurbishing the town and developed extravagant tastes for rare china and antiques. Speculation also abounds as to what Saunière was digging for on the property—and whose body he found. There has been a recent spate of books about the subject that, in the wake of *The Da Vinci Code*, are sure to be rediscovered.¹⁹ As far as I know, all the researchers who tackle the subject do not think Saunière found the body of Mary Magdalene, John, or Jesus since he kept digging. Many of the same researchers, however, think one of those figures was indeed what Saunière was searching for. Was he blackmailing the Church with some terrible secret?

¹⁹ For example, Lionel Fanthorpe, *Secrets of Rennes-le-Chateau* (Weiser, 1992); Henry Lincoln, *The Holy Place: Decoding the Mystery of Rennes-le-Chateau* (Random House, 1992); Christopher Knight and Robert Lomas, *The Second Messiah: The Templars, The Turing Shroud, and the Great Secret of Freemasonry* (Fair Winds Press, 2001); Richard Andrews and Paul Schellenberger, *The Tomb of God: The Body of Jesus and the Solution to a 2,000-Year-Old Mystery* (Little, Brown, and Company, 1996).

One can only wonder what was so shocking about Saunière's confession before his death that cost him final absolution.²⁰

Jesus as a Descendant of the Ascended Masters for a Technological Society

There are three views of the meaning of the Jesus Bloodline in those writers Dan Brown either references in his novel or models at least one character.

1) A Literal Bloodline Involving French Royalty ("Holy Blood" / Sang Real = Literal Offspring)

This view argues that Jesus and Mary Magdalene had children and that this bloodline and the truth of its existence have survived to this day through the efforts of the Priory of Sion despite the efforts of the organized Church. This is the view that is put forth in *The Da Vinci Code*. Adherents of this view believe that this living bloodline has rightful claim to the French throne and, through the labyrinth of relationships created by intermarriage with Britain and the absorption of the Merovingian line by the Germans on through the Hapsburgs, it might plausibly be argued that Jesus' blood heir has claim over a Pan-European kingdom. Writers such as Baigent, Lincoln, and Leigh espouse this view.

2) A Literal Bloodline Involving British Royalty ("Holy Blood" / Sang Real = Literal Offspring)

This view is identical to the above, though more emphasis is placed on how the bloodline runs through British royalty via the Pendragon (the historical Arthurian) line. This is the position of Sir Laurence Gardner, whose credentials were noted above. Gardner's views are detailed in his best-selling work, *Bloodline of the Holy Grail*. What I did not mention before was that Gardner is completely persuaded that human beings were genetically engineered / created by extraterrestrials (they are the plural *elohim* of Gen. 1:26). The full title of his non-fiction sequel says it all: *Genesis of the Grail Kings: The Explosive Story of Genetic Cloning and the Ancient Bloodline of Jesus*. In this book, Gardner borrows heavily from the views of ancient astronaut theorist (and pseudo-Sumerian scholar) Zecharia Sitchin and, to a lesser extent, Erich von Däniken.²¹ This would again be laughable were it not for the fact that, together, Sitchin and von Däniken have sold roughly 70 million books in over 20 languages since the mid-1970s, and some heavyweight scientists have also espoused ETs as our creators as an alternative to random Darwinism and theism.²² Gardner's view overlaps to some extent with that below.

²⁰ There are many more tantalizing things about Rennes-le-Château and the story of Saunière. One researcher (David Wood) has suggested that the "treasure" of Rennes-le-Chateau might consist of a network of ley-lines in the area forming a massive geomantic cosmic diagram—in essence a "temple" outlined over the entire landscape. In fact, if one marks the major towns and sacred sites surrounding Rennes and connects the dots, the diagram's nodes actually form the Kabbalistic Tree of Life. This is significant because the Kabbalah is thought to be, at its oldest, only two millennia old, whereas some of the "site-nodes" in the proposed diagram date to the megalithic era.

²¹ The use and abuse of ancient Near Eastern literature and the Hebrew Bible by ufology has been my own area of concentration in esoteric studies since my PhD is in Hebrew Bible and Semitic languages. See my website www.sitchiniswrong.com.

²² I speak here primarily of the recently deceased Dr. Francis Crick, co-discoverer of the structure of DNA and Nobel laureate. Crick did not believe evolution could explain the complexity of human DNA. Crick's defense of directed panspermia was published in the journal *Icarus* and in the book, *Life Itself: Its Origin and Nature* (Simon and Schuster, 1981; with co-author, chemist Leslie Orgel). The abstract from the journal article reads in part: "It now seems unlikely that extraterrestrial living organisms could have reached the earth either as spores driven by the radiation pressure from another star or as living organisms imbedded in a meteorite. As an alternative to these

3) A "Spiritual" Bloodline Involving No Royal Claims, but Literal Offspring Possible ("Holy Blood" / Sang Real = Offspring Intended to Carry On the Isis-Osiris Religion Underlying "True" Christianity)

This is the view of Picknett and Prince, who believe that the Priory of Sion was essentially a "Johannite" organization that venerated John the Baptist as a superior figure to Jesus. This organization, which reflects what Jesus really taught, has its roots in Egyptian mystery religion. As the high priest and priestess of the Isis-Osiris religion, Jesus and Mary would have had ritual sex in celebration of the original god-goddess sacred marriage that produced all that is. This may have produced children, who would have carried on a high priest or priestess role.

Though Dan Brown does not favor this view, he does weave Picknett and Prince's book title into his text. However, he doesn't tell readers about their book detailing where they think Egyptian mystery religion, its ascended masters, and Gnostic adepts like Jesus came from. That information is detailed in *The Stargate Conspiracy: The Truth About Extraterrestrial Life and the Mysteries of Ancient Egypt*.²³

In more recent years, it has become common to defend the association of Jesus with an extraterrestrial brotherhood by means of certain works of late medieval and Renaissance art.

[\(slides / overheads\)](#)

Conclusion

If this brief foray into Jesus bloodline mythology and esoteric occultism leaves you a bit nonplussed, then that's a good thing as far as my goal today. Indeed, the material is bizarre and covers a vast range of disciplines besides our familiar field of biblical studies, among them art history, esotericism, occult philosophy, hermetic symbology, Gnosticism, and medieval literature. It's true that the existence of the Priory of Sion cannot be firmly established prior to 1956; it's also true that many facets of the Jesus bloodline mythology are much older, reaching back into the first century AD. One may rightly say that circumstantial evidence is lifeless without context, and thus open to criticism and interpretation. When it comes right down to it, we can laugh or we can get involved, using our providentially-acquired skills and credentials to serve those whose calling is not scholarship. Smart people can be wrong or misguided, but if we leave stones of data unturned in our effort to refute popular myths, the impression is still created that it's all just a matter of opinion—or faith.

nineteenth-century mechanisms, we have considered Directed Panspermia, the theory that organisms were deliberately transmitted to the earth by intelligent beings on another planet. We conclude that it is possible that life reached the earth in this way, but that the scientific evidence is inadequate at the present time to say anything about the probability. We draw attention to the kinds of evidence that might throw additional light on the topic."

According to Hugh Ross (personal communication), this view has seen slow but steady growth at the Origin of Life Conference each of the last several years, due primarily to (1) the extreme unlikelihood of undirected panspermia and (2) the fear of theism or intelligent design as the only other option.

²³ Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince, *The Stargate Conspiracy: The Truth About Extraterrestrial Life and the Mysteries of Ancient Egypt* (Berkeley Publishing Group, 2001).

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Appendix: A Few More Notes on the Western Roots of the New Age

Cosmological Overview: Links Between New Age Religion and The Da Vinci Code (Expanded from the Paper as Read)

As noted scholar of New Age religion Wouter Hanegraaff notes, 'creation stories' are common in New Age sources.²⁴ One of the most influential is Edgar Cayce's volume, *There is a River*, in which the New Age prophet describes how the "original sea of spirit" (which was God) "desired companionship [and] projected from Himself the cosmos and souls." Similarly, the New Age writer Ramtha contends that the original "burst of love" in God gave birth to a multiplicity of souls, or gods: "For each particum of light, born of the first contemplated thought, became an individual, a god, a son. Thus all became what is termed light-beings at the birthing of creation."²⁵ These light-beings, sharing the creative power of God, proceeded to create the world.

What happened next in New Age cosmology was not of a creation of humanity but a "descent of man." This descent was begun by pure souls becoming trapped in "flesh prisons." Cayce refers to these beings as "hybrids, neither human nor animal." These imprisoned souls were termed "sons of man" by Cayce. Subsequently, wiser souls came to their rescue by selecting a certain species of ape and "preparing" it as a vehicle for incarnation. Once the imprisoned souls "switched vessels," genuine human beings were the result. Cayce teaches that the new humans continued to evolve to a technologically advanced and spiritually enlightened state. They are considered enlightened in that they knew the truth of how humanity came to be, the divine substance of humanity, and were masters of a body of sophisticated knowledge in the areas of science, building, alchemy, and magic. As humanity lost this knowledge, it "descended" in its enlightenment.

Cayce's account has several familiar New Age features—features that are common to Gnosticism. First, it is clear that soul is superior to flesh—that flesh is viewed as degeneration. Second, humans are divine in that their souls derive from those pure souls who derive from God's essence. Third, the creation of the world is one step removed from God himself. Fourth, the notion of a special gnosis is clear. These ideas are of course very Western in that there is a strong resemblance to Gnosticism.

Moving on in the descent of man, the greatest of the enlightened humans lived in Atlantis.²⁶ The pure souls sent to liberate the pathetic hybrids suffered a rebellion in their ranks. Life on earth became a struggle between these rebels and the remaining pure souls who continued their mission to liberate the hybrids. The leader of these pure souls was the "Christ soul," but eventually the rebels overwhelmed the earth. The earth underwent a cataclysm that entirely destroyed the Atlantean continent in three stages (50,000 BC, 28,000 BC, and 10,000 BC). Because of the long periods between these destructions, the enlightened masters (the Atlanteans) were able to emigrate all over the earth in small numbers. Cayce refers to these small groups as the "Great White Brotherhood." Wherever they emigrated, they took their knowledge and gradually dispensed it to successors. Not

²⁴ Hanegraaff, 305. Wouter Hanegraaff is the director of one of the few graduate programs for western esoteric tradition, the University of Amsterdam's MA in Mysticism and Western Esotericism (<http://www.studeren.uva.nl/ma-myst/>).

²⁵ (Anonymous), *Ramtha*, Steve Lee Weinberg (ed.), Eastsound, 1986. As quoted in Hanegraaff, 305-306.

²⁶ Other New Age writers have different names for this city: Lemuria, Mu, Lumania.

surprisingly, this esoteric gnosis found its greatest “post-Atlantean” expression in ancient Egypt.

While it is fairly common in New Age sources to find the notion that the eighteen “lost” years of Jesus were spent in India or Tibet,²⁷ since the fifties it has become increasingly common to link this time with the Essene settlement at Qumran. It is widely believed among New Age researchers and writers that the Essenes are the link between Jesus and Western esoteric traditions.²⁸ The Essenes are considered descendants of the Cayce’s Great White Brotherhood. They believed in reincarnation (though they referred to it as “resurrection”), practiced astrology and numerology, and were fixated on the imminent incarnation of the “Christ soul” at the beginning of the astrological Age of Pisces. The Essenes were the ones who took Joseph, Mary, and the infant Jesus to Egypt. Jesus grew up under the care of the Essenes in Joseph’s absence, and eventually was taken to Egypt for training in the Egyptian esoteric traditions. It is also important to note that John the Baptist was also considered an Essene and, with Jesus, a pupil of Egyptian mystery religion (the *gnosis* of the Great White Brotherhood) under Simon Magus (see below).²⁹ Later in life, though, Jesus and John became rivals, with the latter doubting the former’s claim to be Messiah.

From this point on, the scenario is familiar to *Da Vinci Code* readers. Jesus did not die on the cross, but lived out the rest of his life naturally after leaving Palestine with his wife / mistress, Mary Magdalene. Mary left Palestine after Jesus’ death, either with a child or pregnant with his child. Eventually, she carried on his ministry of perpetuating the ancient esoteric gnosis of Egypt. The Egyptian connection is important for Jesus’ bloodline mythology, to which we now turn.

Western Roots of the New Age Worldview

Demonstrating the western roots of the New Age movement is not difficult. One needs only a mild acquaintance with western esotericism to see the connections. In what follows, I will distill the lengthy discussion of two pre-eminent authorities in the field of esoteric studies and New Age religion, Wouter Hanegraaff and Antoine Faivre.³⁰

Esotericism

As Antoine Faivre points out, “esotericism” is often taken to refer to a specific body of secret knowledge, a “discipline of the arcane,” or a type of knowledge gained through initiation. These designations are a bit misguided in that the first implies the holders of such knowledge did not want to share their knowledge, while the second makes it seem that some sort of ritual was necessary to gaining such knowledge. Both are true but variable depending on the group, writers, and time periods; that is, these are not consistent definitions and so they cannot be taken as accurate. There are many examples where esoteric teachers and writers published their knowledge with the very intention that it be dispersed, and in many cases, not initiation was necessary to learn the arcane knowledge—

²⁷ Hanegraaff, 315.

²⁸ Hanegraaff, 315-316.

²⁹ While these ideas are humorous to us, they have had great influence in the popular culture and among Christians as well. I know of only one book written by scholars (not evangelicals) for a popular audience that specifically refutes the Jesus-John-Essene notions and the ready-made conspiracy theory that accompanies the “suppression” of these ideas: Otto Betz and Rainer Riesner, *Jesus, Qumran, and the Vatican: Clarifications* (Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994).

³⁰ Hanegraaff, 5-47.

one just had to be familiar with the methods of understanding words, codes, and symbols. It is better, says Faivre, to understand esotericism as a form of thought or a way of approaching revelation in nature and divine communication (general and special revelation in our parlance). As such, esotericism was not (and should not be considered) fundamentally opposed to western Christian doctrine, but that is not all that needs to be said. If esotericism is a way of thinking about truth, what body of material does the approach target and from whence does it gain its legitimacy?

In ancient times, there was no division between the physical and the divine worlds, as though they should (or could) be studied separately. Metaphysical issues and questions were not divorced from cosmology. Every part of the natural world reflected the divine, and so all its features need to be deciphered to reveal the divine. The cosmos and the world were animate. Thinkers in classical Greece and Rome, the early and medieval church, and Judaism of late antiquity espoused this approach to revelation. Within and without early Christianity and Judaism, this basic worldview gave birth to different approaches or "hermeneutics" for understanding God, his natural world, divine intermediaries (good and evil), and humanity's relationship to all the former. Faivre isolates six components of what I will call the "esoteric hermeneutic." I mention three of them (for sake of time) as illustrative of the connections between western esoteric thought and very obvious components of New Age thought.

1. Correspondences: This refers to the idea that "symbolic and real correspondences are said to exist among all parts of the universe, both seen and unseen ("As above, so below"). These correspondences are considered

" . . . more or less veiled at first sight . . . [but are] intended to be read and deciphered. The entire universe is a huge theatre of mirrors, an ensemble of hieroglyphs to be decoded. Everything is a sign; everything conceals and exudes mystery; every object hides a secret. The principles of non-contradiction and excluded middle of linear causality are replaced here by those of the included middle and synchronicity. We can distinguish two kinds of correspondences. First, those that exist in nature, seen and unseen (e.g., between the seven metals and the seven planets, between the planets and parts of the human body or character . . . correspondence between the natural world and the invisible departments of the celestial and supercelestial world. Next there are correspondences between Nature (the cosmos) or even history and revealed texts . . . According to this form of inspired concordism, Scripture (the Bible for example) and Nature are in harmony, the knowledge of one aiding in the knowledge of the other."

It should be obvious that the above provided fertile ground for astrology (forms of which were practiced by both orthodox rabbis and in the early Church without fear of condemnation),³¹ Kabbalah (Jewish and Christian), and alchemy (again, practiced by "mainstream" Jews and Christians).³² The New Agers enamored with postmodernism and quantum theory (cf. non-locality and "vibrational reality") would also find resonance in this "old age" way of approaching God and the creation. In fact, in an unexpected way, the new quantum world could give credence to the notion that the ancients possessed advanced knowledge,

³¹ Betty Jo Teeter Dobbs, *The Janus Face of Genius: The Role of Alchemy in Newton's Thought* (bridge, 2002).

³² Kocku von Stuckrad, "Jewish and Christian Astrology in Late Antiquity-A New Approach," *Numen* XLVII:1 (2000): 1-40; James Charlesworth, "Jewish Astrology in the Talmud, Pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and Early Palestinian Synagogues," *HTR* 70:3-4 (1977): 183-199.

communicated to us in the language of symbol, where words meant far more than their “physical” referent. This has ramifications for how we could defend the grammatical-historical approach to hermeneutics, which is one basis for our dispute with Thiering and proponents of the Jesus bloodline myth who take great liberty with the text.

2. Living Nature: This refers to the belief that “the cosmos is complex, plural, hierarchical.”

“Accordingly, Nature occupies an essential place . . . [that] must be read like a book. The word *magia*, so important in the Renaissance imaginary, truly calls forth that idea of a Nature seen, known, and experienced as essentially alive in all its parts, often inhabited and traversed by a light or a hidden fire circulating through it. Thus understood, “magic” is simultaneously the knowledge of the networks of sympathies or antipathies that link the things of nature and the concrete operation of these bodies of knowledge. (Let us think of the astral powers that the *magus* brings to the talismans, Orphism in all its forms . . . the use of stones, metals, plants favorable to re-establishing the physical or psychological harmony that had been disturbed) . . . More than [these] practices, properly speaking, it is knowledge—in the sense of gnosis—which seems to contribute to establishing the notion of the esoteric attitude . . . To this is often added, fraught with implications for alchemy and for a *Naturphilosophie* of esoteric character, an interpretation of a teaching of Saint Paul (Rom. 8:12-22), according to which suffering Nature, subjected to exile and vanity, also waits to take part in salvation.”

For those in the field of Old Testament familiar with the overwhelming consistency between the Hebrew conception of the world and her ancient Near Eastern neighbors, the belief in this animate world is familiar—and biblical.³³ This worldview is mirrored in the New Testament (Col. 2:8; 2:20, □□□□□□□□),³⁴ early Judaism, and some early church fathers (notably Origen).³⁵ My purpose here is not to raise the thorny problem (to some) this raises for a literal cosmology in Genesis and inerrancy. Rather, it is to point out that certain New Age (and Wiccan) beliefs and practices have strong western roots. The belief in the power of crystals and sympathetic magic come immediately to mind.

3. Imagination and Mediations: This component concerns the use of rituals, symbolic images, and intermediary spirits to tap into the knowledge of the intimate intersection of Nature and the Divine.

“The idea of correspondence presumes already a form of imagination inclined to reveal and use mediation of all kinds . . . [Hence] the importance of angelology in this context, but likewise of the ‘transmitter’ in the sense of ‘initiator’ or ‘guru’ . . . It is the imagination that allows the use of these intermediaries, symbols, and images to develop gnosis, to penetrate the hieroglyphs of Nature, to put the theory of correspondences into active practice and to uncover, to see, and to know the mediating entities between nature and the divine world.”

³³ “Stars” in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Eerdmans, 1999).

³⁴ “Stoicheia” in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Eerdmans, 1999).

³⁵ Alan Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars: The History of an Idea* (Oxford, 1994).

Faivre goes on to note that the emphasis in such a perspective “the accent is on vision and certainty, rather than on belief and faith.” New Age ideas about being guided by “intuition” and one’s “inner Muse” come to mind here, not to mention the typical accounts of spirit guides, and even channeling. The latter in particular has firm western roots, as anyone familiar with Merkabah mysticism would attest. These encounters provide insight and information into what (and who) makes the cosmos at all its levels tick. Research by the recently deceased Dr. John Mack of Harvard into alien abduction accounts also finds a home here, especially if one agrees with Mack that such experiences are real and a form of modern shamanistic initiation.³⁶

To summarize in current parlance, the well-known New Age tenets of the living creation (Gaia), infusion of every object with “spirit,” spirit guides, and channeling have ancient western roots, born out of presuppositions about the relationship of general and special revelation. At this point it is instructive to see how New Age writers make these ideas cohere in their own cosmology. A brief overview in this area will reinforce the western roots of the New Age and provide a bridge to understanding why contemporary writers (and readers) are so interested in establishing a Jesus bloodline.

³⁶ John Mack, *Passport to the Cosmos* (Crown, 1999).

Black Madonnas







Louvre's (heretical) version



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London's National Gallery version



This image is by Flemish artist Aert de Gelder and is entitled "The Baptism of Christ." It was painted in 1710 and hangs in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



This painting is called "The Madonna with Saint Giovannino". It was painted in the 15th century. The Palazzo Vecchio lists the artist as unknown, although it is attributed to the Lippi school.



More...

