

Da Vinci Code**21 May 2006**

“So Jesus had this baby right, and the Pope covered it up by burning the real Bible and replacing it with a made up Bible.”

“How do they know that then?”

“It’s Leonardo da Vinci innit? He put it all in code in the Mona Lisa.”

So the Church Times reviewer Hugh Rayment-Pickard begins his review of the film of the moment. Apparently this was a conversation he overheard in a pub. Well, it seems that Dan Brown’s marketing machine must rate as the most successful ever. His book, “The da Vinci code” has sold 40 million copies and now the film looks set to coin it as well.

So what should we be doing with “The da Vinci Code”? Or what should we permit it to do to us. It makes some pretty damning accusations against the Christian Church, but are they worth bothering about?

Well first the story. It’s rooted in the ancient quest for the mythical Holy Grail. Legend has it that Joseph of Arimathea hid the cup used at the Last Supper somewhere in England and ever since the Middle Ages it’s been believed to have magical qualities and the search for it has been the stuff of a million stories. Well this story begins with the murder of the curator of The Louvre in Paris and as the story unfolds we discover that the murder victim was the master of a secret society called the Priory of Sion. Leonardo da Vinci was one of his predecessors as master. The purpose of the existence of the Priory of Sion was to guard a secret so profound and so powerful that, if known, it would rock the entire foundation of the Christian faith. What they guard is a series of documents which prove beyond doubt that Jesus married Mary Magdalene; that they had a child and that that child’s descendants are alive and well in the world today. It turns out of course that one of the leading characters on the book is descended from Jesus and Mary Magdalene. The point is that she is the Holy Grail; she is the place where the blood of Christ is to be found in the world. She is the one who carries the blood line of Jesus.

The documents which supposedly prove this to be the case include an ancient manuscript called “The Gospel of Mary Magdalene.” Apparently in this Gospel, Mary appears as Jesus’ favourite and she’s the one to whom Jesus gave responsibility for leading the mission of the Church. The thesis of the book is that the Church has suppressed this over the years because it was at odds with the patriarchal superiority that the Church came to embrace with Peter and a group of male Apostles as her leaders. The suggestion is that the Gospels in the New Testament were simply those favoured by the powerful men and that the decision to preserve them was nothing more or less than the result of a political battle, after which, the losers, women, were suppressed. The story goes on to suggest that over the centuries the Church has been so ruthless in its suppression of the rejected version of the story that it would stop at nothing to prevent the truth coming out. The murder with which the book begins was carried out by a monastic hit man on the orders of the Church organisation Opus Dei.

Well, the first thing to say is that the book is a good read. Personally I enjoyed it and found it to be a good thriller, but it’s important to remember that it’s fiction. The author talks about truth from time to time but it is a novel and the theological and historical basis for it doesn’t