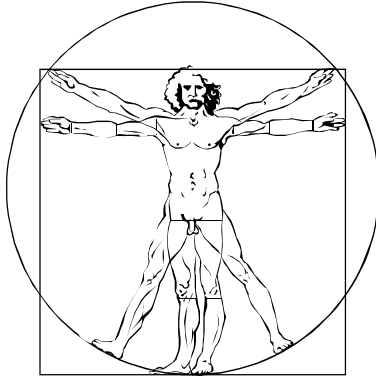


Plumbing the Code: Mary, Da Vinci, and Me

Jesse G. Jennings



Here is a story you might not have heard.

Jesus of Nazareth was married, despite what the Gospels say or don't say, to the woman known to us as Mary Magdalene, who may have been the same person as Mary of Bethany.

Their marriage was both affectionate (the Gospel of Philip, a Gnostic text from the Nag Hammadi trove, tells us, "He often kissed her on the mouth.") and dynastic, a joining of the houses of David and Benjamin. At the time of the crucifixion, Mary was pregnant. With some others, she fled (mainly from Peter, whom she feared) by boat to southern Gaul, where she gave birth to a daughter, Sarah. Thus the royal bloodline of Israel was continued, on through the Merovingian kings, and when the Carolingians succeeded them, the family went underground. In 1188 a group was founded calling itself the Priory of Sion, sworn to a secret perpetuation of the family that continues *right up to this day*, for the alleged purpose of establishing a global hereditary monarchy reaching back in an unbroken line to the ancient Hebrews. Meanwhile, the Jesus-Mary marriage was hushed up by the Roman Church – as it would have cast doubts on the Gospels' authority, and Jesus' very divinity – and also because, a parallel story line goes, while Jesus was heir to Israel's secular throne, the real Christ or "anointed one" was John the Baptist, for whom Jesus more or less fronted. Further, by rendering Mary as a redeemed prostitute, rather than as a strong, independent person who substantially contributed to the work of Jesus and the other disciples, as well as by suppressing the information that until Christianity's fifth century there were women priests and bishops aplenty, the whole essential role of women in getting the Church off the ground was dug under, save for the character of a passive, obedient mother of Jesus. What remains is an exclusively patriarchal system that has been spiritually and at times physically injurious to women ever since; has retarded the healthy, balanced advancement of Western civilization; and is just one enormous lie.

There is more.

The Holy Grail is neither a chalice nor a stone, as was previously guessed, but that bloodline of Jesus, the chalice being representative of a womb. The Knights Templar were founded as the armed wing of the Priory of Sion, but then later broke away and went on to fabulous wealth and power, only to fall dramatically into virtual extinction on the sudden orders of a king who owed them money and a pope who caved in to the king. But the Priory lived on, having as its twelfth Grand Master Leonardo da Vinci, who encoded some of his artwork with clues to John the Baptist's spiritual preëminence, the secret marriage, its issue, and the implications. In Scotland, where remnants of the Templars had appeared out of nowhere in 1314 to back Robert the Bruce in the Battle of Bannockburn, Rosslyn Chapel was erected in the 15th century by the mysterious St. Clair family as a small-scale Solomon's Temple, which the original Templars had actually been deputized to excavate for some mysterious thing, and who may have found whatever it was and brought it back, placing it in Rosslyn's crypts, which another group is presently trying to get permission to search using sonar. And at a village church in southern France, near the former lands of the Cathars (a heretical sect connected to worship of Mary Magdalene, who practiced sexual equality, and who were eradicated by forerunners to the Inquisition), there was discovered in the 19th century a *câche* of written material which made the local priest immediately rich, and which led in the 1970s to all of this leaking – or being leaked – to the public.

Appalled? Offended? Intrigued? Dropping everything to fly to Europe to check all this out for yourself? These are some of the reactions experienced by the approximately five million people

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who have read Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*. It's still number one on the *New York Times*' fiction bestseller list – 72 weeks so far, and with no sign of slowing down. There are two reasons for its popularity. One is that it's a hugely exciting mystery-thriller; critic Janet Maslin's second review paragraph was just: "Wow." The other is that threaded throughout all the excitement is a mix of New Age lore, strange science, and conspiracy-theory grist...and, for many, a whole new way of thinking about our Western religious heritage. *The Da Vinci Code* is a novel, though it isn't being treated as such by the religious press, because while fiction it suggests a lot of things as being true, such as the story I've very briefly recounted, and a lot of other things.

J. R. R. Tolkien never said that there was once really a ring and a community of Hobbits in pursuit of it, though he presented a compelling enough pedigree for his characters, right down to the etymology of their various languages, that the reader can come away sure that must have been. J. K. Rowling has never intimated an actual Hogwarts, though by her descriptions one can be bound into the spell of it. On a page entitled "Fact:", a prologue to his Prologue, Dan Brown writes that the Priory of Sion exists, as does the Catholic strict-observance group Opus Dei, and a handful of what is known about them. Then he says, "All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate." He never declares that his history is accurate. But enough others have.

Last summer I read *The Da Vinci Code* and saw in it a fictionalized rendering of the material in *Holy Blood*, *Holy Grail*, *The Bloodline of the Holy Grail*, *The Messianic Legacy*, *Genesis of the Grail Kings*, *King Jesus*, *The Woman With the Alabaster Jar*, *The Church of Mary Magdalene*, and about a hundred other titles in a similar vein with which I had previously lined the walls of my house. Each of these others came into print without triggering the vast flood of rejoinders from mainstream Christianity that *The Da Vinci Code* has stimulated. As one Dan fan puts it, "The secret is out," and evidently there is real concern within Christianity for the ripple effect these alleged revelations may have. You can probably see Da Vinci referenced more on the marquees of Southern churches than in all of Italy. Discussion circles, parental support groups, debunkers and exegetes abound.

What would it mean if the above story, or even a portion of it, were proved true? The historical basis of modern Christianity would take a hit. On the other hand, Christian faith would survive, as it has through its two millennia punctuated by intolerance, oppression and fear. There are millions of committed Christians despite crusades, inquisitions and "witch" burnings. Certain respected Christian academics have even gone so far as to suggest that the resurrection never happened, being instead a dramatic performance, an agricultural rite ("bread from the death of wheat"), or done in earnest but survived by Jesus, who then lived out his life in seclusion. While some in these scholars' faith communities have anathematized for saying this, others have just shrugged and replied that Christ's love is still Christ's love, and that miraculous healings and manifestations are still achieved through prayer. What is vital about one's faith is not what was done, but what *may* be done.

The amateur historian in me waits to see what turns up beneath Rosslyn, be it stunning artifacts or just old plumbing, and more things will no doubt fall out of the trees over time, ranging from the spectacularly his-

tory-altering to the merely odd. They have not yet completed translating the Dead Sea Scrolls. Atlantis may have wound up in the Andes, and why *did* they etch those Nazca Lines? But as a Religious Scientist, none of my interest in Grail lore, Enoch, Druids, Black Madonnas (Isis?), and why Gypsies are traditionally connected with Egypt (hence the name), has any real emotional agenda – until I discover some allegorical reference in all of it to what my own spiritual life may entail, here and now. That Mary Magdalene had a vastly more important position – dynastic queen – than convention has given her would not rock my world. Neither, for that matter, would any new revelations about our founder Ernest Holmes, whom we read and admire but do not worship. Worlds of information are there if one has the time and the taste for it all, and every bit of it is subordinate to the inner wisdom each of us accesses every time we think and feel. There are many strata to dig through, and we embark on the grandest possible Quest, and do ourselves and our world the most good, when we take such stories as this and break them down to the *personal*. At the end of the day, each one of us goes home to ourselves and our interior world, from which we create our very experience of all reality. This, to me, is the ultimate message of Jesus, the Grail, holy places, long-held secrets, and the Divine Feminine: all escort us back to the thinking, feeling self.

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If Brown's book can be said to make one emphatic point amid its profusion of data and theory, it's about both the enduring vitality and chronic underrepresentation of the Divine Feminine. At the dawn of recorded history, some 37,000 years ago, people revered the Goddess. (It interesting that today you seldom hear anyone speak of "the" God. Rather, It is just "God." The definite article suggests one item among others. Remove it, and the item may become all things at once.) So then, many years ago, the people worshipped Goddess. Sometimes there were secondary support goddesses, representing aspects of Goddess, and at some point Goddess had a figurative consort, a God. And at some later point, this masculine aspect of Deity became the dominant. Many are saying this was not a good thing, that basically we gave up a nurturing Deity for a punishing one.

This is where allegory comes into play. For our world to stampede away from reverence to male God, into allegiance to female Goddess, would be just another rearrangement of doctrinal furniture. For us to acknowledge that our culture has disparaged the feminine aspect of all life, and specifically women, is a worthy step, and still not as far as we could go. The Divine

Feminine symbolizes nurturance, reproduction and regeneration (as in the cycle of the seasons), and perhaps most of all the immense power of emotion, the subconscious storehouse of unlimited energy. Ancient custom has God in the sky, Goddess on earth. The Divine Masculine is the transcendent, the Feminine the immanent. Ernest Holmes tells us, "We look too far away for reality." For millennia our species has sought return to a Garden, constructing elaborate theologies for how this is to be accomplished. It's simpler than we have made it. The Garden, wherein is found our redemption from isolation and insignificance, is right where we are, within our own natures, *precisely where we left it*: in the emotional realm, that demands profound courage to explore.

The late Ira Progoff wrote a beautiful guided meditation, "The Well and the Cathedral," in which he presents the picture of an underground stream capable of reaching everywhere. Periodically a person will sense the reality of this stream and dig a well into it, travel down that well to infinite wisdom, and return to the world transformed. Others will admire this transformed person, place a stone to mark the spot where he or she emerged, and these stones will eventually assemble themselves into a cathedral. Then thousands will go sit in the cathedral, oblivious to the well beneath them and the stream beneath that, which any one of them could go explore, and thus be transformed, as was the hero they all so admire. P. D. Ouspensky opens up the symbolism further: most cathedrals typically mimic the human form. The altar sits, from a bird's eye view, about where the brain would be. Around the crown of the head, chakra-like, are small chapels dedicated to various saints and their particular strengths or areas of influence. Over the altar hangs a red communion lamp, likened to the pineal gland, or "third eye." A labyrinth may be set in the center of the floor, further emphasizing an inward journey.

Every last bit of myth and magic, from Temple Mount to Camelot, is about you and me. The self that worships, unknowingly worships the Self, the Divine Within. That treasure beneath us, "down" in the subjective field of awareness, though covered by an exoteric façade, is very real.

It is the most real thing there is.



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