

Understanding the New Age Movement



by Stratford Caldecott



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INTRODUCTION

The New Age movement is spoken of less today than, say, twenty years ago, but that is only because the ideas and practices of the movement have seeped into the mainstream and have become commonplace. Surveys of the population in 1990 showed that around one in three people in Britain believed in reincarnation (up from 18% in 1968). The proportion was even higher among Catholics! More recently, the enormous success of *The Da Vinci Code*, which is based partly on New Age ideas, shows that the movement is far from over, and that its influence continues to grow.

In fact the temptations experienced by Catholics in this regard are one aspect of a wider cultural phenomenon. The Catholic Church is still trying to understand and respond to the cultural crisis that engulfed her after the 1960s. (Another aspect of that crisis concerned the liturgy. An attempt to simplify and make accessible the formal liturgy of the Church led to the elimination of a sense of mystery and wonder from the Mass. Together with a decreased emphasis on the mystical dimension of the liturgy, the result was to make Catholicism less attractive not only to the old,

who were often deeply attached to the old style of liturgy, but also to many of the young for whom the revision had been designed.)

An important document entitled *Jesus Christ the Bearer of the Water of Life: A Christian Reflection on the "New Age"*, published by the Pontifical Councils for Culture and for Inter-religious Dialogue in 2003, points out that the New Age movement is far from "new". Nor is it a "religious movement" in any very coherent sense. It is, rather, an eclectic mix of influences and ideas from Asia, from pagan religions and ancient Gnosticism (see below). The only new elements come from a particular modern spin that is placed on these ideas. The New Age draws on Darwinian evolution, depth psychology, quantum mechanics, feminism and ecology, to construct a spirituality packaged in a way that suits our own historical period. Disillusionment with political institutions and even with conventional allopathic medicine contributes to its appeal. And, as the document admits, Christian communities themselves are largely to blame, for paying inadequate attention to the "spiritual dimension and its integration with the whole of life...the link between human beings and the rest of creation, the desire for personal and social transformation" and so forth. "People feel the Christian religion no longer offers them – or perhaps never gave them – something they really need."

The document therefore tries to be fair. “The existence and fervour of *New Age* thinking and practice,” it writes, “bear witness to the unquenchable longing of the human spirit for transcendence and religious meaning, which is not only a contemporary cultural phenomenon, but was evident in the ancient world, both Christian and pagan.” Yet immediately it goes on to add that the results of this fervour are almost always at loggerheads with orthodox Christianity (“a new way of practising Gnosticism”), and have seriously undermined authentic Christian spirituality by their influence within retreat houses and religious communities. The Enneagram (a system of personality classification) is singled out for mention in this connection.

While the New Age seeks the transformation of the self, it often denies the transcendence of God, which alone could make a real transformation possible for human beings. Along with the transcendence of God goes the “otherness” of religion, the fact that it addresses us from beyond ourselves and can tell us things we do not know, and may feel more comfortable not knowing. The Vatican document contrasts the appeal of Aquarius the Water Carrier with the appeal of the One who offers us the “water of life”. “If the Church is not to be accused of being deaf to people’s longings, her members need to do two things: to root themselves ever more firmly in the

fundamentals of their faith, and to understand the often-silent cry in people's hearts, which leads them elsewhere if they are not satisfied by the Church. There is also a call in all of this to come closer to Jesus Christ and to be ready to follow Him, since He is the real way to happiness, the truth about God and the fullness of life for every man and woman who is prepared to respond to his love."

The New Age is a growing challenge to Christians, not because of its belief-structure, which offers very little that is coherent enough to challenge anyone, but because of the way it expresses the legitimate frustration many feel in the face of materialism, individualism and reductionism. While relativism (the idea that no truth is absolute) might seem to be a typical New Age assumption, many New Agers nevertheless cling to the idea of "secret teachings" that offer certainties beyond the reach of ordinary religion and science.

How should Catholics, and orthodox Christians generally, respond? An adequate answer is threefold. We need (1) to study and understand the appeal of the New Age, (2) glean the elements of truth that attract people to it, and (3) unfold the mystical and spiritual teachings of our own tradition. The Catholic Truth Society has begun to undertake the third part of this task with its series, "Deeper Christianity". The present booklet aims to assist in the first two parts – understanding the New Age phenomenon, and the challenge it represents.

WHAT IS THE NEW AGE?

In order to understand the modern New Age movement, and how it differs from Christianity, we have to start at the beginning. Christianity is a religion founded by a man who was born without a human father, who was crucified by the Romans and came back to life. He came back not just to life of the old sort, but to a radically *new kind of existence* that is no longer subject to illness or death, and in which the body is so completely spiritualised that it can appear and disappear where it chooses. Furthermore this new state of existence is offered to all who place their love and trust in the same man, submitting themselves like him to the will of his heavenly Father.

Now that is quite a lot to believe. Add to it the claim that Jesus sent his Holy Spirit to protect the Church of his followers from ever falling into serious doctrinal error (no matter how sinful its leaders happened to be at any given time), and the claim that in order to seal the new Covenant Jesus gave his members his own resurrected body and blood to eat and drink through the Eucharist, and you can see why Christianity seemed “to the Jews an obstacle they cannot get over, to the pagans madness” (*1 Co 1:23*).

The Gnostic Legacy

By contrast with this, the various movements grouped together under the heading of “Gnosticism” taught something that appealed more readily both to reason and to imagination: that is, salvation through knowledge (*gnosis* in Greek). The Gnostic movements arose in the Middle East in the few centuries before Christ and flourished around the whole Eastern Mediterranean region during the few centuries after. They were condemned both by early Christian theologians such as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, and by Neoplatonists such as Plotinus.

Gnosticism was an elaborate mythological system of spiritual hierarchies. Like other forms of pantheism, it regarded the material world as the product of a fall or emanation from the deity (in some versions this was the fault of a spiritual entity known as Sophia). It taught a process of spiritual ascent (at least for the elite) through the invocation of helpful spirits, and was therefore closely related to the development of magic.

Some versions of Gnosticism, such as that of Marcion, who separated the God of the Old Testament from that of the New, tended towards a kind of dualism (the idea that the everything is based on two opposing forces) rather than pantheism. More dualistic

still, however, were ancient Zoroastrianism and the eclectic religion founded by the Persian Mani in the third century (Manichaeism), in which dark and light principles were presented as equal and opposed until a final separation of the two takes place at the end of time.

Gnosticism was judged heretical by Christians for several reasons. Its fanciful mythology (undoubtedly a stimulus for the imagination) was deemed absurd, and its identification of matter and the body with evil simplistic and misguided. The Christian Gospel taught that matter was created by a good and supreme Creator, but that the harmony of creation had been disrupted by a purely spiritual evil – the sin of pride. The Son of God had assumed a fleshly body among men in order to redeem the world of matter. The whole world was destined to follow the Son through bodily death to a resurrection of the flesh. All of these teachings – including that of the actual incarnation of the divine Son – were denied by the Gnostics. In fact it was partly by responding to the intellectual and pastoral challenge of Gnosticism that Christian theology began to develop in the hands of the early apologists.

Gnosticism was never definitely defeated. Instead it continued to flourish at the margins of Christian society, to influence other religious movements, and to throw up new heresies from time to time through the centuries.

The medieval heresy of the Cathars or Albigensians based in southern France is a case in point. The Cathars were violently suppressed in the first “internal crusade” of Christendom at the end of the eleventh century, but they also provided the stimulus for the foundation of the Dominican Order, dedicated to the intellectual exposition and defence of the true faith (Thomas Aquinas, the greatest teacher of our tradition, was a model Dominican).

It should be added that, while the Gnostics have clearly given all *gnosis* a bad name, even St Paul speaks of Christianity as a system of “knowledge”, and some of the early Church Fathers (such as Clement of Alexandria) have even been called Christian gnostics. The difference is that for a Christian, it is not the knowledge of the faith that saves us, but the living relationship with Jesus Christ, who is the “knowledge”, the “Logos” or Word, of the Father.

Medieval Influences

A series of controversies in the early centuries – not just the one about Gnosticism – forced the Church to define with increasing precision exactly what Christians believed about the nature of Christ. Was he a man inhabited by a divine Spirit, or a God who adopted the illusion of a human body? Was he divine or human? By the Council of Chalcedon in 451 the

Church had found a way of saying that he was both at the same time: fully divine and fully human. The two were not incompatible. In order for that to be possible, they had to make a crucial distinction between *person* and *nature*. Jesus was a divine person who had assumed a human nature (including both body and soul). Those who rejected this solution were labelled heretics, to distinguish them from those who held the ancient and orthodox faith of the Church, now definitively clarified.

But the heretics did not go away, and heretical ideas continued to ferment underground even as the Church became the established religion of the Empire (or what was left of it after the collapse of Roman power). These influences were to resurface a millennium and a half later, when the New Age began to gather strength. It is, at least since the Fall, only natural to have problems believing a paradoxical mystery. The authority of the Church rests on an act of faith that many are not prepared to make – a gift from God that many are not prepared to receive.

By the beginning of the thirteenth century, other influences had come to bear, including the revolutionary ideas of the Cistercian Abbot, Joachim of Fiore (or Flora), who died in 1202. Clearly a holy man, Joachim with the encouragement of several popes developed an interpretation of history based on Scripture and

numerology that probably qualify him as the first real “New Ager”. In the words of the online *Catholic Encyclopedia*, he taught that:

There are three states of the world, corresponding to the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity. In the first age the Father ruled, representing power and inspiring fear, to which the Old Testament dispensation corresponds; then the wisdom hidden through the ages was revealed in the Son, and we have the Catholic Church of the New Testament; a third period will come, the Kingdom of the Holy Spirit, a new dispensation of universal love, which will proceed from the Gospel of Christ, but transcend the letter of it, and in which there will be no need for disciplinary institutions.¹

The “new dispensation” or “new age” was supposed to be already at hand. Joachim’s detailed prophecies failed to materialise, his simplistic interpretation of world history was refuted within 50 years or so by St Thomas Aquinas, and the “spiritual Franciscans” he influenced were suppressed by St Bonaventure, but the potent idea of an “Age of the Spirit” in which the rule of law would be abolished and universal love remained extremely

¹ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08406c.htm>

attractive to many. Freemasons, many Protestant sects, anarchists and New Agers can all trace their ancestry back to Joachim.

The flowering of the Jewish mystical teachings known as Kabbalah in thirteenth-century Spain and southern France introduced another potent idea: that of a cosmic diagram of the forces and numbers underlying the cosmos. Thought to be of immense antiquity, going back to Moses himself, this was the first of many revivals of “ancient” or “lost” knowledge - a constant theme in esoteric writing ever since. The masons and architects responsible for the Gothic cathedrals themselves looked back to the musical and mathematical knowledge of Plato and Pythagoras. Contact between Jewish, Christian and Islamic scholars in Moorish Spain and contact with the East brought about by the Crusades enriched Christendom with lost texts of Aristotle in Arabic translation, and mathematical notations developed in India.

The medieval period gave way to the Renaissance, which brought the process to fever-pitch. The rediscovery of pagan wisdom combined with an extraordinary creative confidence led to a florescence of the arts and sciences, but also of occult and magical speculation, driven by the desire to understand or even control the forces of nature. It was the age not just of artistic geniuses like Leonardo and Michaelangelo, but

of sages and mages, magicians and astrologers, Christian Kabbalists and alchemists who looked back to the supposed Hermetic wisdom of ancient Egypt - men like Paracelsus, John Dee (in the court of Elizabeth I) and Nostradamus. All of this proved to be the seed-bed for the modern sciences of chemistry and astronomy, but as science became more rationalistic and empirical, the more intuitive, spiritual and magical approach became the province of secret societies such as the Freemasons and occult brotherhoods like the Rosicrucians, which flourished during the Enlightenment period. (The two streams of speculation were never entirely disentangled, and Isaac Newton, for example, was involved in both.)

The New Gnostics

We now jump forward to the twentieth century. The term “New Age” in its modern sense was popularised by Alice Bailey in the 1930s, founder of an offshoot of the Theosophical Society. It was picked up again by Baba Ram Dass (alias Richard Alpert) and others in the 1960s, when it became popularly identified with the coming astrological “Age of Aquarius”. In that Age, it was prophesied, mankind would finally become mature enough to renounce the use of force and establish a new world order of peace and harmony, an era of higher or cosmic consciousness and universal love. Eventually

mankind would evolve to leave matter behind, and all would be light.

Clearly the New Age has given a new lease of life to the ancient traditions. The reasons for its popularity are not far to seek. Clearly modern social and cultural conditions have played their part by enabling exotic alternatives to Christian belief to flourish. The progress of quantitative science, though impressive, had left many people dissatisfied. Hungry for some kind of wisdom or spiritual fulfilment which neither science nor Christianity seemed able to offer, they were easily attracted to spiritualism and the exotic doctrines of the recently-formed Theosophical Society, which formed a kind of seed-bed for the new movement.

The Society itself was founded in New York in 1875 by the Ukrainian-born occultist Madame H.P. Blavatsky (1831-1891), drawing on wide experience among Freemasonic and other secret societies and occult fraternities, and the knowledge acquired during travels in India and Egypt. The movement quickly divided and sub-divided. A boy called Jiddu Krishnamurti was groomed by the Society to be the next great teacher of mankind, but renounced the title and went on to teach that *gurus* are unnecessary. In another important schism the German clairvoyant Rudolf Steiner left the Theosophists to found the more Christian-oriented Anthroposophical Society in 1923.

Again, other influences came to bear: the psychological theories of Carl Jung (who gave great attention to alchemy and Gnosticism), the cosmological speculations of scientist-theologian Teilhard de Chardin, yoga, ecology, feminism. The scriptures of other religions, alongside the writings of Kabbalists, mystics and previously obscure Christian heretics, became widely available in translation.

In the wake of Swami Vivekananda and the Vedanta Society, which propagated a version of Hindu wisdom to a growing intellectual audience in the West at the end of the nineteenth century, new gurus appeared from the East (G.I. Gurdjieff, the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Bhagwan Sri Rajneesh). A wave of interest in Zen Buddhism (fostered in California by the writings of Alan Watts and D.T. Suzuki) and Sufism (associated with Pir Vilayat Khan, Idries Shah, and Frithjof Schuon), prepared the ground for exiled Tibetan *rinpoches* and the Dalai Lama himself to create centres of Buddhist meditation and ritual in the West - even entire monasteries complete with golden dragons, like Samyé Ling in Scotland.

Meanwhile, as the erosion of Christian faith and practice continued apace, leading physicists had become interested in mysticism and even Chinese philosophy (Erwin Shroedinger, James Jeans, Max Planck, and Fritjof Capra with his *Tao of Physics*). The

“new physics” inspired similar developments in chemistry (Illya Prigogine) and later in biology (Rupert Sheldrake, with his suggestion of “morphogenetic fields” responsible for the growth and transmission of form). Beginning in California, the practice of humanistic as distinct from experimental psychology flowered in the so-called “human potential movement” (associated with such figures as Abraham Maslow, Fritz Perls, Robert Assagioli).

The fascination with mediumistic phenomena and spiritualism so prominent at the end of the nineteenth century (Arthur Conan Doyle, the inventor of *Sherlock Holmes*, was an avid proponent, and even G.K. Chesterton as a young man fell into these circles) re-emerged decades later under the cloak of parapsychology, the academic discipline founded by J.B. Rhine in the 1930s, and then rather less respectably in the 1980s fashion for “channelling” disembodied entities calling themselves Ramtha, Lazaris, Seth, and so on. Books recording the revelations of these entities became bestsellers.

An interest in native traditions suppressed by European colonialists, and in the use of hallucinogenic drugs led (through the writings of self-styled anthropologist Carlos Castaneda and others) to the rediscovery of shamanism, with its claims to mediate between this world and the world of spirits and natural

forces. As a result, Paganism and Wicca (witchcraft) are now regarded by many academics as a significant religious minority, with as many as 20,000 exponents in the UK alone.

In Eastern Europe, partly because the prevailing ideology in the Soviet Union was a strongly materialist one, parapsychology flourished, since it seemed to offer a respectably empirical and scientific route to the whole world of extraordinary phenomena. Thus, with the suppression of Christianity in Soviet Russia the ground was more than prepared for the explosion of religious sects and occultism that took place after the fall of Communism in 1989. An additional factor here was the influx of Western New Age ideas, sometimes presented in the form of management training and business seminars for aspiring Russian entrepreneurs. And while Catholics and Orthodox argued about the return of Church property, wealthy sects including the long-established Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses did their best to fill the religious vacuum among the young.

Some New Age Ideas

In England, a leader and inspirer of the New Age movement for much of his long life was Sir George Trevelyan (nephew of a well-known historian). Trevelyan (d. 1996) was the founder of the Wrekin

Trust, one of a number of important New Age centres that include Findhorn in Scotland (where large vegetables were originally grown on barren land thanks to the influence of local nature-spirits) and Dartington Hall in England (an intellectual hub of the New Age). In his book *A Vision of the Aquarian Age* (Coventure, 1977), Trevelyan sums up much of the New Age world-view:

“Behind all outwardly manifested form is a timeless realm of absolute consciousness. It is the great Oneness underlying all the diversity, all the myriad forms of nature. It may be called God, or may be deemed beyond all naming... The world of nature, in short, is but a reflection of the eternal world of Creative imagining. The inner core of man, that which in each of us might be called spirit, is a droplet of the divine source. As such, it is imperishable and eternal, for life cannot be extinguished. The outer sheath in which it manifests can, of course, wear out and be discarded; but to speak of ‘death’ in relation to the true being and spirit of man is irrelevant” (pp. 5-6).

Implied here is one of the most popular beliefs associated with the New Age movement, namely **reincarnation**. As Sir George expresses it: “The soul belongs properly to higher and purer spheres. It

incarnates for the purpose of acquiring experience in the density of earth matter – a necessary educational phase in its development. Such incarnation, of course, entails drastic limitation of a free spiritual being. Birth into a body is, in fact, more like entry into a species of tomb” (p.6). He explains the anthropology that lies behind this belief as follows: “More precisely, we must recognise man as a threefold being of body, soul and spirit... The immortal ‘I’ is neither the soul nor the transient personality. In order to descend into the density of the phenomenal world, it must clothe itself, so to speak, in a protective sheath.” The “soul” is therefore the sheath or “astral body” which the eternal “I” draws about it in order to experience the psychological level of reality. It also draws around itself an “etheric” body of vital forces to hold together the physical body.

In orthodox Christianity, the unique personality constituted by the unity of a human spirit or soul with the body it animates is not transient, as in the theories of reincarnation, but is promised an eternal resurrection. But Sir George writes: “If the earth plane is indeed the great training ground of the soul, it is unlikely that we should come here only once. One lifetime is hardly sufficient to reap all the harvest of experience that earth can offer” (p.36). He traces the idea that the earth is a school for reincarnating spirits

back to the German theologian G.E. Lessing, in a book published in 1780.

The idea has always been popular in parts of Asia, but there reincarnation has traditionally been regarded as a kind of *failure*, and so seen in a negative rather than a positive light. For most Buddhists, for example, the goal of a human being should be to escape reincarnation by achieving enlightenment. In any case, since incarnation as a human being rather than a lower animal is regarded as extremely unlikely, another earthly life is not necessarily something to be anticipated with pleasure.

What transformed the popular understanding of reincarnation in the West was the theory or dogma of evolution, with which it became entangled. Sir George comments that “it is fitting for our western minds that **evolutionary thinking** should colour our understanding of reincarnation. Consciousness evolves from age to age, and this consciousness is carried in individual souls. Each, therefore, can enter the stream of earth life as a creative deed to lift the race as a whole one step further” (p.38). Thus the doctrine of reincarnation in the form now held by a quarter of the European population is not simply an idea taken over from the Oriental religions, but an application of the idea of progressive evolution to a dualistic theory of the human soul.

It is also a manifestation of one of the underlying motivations of the New Age movement, namely the desire for a **super-self “me”**. The idea that the “I” has many lifetimes in which to learn from its mistakes and discover its identity with the “God within” can seem immensely attractive – especially if the apparent alternative is either to vanish after a brief span on earth, or to be judged for ever on the basis of decisions taken in ignorance. (The latter is a popular misinterpretation of the Christian doctrine of the afterlife, missing the point of the Church’s teaching that no one will be condemned for doing something they could not help or avoid.) G.K. Chesterton satirised this obsession with the Self in his book *Orthodoxy* (1908):

Of all conceivable forms of enlightenment the worst is what these people call the Inner Light. Of all horrible religions the most horrible is the worship of the god within. Anyone who knows anybody knows how it would work; anyone who knows anyone from the Higher Thought Centre knows how it does work. That Jones shall worship the god within him turns out ultimately to mean that Jones shall worship Jones. Let Jones worship the sun or moon - anything rather than the Inner Light; let Jones worship cats or crocodiles, if he can find any in his street, but not the god within.

Christianity came into the world, firstly, in order to assert with violence that a man had not only to look inward, but to look outwards, to behold with astonishment and enthusiasm a divine company and a divine captain. The only fun of being a Christian was that a man was not left alone with the Inner Light, but definitely recognised an *outer* light, fair as the sun, clear as the moon, terrible as an army with banners.

Of course, the impulse for self-realisation is also present in Christianity, culminating in the “deification” of the person by grace, but as Chesterton indicates this is achieved by looking and turning outwards, by self-giving love.

There is also a perfectly legitimate desire for **spiritual healing**. This lies behind much alternative or complementary medicine, as well as the therapies devised by the successors of the founders of modern psychology: Freud, Jung, Adler and Frankl. Humanistic psychology also draws upon any number of other influences for its inspiration, from Gnosticism and alchemy (two of Jung’s particular interests) to Gurdjieff (an eccentric middle-eastern teacher who invented or transmitted the Enneagram) and Theosophy (influential in the development of past-life therapy).

In line with the “holistic” perspectives of the New Age, similar principles must apply to the healing of the whole earth. The science of **ecology**, and the realisation that irresponsible industrialisation may have irreparably damaged the earth’s ecosystem (major concerns of the hippies in the 1960s, resurrected in the twenty-first century once the danger of global warming had become apparent), have to a large extent taken the place of the Cold War and the arms race as a topic of near universal concern. Within the New Age movement itself, the transformation of the individual through therapy or changes in diet and lifestyle is linked to transformation of the planet, through the restoration of balance in the “earth-energies” and the creation of a new, sustainable and environmentally friendly civilisation. Generally, the aim is to achieve this not by a “top-down” restructuring of the global economy, but through the spiritual influence of personal example, invocation or prayer.

The confluence of environmentalism with the feminist idea that the ecological crisis is due to the historical predominance of patriarchal structures responsible for the “rape of the earth” (a confluence branded “eco-feminism”) leads many in the New Age to promote **matriarchal** forms of religion and society. A Mother-Goddess – sometimes known as “Gaia”, the personification of Nature and of the living planet –

takes the place of the Father-God and his Son, and a female priesthood develops to represent her (the role of the priestess in any of the ancient traditions usually being one of invocation and healing rather than sacrifice). All of this in turn leads to a corresponding movement among *men*, also linked to the revival of shamanistic traditions and the appropriation and reinterpretation of ancient myths and folktales (Joseph Campbell, Robert Bly).

Throughout the New Age movement a similar dynamic is apparent. Modernity or the rationalistic civilisation of the Enlightenment is perceived as, in one way or another, diseased – the cause being identified variously as industrialisation or materialism or patriarchy, or all three together. The world is regarded as an **organic whole** in need of healing, and any “therapy” must start at the level of the individual. (Many of the assumptions of the diagnosis are quite compatible with Christianity. As is well known, ecology was a major concern of Pope John Paul II; and in his 1995 encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* he called for a “new feminism” which “rejects the temptation of imitating models of ‘male domination’”. In the case of ecology, the establishment of the John Paul II Center for Theology and Environmental Studies at Saint Joseph’s College in Maine in 2006 indicates that some Catholics have been awoken to the importance of this particular dialogue.)

The Da Vinci Code Phenomenon

The extraordinary, runaway success of Dan Brown's "thriller", *The Da Vinci Code*, highlights the perennial challenge New Age thinking poses to Christians. The *Code* is fiction, but bases itself on speculations that have been put forward in other books (notably *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*) and are taken seriously by millions. The "secret" that the Church has been hiding all these centuries – in order to protect its own power – concerns the true nature of the Holy Grail. Far from being the miraculous chalice in which is preserved drops of blood from the side of the dying Christ, the object of the legendary Quest of the knights of King Arthur, or a mystical symbol of the Eucharist, the Grail turns out to be the *sang real*, the royal bloodline of Jesus Christ passed down through marriage with Mary Magdalen, through the Merovingian dynasty of French monarchs, down to the cryptographer Sophie Neveu (the main love-interest in the book). Or rather the Grail is the Magdalen herself, the receptacle of the bloodline, giving Brown a chance to tap into the New Age interest in the "sacred feminine" and the Gnostic Gospels.

Jesus, in this version of events, was not divine and not celibate. His divinity was only proclaimed by the Emperor Constantine after several centuries. The Church suppressed the true importance of Mary

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