

BLOODLINE OF THE HOLY GRAIL?

Bloodline of the Holy Grail, Laurence Gardner, Element, Dorset, 1996

Who Was Jesus? NT Wright, SPCK, London, 1993

Laurence Gardner published his Bloodline of the Holy Grail in 1996 (Element, Dorset). Subtitled The Hidden Lineage of Jesus Revealed, the book purports to show that the legendary Holy Grail was Royal Blood and none other than the blood of Jesus Christ. Jesus' bloodline though Mary Magdalene became the Merovingian dynasty and the Royal House of Stewart.

It takes a lot of imagination to think that the Arthurian legends and tales of the Grail really refer to a Royal Bloodline. It is most likely that the Grail means what the oldest legend says it means: the cup that Jesus used at the last supper with which some of his blood was collected after he was crucified. If a bloodline had been meant then why didn't they say that certain people have blood that has been turned into the blood of Christ instead? That would hint that they have descended from Jesus but successfully hide this secret.

The first warning bell about this book rings when the author states his approbation and dependence on the outrageous book, Jesus the Man, by Barbara Thiering which imagines bizarre codes in the gospel which she deploys to create a boring and disappointing story about Jesus that contradicts the gospel story.

He accepts the genealogy of Jesus provided in the Gospel of Luke (page 405). That should tell him that there is no code in the gospels for how could stories be encoded in a genealogy? If the gospels were codes then the stories would need to be completely mad in order to keep up the codes.

On page 103, he records that "One very clear property of the language used in the New Testament is that words, names and titles which have a cryptic meaning are used with that 'same meaning' throughout – not only do they have the same meaning every time they are used, but they are used every time that same meaning is required. Undoubtedly, the most thorough studies to date in this field of research have been conducted by Dr Barbara Thiering...in some cases, individual derivations of coded names or titles may be complex or obscure, but more often they are straightforward, though rarely obvious."

Now suppose the Leper denotes Simon Magus. If there is a code you could only figure out that Magus was meant if some things were said of the Leper were true of him. But if some things are obscure then there is no way to be sure. Nobody uses a clear code with an obscure one.

There are horrific errors in this book. On page 217 we read, "Rome's final split with the Eastern Orthodox Church occurred in 867, when the latter announced that it upheld the true Apostolic succession. The First Vatican Council disagreed, and so Photious, Patriarch of Constantinople, excommunicated Pope Nicholas 1".

The final split did not happen until 1054 AD with the pope and the patriarch of Constantinople mutually excommunicating each other though the the Latin and the Eastern Church hadn't been getting along for centuries. The First Vatican Council did not happen until 1869-70. Also, the schism was over the papacy and its efforts for domination of the whole Church and not over apostolic succession.

We read that Peter was never a bishop anywhere (page 217). The most ancient tradition says that he was bishop of Antioch. Later legend says that he was bishop of Rome. The ancient tradition about Antioch has more authority than Gardner's twentieth century speculations. He shows that he is biased.

It is simply untrue that St Patrick's' teaching hinted about having a belief that Jesus was not God contrary to page 214.

Gardner asks if Joseph of Arimathea was really Jesus' mother's uncle and rejects this on the basis that Joseph would have been about 20 years older than Mary which would not fit the legends about him (page 138). Because of this he says that Joseph was really the apostle James the Just! But lots of people have and have had uncles younger than themselves.

Page 139. "It is also apparent that Jesus' mother Mary's background and family are not accounted for in the Bible. This is not surprising since the Church interpretation of Mary's heritage is that she was a product of Immaculate Conception". The Catholic Church never taught that Mary had no father at all. Yet this blames the Church for the biblical silence on Mary's family. And the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception teaches that Mary was without sin at her conception not that she was born of a woman without a man. And would the Church doctor the Bible to promote a doctrine that it didn't even put in it?

Sadly, Gardner takes the rubbish about Jesus inserted into Jewish Antiquities by the first century historian Josephus as authentic (page 149). He even says that there was no reference to any scriptural motive in it. He must mean that Josephus

did not write this to fit the Old Testament prophecies to prove they were fulfilled. But the text says that Jesus fulfilled prophecies in the thousands. And the Christ which he called his was the title of the man the scriptures allegedly spoke of. Did Gardner bother reading what Josephus wrote at all? And the text could be inauthentic even if it did not appeal to scripture.

Linus, a British prince and son of King Caractacus, was supposed to be the Linus that was the first Bishop of Rome or what Catholicism says he was: the first successor of the first bishop of Rome, Peter (page 152). Of Linus, St Irenaeus wrote, "The apostles having founded and built up the Church at Rome, committed the ministry of its supervision to Linus. The tradition that Linus was a slave and not a prince is casually brushed off. No reason is given for rejecting it or for saying that Linus was a prince. The Apostolic Constitutions say that Linus was appointed by St Paul in Peter's lifetime and this took place in 58 AD. Linus was a common name in those times.

There is no good evidence for anything Gardner says. The early records consisted of the New Testament and the Apostolic Fathers wrote a small number of things in the early second century and nothing in these records which have the primacy over any late legend supports him. We don't have a clue what became of Joseph of Arimathea after he was dropped from the end of the gospels.

The book is a mishmash of fact and eccentricity and fiction. It poses no threat to one who denies that there was any evidence that Jesus existed.

Bloodline of the Holy Grail, Laurence Gardner, Element, Dorset, 1996