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The Contemporary Myth Gets It Exactly Wrong — N. T. Wright on *The Da Vinci Code* and Its Popularity

Wednesday, April 12, 2006

I disagree with Bishop N. T. Wright on a number of issues, ranging from the so-called “New Perspective” on Paul to the role of women in the church. Nevertheless, when he is right (and in defending such doctrines as the resurrection of Christ, he often is), he is usually eloquent.

Consider these selections from his essay on Dan Brown’s novel, *The Da Vinci Code*:

If it’s sacred femininity you want, you must look elsewhere, to various forms of paganism ancient and modern. These have become enormously popular in some strands of New Age and postmodern thinking. They have found their way into some revisionist versions of western Christianity. But they have nothing to do with Nag Hammadi and nothing whatever to do with early Christianity.

More:

The Christian writers of the early second century know and revere the four canonical Gospels, but show no knowledge of traditions like the Gnostic writings. When the canon of the New Testament was finally decided upon, it was not a matter of selecting four books arbitrarily from a list of several dozen. It was a matter of noting that these four Gospels had been known from very early on to have been the core testimony to Jesus.

And note this very important statement:

In fact, the contemporary myth gets things exactly the wrong way round. It isn’t the case that the canonical New Testament is politically and socially quiescent, colluding with empire, while the Jesus whom we meet in the Nag Hammadi texts and similar documents is politically and socially subversive, so dangerous that he had to be suppressed. It’s the other way round, and this may be among the most telling points we have to recognize for today. You may salve your own conscience by embracing Gnosticism, by telling yourself how very wicked the world is and how you are going to escape it once and for all by following the path of spiritual self-discovery and enlightenment. But if Caesar takes any notice at all, all he will do is sneer at you and go on his way to yet more triumphs of sheer power. And if that happened in the second century, we can be sure it’s precisely what’s happening today. Heidegger and Bultmann couldn’t prevent Hitler; Derrida and Foucault and their numerous disciples can’t do anything to stop the new empires of today. Certainly those who are advocating a new kind of do-it-yourself spirituality, and claiming that Jesus is somehow in or behind it all, cut no ice on the political front.

See Rt. Rev. N. T. Wright, “[Decoding *The Da Vinci Code*,”](#) *Response* [[Seattle Pacific University](#)], Summer 2005. Dr. Wright is Bishop of Durham, Church of England.

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