

Was Abraham Lincoln Wrong?

By

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Each time I go from my house to my car I look at Lincoln Park. It's particularly beautiful these Spring days, with white and pink blossoms on many trees and various shades of green on the partially opened leaves.

Lincoln Park was created after the Civil War and the debacle of the Great Chicago Fire to honor an Illinois hero who was a martyred president. When I was in grade school, long before the advent of "Presidents' Day," we had a free day every February 12, because it was Lincoln's birthday. It made sense to have a day to honor Lincoln. Celebrating Presidents' Day, however, makes as much sense as would the creation of a "Popes' Day." Some Popes you want to thank God for (especially the many who are saints) and some you want to forget; so it is with Presidents. Lincoln, however, complex as he was, is worth remembering.

Worth remembering as well is a saying of Lincoln's that I recall goes something like this: You can fool some of the people all of the time and all of the people some of the time, but you can't fool all of the people all of the time. Has Abraham Lincoln finally been proved wrong by the seemingly unlimited popularity of the *DaVinci Code*?

Will people now really believe that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and had a child whose blood flows in the veins of the first French royal house (where else)? Will people now believe that the Catholic Church is an organized conspiracy designed to hide this “fact” for two thousand years (why not)? Will people finally understand that the martyrs of the Church’s first three hundred years didn’t themselves believe that Jesus had risen from the dead and was truly the eternal Son of God but, rather, endured torture and death just to hide his secret marriage (didn’t Henry Ford say that history is bunk)? Will people swallow with delight the story of a two thousand year old conspiracy based on papers forged in France in the 1960’s (wasn’t that a time of universal enlightenment)? Will the Louvre Museum become a place of universal pilgrimage to honor the bones of the Eternal Feminine buried there (could Paris handle the crowds)? Can anybody hear Lincoln turning in his grave (actually, in his crypt in Springfield)?

Maybe the *Da Vinci Code*’s tale, now told in a “major movie,” will prove as ephemeral a social phenomenon as the hula hoop or pet rocks. It’s of a different magnitude of importance, however, because it’s about Jesus. Who Jesus is becomes a question for each generation, because he claimed to be Son of God and savior of the human race. People in Jesus’ time had difficulty believing this. Jesus’ entire public life could be summarized in the various attempts to figure out his identity. His enemies got it wrong, but so did many of his friends. The Church got it right after Jesus’ resurrection and has been telling the world who He is for two thousand years. But false identities of Jesus, first invented two thousand years ago, have been invented constantly ever since. Sometimes the

ideas are original; often they are just re-treads of old heresies come back to have another day in the sun. The *DaVinci Code* espouses a Gnostic theory about Jesus. We are saved, according to this third century theory, not by our relationship to Jesus but by the special secret knowledge he knew and handed on to those he wanted to bring into his circle. What's important are Jesus' sayings, especially the "lost" or esoteric sayings, not his passion, death and resurrection. Conspiracy theories fit easily into our social mind set; a risen Lord does not. So we stay with what responds to our curiosity rather than convert to truths that challenge our life. It's an old story, unfortunately.

Evangelizing means telling the world the truth about Jesus Christ. So far, in the history of the human race, this mission of the Church could continue because not all of the people had yet been fooled about Christ all of the time. Is that about to change? Will the whole world, taken in by a popular novel, now be wrong about who Christ is? No, but it might be close. P.T. Barnum, another well-known American, said there's a sucker born every minute. These days, Barnum is resting comfortably in his grave.

May is the month of Mary, the virgin mother of Jesus and the mother of the Church. In her love for us, Mary constantly points out our needs to her divine Son. Perhaps the best response to the barrage of foolishness about Jesus and the Church that will continue this month is to turn to Mary in prayer and ask her to keep pointing us, in turn, to her Son. The Blessed Virgin Mary, when all is said and done and when all is written and filmed, knows more about Jesus than anyone else. In judging any theory or tale about Jesus, perhaps the question to

ask is: What would Mary think? You won't find her answer reflected in *the DaVinci Code*. God bless you.