

Holy Texts of Deception: Christian Gnosticism and the Writings of Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh

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John Milbank, in his important and magisterial study *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (1990), advances the claim that 'secular reason' is but a form of Christian deviancy.¹ By secular reason Milbank intends 'secular social theory' or sociology. Milbank offers an 'archaeology' of secular social theory which is also an archaeology of the secular, since for him 'the genesis of discourse is intertwined with the genesis of a new practice'.² His genetic account of the construction of secular reason traces it first in 'the discourses of liberalism—"scientific politics" and political economy', where the human construction of the cultural world is discovered, and where human making is thought to 'mark out an autonomous human space', as in Hobbes.³ The secular is not that which is discovered when the sacred is removed, but that which is first constructed within the space of the sacred.

It is Milbank's contention that, as he puts it, 'secular discourse does not just "borrow" inherently inappropriate modes of expression from religion as the only discourse to hand . . . but is actually *constituted* in its secularity by "heresy" in relation to orthodox Christianity, or else a rejection of Christianity that is more "neo-pagan" than simply anti-religious'.⁴ Thus for Milbank "'scientific" social theories are themselves theologies or anti-theologies in disguise'.⁵ The Hobbesian construction of man as the maker of society, the myth, as Milbank puts it, of the 'self-present and self-sufficiently initiating "person" who echoes the pure will of a creator God',⁶ is not, as the idea of 'voluntarist sovereignty', simply a notion transferred from the divine to the human, from the sacred to the secular. This, Milbank contends, would be the 'facile theme of "secularization"'. On the contrary, '*only* the theological model permits one to construct the *mythos* of the sovereign power, or sovereign person, so that it is not a case of "essentially" secular and pragmatic realities being temporarily described in antique theological guise'.⁷ It is only, as Milbank goes on to note, 'when theology finally

drops out of modern theories of sovereignty that the real moment of mystification occurs, because here the “mythical” character of sovereignty is forgotten’.⁸ Thus the secular is constructed not beyond, but within theology.

In this paper I want to consider an illustration, not of Milbank’s thesis, but of a vulgarised form of it, the idea that certain texts of popular secular culture are precisely constituted and sustained by the theology they seek to subvert, dependent upon the very religion they present as conspiratorial deceit and deception. Insofar as Milbank’s thesis is correct, the critique of religion propounded in these publications is never more than a deviant turning within the object of their censure.

My example is the work of Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh.

I

Baigent and Leigh’s best known book is *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*, written with Henry Lincoln and published in 1982.⁹ Their more recent book, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception* (1991),¹⁰ was heralded by its publisher, Jonathan Cape, as unveiling ‘what could be the single most controversial religious cover-up of the century’.¹¹ Baigent & Leigh are also the co-authors of *The Temple and the Lodge* (1989) and, again with Henry Lincoln, *The Messianic Legacy* (1986).¹² I shall be attending to only *The Holy Blood* and *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception*.

One gains some idea of the nature and importance of these books from the reviews of *The Holy Blood* cited in the paperback edition of 1983.¹³ Hugh Montefiore describes it as ‘amateurish, ignorant and grotesque’, while Marina Warner finds it a ‘heap of hooey’. But for *New Humanity*, *The Holy Blood* is ‘one of the most important and thought-provoking works to appear in recent years’, while for *Fate Magazine* it is ‘destined to become an occult classic’. However the nature of the book is better gauged by the writer in the *Canadian Jewish News* who suggests that ‘if taken as sheer entertainment, it surpasses many a mystery story’. *Newsweek* is cited as saying that ‘the plot has all the elements of an international thriller’. But it is Anthony Burgess who best indicates the character of the book. ‘It will seem to some a crackpot exercise, but these young men are no fools: they have learning, energy, enthusiasm tempered by scepticism . . . it is typical of my unregenerable soul that I can only see this as a marvellous theme for a novel’.

In the introduction to *The Holy Blood*, Hugh Lincoln tells us that the idea for the book came to him while reading a casually purchased

'mystery story', *Le Tresor Maudit* by Gerard de Sede, a 'lightweight, entertaining blend of historical fact, genuine mystery and conjecture'.¹⁴ That gets it about right.

Baigent & Leigh's books are about texts, or rather the true import of texts. For Baigent & Leigh are not so much the discoverers of buried treasure as of an awful truth, not so much archaeologists as semioticians, 'outsiders' for whom, as they themselves put it, 'assembling the disparate available fragments into a coherent order amounts to an exercise in semiotics'.¹⁵ They are orderers of coherent meaning out of the tatters and threads of ancient texts.

Theirs are dark and mysterious texts, long-hidden from public view because of the terrible matters they contain. The principle texts of *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* are a number of parchments said to have been discovered in France by a simple parish priest in the course of restoring his village church in 1891.¹⁶ These parchments are not simply historical remains but the preservers of a powerful secret.

Starting with these texts, Baigent & Leigh discover the existence of a secret society behind that of the already mysterious order, the Knights Templar. This society was and is the Priore de Sion (Priory of Sion), surviving the destruction of the Knights Templar in the fourteenth century, acting in the shadows of Western history yesterday and still today, and devoted to the restoration of the Merovingian dynasty and bloodline to the thrones of Europe.¹⁷ Victor Hugo, Claude Debussy and Jean Cocteau were some of its more recent Grand Masters or 'navigators'.¹⁸ It is a freemasonry, a grand conspiracy; powerful and rich because of its secret knowledge.

What could this knowledge be? What is the secret of the Priory of Sion? As Baigent & Leigh tell their story, as they collect more and more information, they keep 'overlooking something'; they can't quite bring it all into focus. The truth is too remarkable, too unbelievable, too shocking for it to be seen for what it is. 'It seemed to make no sense — that the restoration of a 1300-year-old bloodline should constitute so vital a *cause celebre* for so many public and highly esteemed people. Unless, of course, we were overlooking something. . . . Unless, in short, there was something very special indeed about the Merovingian blood royal'.¹⁹ 'And yet the really crucial question continued to elude us. We still could not see why the Merovingian bloodline should be so inexplicably important today. . . . Quite clearly we were overlooking something'.²⁰ 'It might be that the Merovingians were ultimately of Judaic origin, but if this were so it seemed to us essentially incidental.... However important it might be, there was something of even greater importance involved. We were still overlooking something'.²¹

It is at this point that the Grail legend enters the story. It is the legend of the cup of Jesus's last supper with his disciples. It is the cup of the blood of Christ, brought to the West, some say by Joseph of Arimethea to Glastonbury in England; others say by Mary Magdalene to Marseilles in France. But was the Grail the cup or something associated with the cup? 'It was now becoming apparent to us that everything we had studied during our investigation was but a ripple — which, monitored correctly, might direct us to a single stone cast into the pool of history two thousand years ago'.²²

Baigent & Leigh have arrived at the heart of the mystery. Following the clues, deciphering the codes, they have come to knowledge of the awful and powerful secret, and they are about to disclose it to us, their readers. They call it their hypothesis. The 'fragmentary shreds of evidence', as they call them, have led ineluctably to 'one glaring self-evident conclusion . . . controversial and explosive'.²³ It was not the cup of Christ's blood that the Magdalene brought to France, it was Christ's bloodline, his lineal descendant.

At the heart of the book is this great 'perhaps'. 'Perhaps the Magdalene — that elusive woman in the Gospels — was in fact Jesus's wife. Perhaps their union produced offspring. After the Crucifixion, perhaps the Magdalene, with at least one child, was smuggled to Gaul — where established Jewish communities already existed and where, in consequence, she might have found a refuge. Perhaps there was, in short, an hereditary bloodline descended directly from Jesus. Perhaps this bloodline . . . then perpetuated itself, intact and incognito, for some four thousand years — which is not, after all, a very long time for an important lineage. Perhaps there were dynastic intermarriages not only with other Jewish families, but with Romans and Visigoths as well. And perhaps in the fifth century Jesus's lineage became allied with the royal line of the Franks, thereby engendering the Merovingian dynasty'.²⁴ Well, perhaps.

Ever perspicacious when commenting upon the nature of their tale, Baigent & Leigh note that their hypothesis is 'preposterous', 'sketchy', and rests on 'flimsy' foundations. Thus, in the last third of their book, they seek out evidence in its support. Not unexpectedly they turn to the most prestigious texts with which they have to do, the four canonical gospels of the Christian Church. These sacred scriptures would appear to contradict their hypothesis, presenting a Christ who has no wife and no children, who dies and is resurrected, who lives on not through his descendants, but at the right hand of his Father in heaven.

Baigent & Leigh are greatly helped in their search by nearly two centuries of biblical historical criticism which has made it possible for

almost any theory concerning the gospels to have some degree of initial plausibility. The gospels don't say that Jesus was married but they don't say that he wasn't; they don't say that he was celibate. It would have been odd for Jesus not to have been married and so he probably was. A 'respected contemporary theological scholar', who turns out to be Charles Davis, is cited in support. The wedding at Cana was in all likelihood Jesus's own; Jesus was the bridegroom to whom Jesus spoke.²⁵ With these sorts of argument at their disposal it doesn't take Baigent & Leigh long to conclude that if 'Jesus was indeed married, there would . . . seem to be only one candidate for his wife' — Mary Magdalene.²⁶

But why all this fuss about the child of a pretended Messiah who was executed by the Romans? One of the nice things about Baigent & Leigh's hypothesis is that unless the claims of orthodox Christianity are believed, one would be hard pressed to think of an alternative reason for being so interested in Jesus and his descendants. But Baigent & Leigh do think of a reason. King David of old was of the tribe of Judah, and he usurped the throne of Saul who was of the tribe of Benjamin. But Jesus, who was of the line of David and thus of the tribe of Judah, married the Magdalene who was of the tribe of Benjamin. The gospels don't say that she was of this tribe, but no matter; we have, so Baigent & Leigh tell us, the 'outlines of a coherent historical scenario'.

'Jesus would have been a priest-king of the line of David, who possessed a legitimate claim to the throne. He would have consolidated his position by a symbolically important dynastic marriage. He would then have been poised to unify his country, mobilise the populace behind him, drive out the oppressors, depose their abject puppet and restore the glory of the monarchy as it was under Solomon. Such a man would indeed have been "King of the Jews"²⁷ Now we can see why Jesus was a real threat to the Romans, being 'a married man, with a rightful claim to the throne and children through whom to establish a dynasty'.²⁸ Jesus may have had sons everywhere. Baigent & Leigh even suggest that Barrabas might have been one of them; indeed, they further suggest, Jesus might have been conceiving them 'at any point up to and within a day or so of the Crucifixion'.²⁹

But do Baigent & Leigh suppose that Jesus actually died on the cross? Not a bit of it. They are masters of the grand conspiracy and careful stratagem, and so was Jesus. His execution, they suggest, was 'a private crucifixion on private property'.³⁰ 'With the general populace kept at a convenient distance, an execution was then staged—in which a substitute took the priest-king's place on the cross, or in which the priest-king himself did not actually die. Towards dusk—which would

have further impeded visibility—a “body” was removed to an opportunely adjacent tomb, from which, a day or two later, it “miraculously” disappeared’.³¹

And so we have the true story of Jesus Christ according to Messrs Baigent & Leigh. It stands as an alternative gospel to that of orthodox Christianity; a rival scripture, a shadow sacred text. Indeed it represents a rival Christianity, as old as that of the Church, but suppressed, silent and secret.

One might question why anyone would have been interested in Jesus and his family even if he were the rightful claimant to a Jewish throne, why the monarch and heirs to his small insignificant Kingdom would have been of any interest to the rulers of Europe throughout the centuries. The interest of the Priory of Sion in Jesus and his family is not, according to Baigent & Leigh, dependent on his divinity, but on his dynastic claim to the throne of Israel. This is the paradox of their book. If there were not orthodoxy, and its story of Jesus, Jesus would be of no interest to anyone. So the Priory of Sion needs orthodoxy to legitimate their interest in Jesus and his heirs, but the secret they guard, that Jesus had heirs, undermines the orthodoxy by which they are legitimated. They are credible only insofar as the ‘mythos’ upon which they are founded is forgotten. The story of *The Holy Blood* is a fabulous mystification.

I now want to turn to *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception*, where the plot does not so much thicken as repeat itself.

II

For Baigent & Leigh the past is not a foreign country, but a place and a time just like our own, and one moreover that is subject to patient scrutiny and ultimate clarification. They expect history to be simple. They don’t like muddle and mess. In the *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception* they tell us that on consulting the experts about the history of Jesus and early Christianity they were disturbed to find ‘no one theory or interpretation that satisfactorily accommodated all the evidence, all the anomalies, inconsistencies and contradictions’.³² This is somewhat surprising considering the grand theory of Christian origins constructed in *The Holy Blood*, but given their perplexity one can imagine their delight on coming across the work of Robert Eisenman. It is true that in Eisenman’s 1983 book *Maccabees, Zadokites, Christians and Qumran*, footnotes outweigh text, but it also contains a ‘central thesis of exhilarating commonsense and lucidity’.³³

The *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception* is premised on the dismal

story of scholarly ineptitude and petty rivalry surrounding the preservation, decipherment and publication of the scrolls found hidden in the caves at Qumran near the Dead Sea in 1947.³⁴ It is not an edifying story. It concerns the group of scholars, many of them Roman Catholic priests, who have been in charge of most of the scrolls since their discovery.

'These scholars', according to John Ray in a review of *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception* in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 'are able to work only in time spared from other commitments. In some respects, it is an amateur attempt, and it is hardly surprising that the task is far from completed, especially given the constant problems of Middle Eastern politics. Unfortunately, an outsider must also conclude that the team has had more than its share of jealousies, obscurantism and lack of cohesion: one of the collaborators went freelance and wrote a book arguing that Christianity was a side-effect of hallucinogenic mushrooms, and the former chief editor, a Roman Catholic, gave an interview to an Israeli newspaper denouncing Judaism'.³⁵

Nevertheless, the academic world has increasingly found tiresome and inexplicable the secrecy and delay surrounding the work on the scrolls, and prominent scholars have called for explanation and expeditious publication of Qumran's textual treasures. Thus Geza Vermes has been quoted as describing the long wait for the scrolls' publication as the 'academic scandal *par excellence* of the 20th century'.³⁶

But this sorry tale of scholarly acrimony and incompetence is not the real scandal of the scrolls; it is rather the attempt of their guardians to conceal their true import. A standard view of the scrolls sees them as the work of a small community or sect identified as the Essenes mentioned in Josephus. They were, in the words of A.R.C. Leane, 'earnest and very strict Jews who were appalled by the lawless and unclean state into which Israel had sunk, and were convinced that all was soon to be set right, in favour of the few righteous, by divine intervention. . . . Two Messiahs, one priestly and the other secular, are to be expected in the end of the age, and their forerunner has already come in the person of the Teacher of Righteousness, a member of the sect who arose twenty years after its foundation and became a highly respected leader, and is now dead. All these beliefs, together with their Rule, or way of life, they derived from a profound searching and special interpretation of the scriptures'.³⁷ This group was generally supposed to be pre-Christian.

But another account of the scrolls can be given, one which their Roman Catholic guardians, the 'international team' or 'villains of the

piece',³⁸ as Baigent & Leigh call them, do not wish to have disclosed, one which they have done their best to suppress. The villains of the piece are not simply the scholars working on the scrolls in Jerusalem. It doesn't take Baigent & Leigh long to discover the connections between them and the Pontifical Biblical Commission in Rome, and between it and the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, formerly known as the Holy Inquisition. The stories of Hans Küng and Edward Schillebeeckx are rehearsed so as to remind us just how inquisitorial, how terroristic, the Congregation still is.³⁹ The suggestion is clear: it is Rome itself that is suppressing the truth of the scrolls.

What Baigent & Leigh discover through their patient interrogation of scholarship, is that the scrolls are much closer to early Christianity than is comfortable for orthodox Christianity, which insists on the uniqueness of Jesus and his message. Thus, as Baigent & Leigh tell us, one can only imagine the reaction of the 'international team' on 'first discovering the seemingly extraordinary parallels between the Qumran texts and what was known of "early Christianity". . . . it must have seemed as though they were handling the spiritual and religious equivalent of dynamite—something that might just conceivably demolish the entire edifice of Christian teaching and belief'.⁴⁰

The truth of the scrolls, as Baigent & Leigh would say, is explosively different to what they call the 'consensus view of the international team'.⁴¹ Far from being a reclusive, quietest, puritan group of pre-Christian Jews, the Qumran community, Baigent & Leigh inform us, was 'equivalent to the "early Church" based in Jerusalem—the "Nazoreans" who followed James, "the Lord's brother"'.⁴² In this Baigent & Leigh follow the etymological arguments of Peter Eisenman, who finds the names of various groups mentioned in various literatures, such as the Ebionites, Zadokites, Nazorites, and Essenes, to be but variations on a theme. Everything is part of everything else.

Thus in first century Palestine we find ourselves with the emergence of a 'kind of fundamentalist dynastic priesthood claiming either genealogical or symbolic descent from Aaron and associated with the expected imminent advent of a Davidic or royal Messiah. This priesthood maintains itself in a state of perpetual self-declared war with the Herodian dynasty, the puppet priests of that dynasty and the occupying Romans. Depending on their activities at a given moment, and the perspective from which they are viewed, the priesthood and its supporters are variously called "Zealots", "Essenes", "Zadokites", "Nazoreans" and a number of other things—including, by their enemies, "brigands" and "outlaws"'.⁴³

To characterize this large and many-faced group, Baigent & Leigh,

when referring to it as a whole, describe its members as those who are 'zealous for the law'. They are, if you like, what came before the Priory of Sion. James is their leader in Jerusalem, and Paul becomes the first Christian heretic, who in all probability was also, we learn, a Roman spy. It was he who created the Christian Church and theology we now know, far from the dynastic interests and martial activities of earliest Christianity. It is thus that Eisenman's research reveals the 'underlying simplicity of what had previously seemed a dauntingly complicated situation'.⁴⁴

For some, the interest of *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception* will reside in its claim to present an alternative account of Christian origins. This is not my present interest. Rather I want to draw attention to the plot of the book, which, I think fairly obviously, repeats the plot of *The Holy Blood*.

In both a collection of texts is discovered, some of which are kept from public view. Both collections of texts are jealously guarded by groups who know the secrets they contain. Both groups are conspiracies. One is the Priory of Sion, the other the 'international team'. Both groups have connections in high places in the Church of Rome. And the Church of Rome has an interest in ensuring that both collections of texts do not come to light. This is because the secrets they contain provide evidence that Jesus and the early Church were not as the Roman Catholic Church, and indeed any orthodox and catholic church, proclaims. Both books reveal what these secrets are. So at this level we are dealing with the same book, the same text.

There are of course differences. The parchments of *The Holy Blood* are highly obscure while the *Dead Sea Scrolls* are by comparison almost public documents. The Priory of Sion has existed for nearly a thousand years while the 'international team' dates from no earlier than 1947. The most important difference is that the secret of one is the bloodline of Jesus while that of the other is the early church as zealous revolutionary movement. One might wonder how both secrets can be conjoined. Baigent & Leigh make no attempt to do so. But I think they can be.

The Jesus of the earlier book was also interested in dynastic claims to power in Palestine, and though his particular attempt to cease it failed, and he and/or his heir(s) had to flee to Europe, his brother James was able to continue the movement at home. That is until Paul began to develop the Christian message in such a way that it ran counter to the actual course of events, and there emerged the Christianity we know, and its shadow, the conspiracy of the Priory of Sion. If the *The Holy Blood* is Baigent & Leigh's re-writing of the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception* represents their re-

writing of the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles of Paul, not to mention the scrolls of Qumran. Together, both books constitute a re-writing of western history. Put like this one cannot but admire the audacity and grandeur of their fiction.

III

In conclusion I want to name the place of Baigent & Leigh's work in contemporary secular culture; if you like, the genre to which it belongs. I shall employ theological categories because, in my vulgar adoption of Milbank's thesis, I picture their work as lying not *beyond* but *within* theology.

If one imagines a cultural map premised on the Christian deviancy of secular reason, the texts of Baigent & Leigh would be located close by those of the Church's earliest heretics, those departing, already at the beginning, from the emerging story of Christian orthodoxy. Baigent & Leigh represent a late return to this earlier form, or, to put it the other way about, a repristination of earlier heresy for modern times.

It is typical that Baigent & Leigh are ahead of me in so placing them. Always the best commentators on their own texts, always dropping clues for the attentive reader as to the drift of their story, Baigent & Leigh, in *The Holy Blood*, admit to being well aware that their research has led to conclusions that are 'heretical, perhaps even blasphemous'.⁴⁵ Baigent & Leigh are also ahead of me in naming their heresy: Gnosticism.

In *The Holy Blood* they describe Gnosticism as 'repudiating the hierarchical structure of Rome and extolling the supremacy of personal illumination over blind faith. Most of them were also, in one sense or another, dualist, regarding good and evil less as mundane ethical problems than as issues of ultimately cosmic import. Finally most of them concurred in regarding Jesus as mortal, born by a natural process of conception—a prophet, divinely inspired perhaps but not intrinsically divine, who died definitively on the cross or who never died on the cross at all'.⁴⁶ Not perhaps the most accurate of descriptions, but one which, apart from the mention of dualism, captures the nature of their own work. But their work is also Gnostic in other ways. It has to do with secrets, with secret societies, with arcane knowledge, with occult names and messages, and above all with secret gospels, with stories of Jesus other than those of the orthodox church.

Gnosticism was the purveyor of secret knowledge, known only to a few. It is the classic form of Christian secrecy. To the insiders everything is known, to the outsiders all is riddles and conundrums. 'To

you has been given the secret of the Kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables; so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand'. So says Jesus in Mark's gospel, and it was used by Gnostic teachers, such as Valentinus in the second century, to validate their own teaching, which they had learned in secret from the apostles. Baigent & Leigh are the outsiders who learn the truth of the parables, who read between the lines and who become insiders. Thus they can also initiate us, their readers, into the secrets of the group, the secret society, the conspiracy.

In the preface to *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception*, Baigent & Leigh liken the 'international team'—who have conspired to foist upon the world the 'consensus view' of the scrolls—to the monastery in Umberto Eco's novel *The Name of the Rose*. For Baigent & Leigh, Eco's monastery, 'and the library within it, reflect the medieval Church's monopoly of learning, constituting a kind of "closed shop", an exclusive "country club" of knowledge from which all but a select few are banned—a select few who are prepared to toe the "party line"'.⁴⁷ If it were not for the sleuthing of our authors, who we are obviously to liken to Eco's William of Baskerville, none of us would be any the wiser, excluded from the inner sanctum and dupes of a malefic conspiracy. There is of course a certain irony in the fact that Eco's detective does not so much uncover a consistent conspiracy as fabricate a coherent pattern from a bewildering array of contained contingencies.⁴⁸ So much for the sleuth turned semiotician.

The writings of Baigent & Leigh constitute a latter day Christian gnostic gospel, offering to reveal the 'mysteries [and the] things hidden in silence' since the beginning, just like the *Apocryphon of John*, the Gnostic text discovered at Nag Hammadi in 1945.⁴⁹ This modern Gnostic gospel is a secular pseudo-sacred text, treated with great reverence by many a post-Christian positivist, who cannot but acquiesce to its claim to be scientific, dispassionate, objective, scholarly. Witness, for example, the seriousness with which Melvyn Bragg and his guests on the BBC Radio 4 programme 'Start the Week' discussed the work of Baigent & Leigh.

But as a modern Gnostic gospel, Baigent & Leigh's secret is entirely dependent upon the gospels of which it is the shadow. If there were not orthodox Christianity Baigent & Leigh's story would be of no interest, not just in the trivial sense that it depends on that which it contests, but in the sense that such a story would never have been told, or could never have been told in the way that it is. It is not possible to imagine the story of Jesus without its invoking and, in a curious return, being invoked by, the canonical gospel stories. This is because the

imagination is sedimentary or genetic, requiring an archaeology or genealogy. The genealogy of Baigent & Leigh is finally Gnostic, and thus their texts deviations within Christian theology. It is thus that secular reason, at the level of imagination, may be more unstable than is generally supposed.⁵⁰

- 1 John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), p.23.
- 2 Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p.3.
- 3 Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p.4.
- 4 Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p.3.
- 5 Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p.3.
- 6 Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p.28.
- 7 Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p.28.
- 8 Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, p.28.
- 9 Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh & Henry Lincoln, *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982).
- 10 Michael Baigent & Richard Leigh, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1991).
- 11 Press release.
- 12 Michael Baigent & Richard Leigh, *The Messianic Legacy* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1986); Michael Baigent & Richard Leigh, *The Temple and the Lodge* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1989). More recently Baigent and Leigh have published *Secret Germany: Claus von Stauffenberg and the Mystical Crusade against Hitler* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994).
- 13 Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, & Henry Lincoln *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* (London: Corgi Books, 1983), pp.2–3.
- 14 Baigent, Leigh & Lincoln, *The Holy Blood* (1983), p.16.
- 15 Baigent & Leigh, *The Dead Seas Scrolls Deception*, p.xix.
- 16 Baigent, Leigh & Lincoln, *The Holy Blood* (1983), p.25.
- 17 Baigent, Leigh & Lincoln, *The Holy Blood* (1983), p.106.
- 18 Baigent, Leigh & Lincoln, *The Holy Blood* (1983), p.133.
- 19 Baigent, Leigh & Lincoln, *The Holy Blood* (1983), p.244.
- 20 Baigent, Leigh & Lincoln, *The Holy Blood* (1983), p.281.
- 21 Baigent, Leigh & Lincoln, *The Holy Blood* (1983), p.291.
- 22 Baigent, Leigh & Lincoln, *The Holy Blood* (1983), p.328.
- 23 Baigent, Leigh & Lincoln, *The Holy Blood* (1983), p.328.
- 24 Baigent, Leigh & Lincoln, *The Holy Blood* (1983), p.329.
- 25 Baigent, Leigh & Lincoln, *The Holy Blood* (1983), pp.346–9.
- 26 Baigent, Leigh & Lincoln, *The Holy Blood* (1983), p.355.
- 27 Baigent, Leigh & Lincoln, *The Holy Blood* (1983), pp.365–6.
- 28 Baigent, Leigh & Lincoln, *The Holy Blood* (1983), p.366.
- 29 Baigent, Leigh & Lincoln, *The Holy Blood* (1983), p.371.
- 30 Baigent, Leigh & Lincoln, *The Holy Blood* (1983), p.375.
- 31 Baigent, Leigh & Lincoln, *The Holy Blood* (1983), p.377.
- 32 Baigent & Leigh, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception*, p.xvii.
- 33 Baigent & Leigh, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception*, p.xvii. Robert Eisenman's principal works are *James the Just in the Habakkuk Peshar* (Marra Editore Cosenza, 1984), and *Maccabees, Zadokites, Christians and Qumran* (Leiden: Brill, 1986). Eisenman, who is the 'American hero' of Baigent & Leigh's book, 'having published two small, poorly argued and widely unread monographs, is naturally "a foremost

expert in biblical archaeology and scholarship” (Peter Jones, ‘A Case of Publish and be Damned’, *The Times Saturday Review*, 18 May 1991, p.22). More recently Eisenman, with Michael Wise, has published *Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered: First Complete Translation and Interpretation of 50 Key Documents Withheld for Over 35 Years* (Element Books, 1992). Of related interest to the work of Eisenman, Baigent & Leigh is Barbara Thiering, *Jesus and the Riddle of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Unlocking the Secret of His Life Story* (Toronto: Doubleday, 1992). All these writers, like other scholars, suffer the pathos of belatedness: they want to be first on the scene with the real story of Jesus from Nazareth

- 34 See John Allegro, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Reappraisal* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1956); J. T. Milik, *Ten Years of Discovery in the Wilderness of Judea* (London, 1959); A. Dupont-Sommer, *The Essene Writings from Qumran* (Oxford, 1961); G. R. Driver, *The Judean Scrolls* (Oxford, 1965); and Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975). See also Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Responses to 101 Questions on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1993).
- 35 John Ray, ‘Re-covering the Texts’, *Times Literary Supplement*, 24 May 1991, p.27. The collaborator who went ‘freelance’ and wrote about ‘hallucinogenic mushrooms’ was John Allegro, who in 1970 published *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross*; and the ‘former chief editor’ is John Strugnell.
- 36 Quoted in Edward Rothstein, ‘The Battle of the Scrolls’, *The Independent Magazine*, 18 May 1991, p.29.
- 37 Robert Davidson & A. R. C. Leaney, *The Pelican Guide to Modern Theology, Volume 3, Biblical Criticism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), p.172. See further P. R. Davies, *Qumran* (London, 1982), and Philip R. Callaway, *A History of the Qumran Community: An Introduction* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988).
- 38 Baigent & Leigh, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception*, p.99.
- 39 Baigent & Leigh, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception*, pp.122–5. On Kung and Schillebeeckx see further Peter Hebblethwaite, *The New Inquisition? Schillebeeckx and Kung* (London: Collins, 1980).
- 40 Baigent & Leigh, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception*, pp.136–7.
- 41 Baigent & Leigh, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception*, p.165.
- 42 Baigent & Leigh, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception*, p.174.
- 43 Baigent & Leigh, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception*, p.207.
- 44 Baigent & Leigh, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception*, p.199.
- 45 Baigent, Leigh & Lincoln, *The Holy Blood* (1983), pp.432–3.
- 46 Baigent, Leigh & Lincoln, *The Holy Blood* (1983), p.406.
- 47 Baigent & Leigh, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception*, p.xviii. See Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, translated by William Weaver (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980).
- 48 I have to thank Dr Dermot Killingley for bringing to my attention both the similarity and the irony between Baigent & Leigh’s secret ‘gospel’ and Eco’s semiotic/detective novel.
- 49 See Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1980), p.15.
- 50 An earlier version of this article was read to the Conference on the Sociology of Sacred Texts at the University of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, July 1991. I express my gratitude to those who discussed the paper with me at the time, in particular Ms Elisabeth Erdman-Visser, Dr Peter Hayman, Dr Dermot Killingley, Mrs Iren Lovasz and Dr Helmut Waldmann.