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### More Light, Less Heat

Is it about heresies, da Vinci, witches or the Baptist? Who can really tell... but the Devil, in this case, is not in the detail

The Secret History of Lucifer

The Ancient Path to Knowledge and the Real Da Vinci Code

Lynn Picknett

Constable & Robinson

Hb, 304pp, illus, notes, bib, ind, £16.99, ISBN 1841199389

Dan Brown's "The Da Vinci Code" is still introducing many people to conspiracy theories, alternative history and occult ideas. Inevitably, books based on similar ideas are showing up on bookstore shelves, alongside classics such as "Holy Blood, Holy Grail".

Readers of "The Da Vinci Code" or its ilk will not be surprised by the content of "The Secret History of Lucifer: The Ancient Path to Knowledge and the Real Da Vinci Code".

Lynn Picknett, author of "Mary Magdalene: Christianity's Hidden Goddess" and co-author of "The Templar Revelation: Secret Guardians of the True Identity of Christ", has a penchant for lengthy subtitles and alternative viewpoints on religion and culture. "Lucifer" touches upon creation myths, the gospels and apocrypha, Leonardo da Vinci, witchhunts and (in)famous occultists.

Picknett states in her introduction that: "A belief in the Devil and his faithful has caused more agony, terror and evil in the world than any true Satanism." Lucifer, the spirit of knowledge and progress, is often misunderstood and twisted into something evil.

Lucifer and Satan are not the same: dogmatists have misdiagnosed and anthropomorphised Satan as Evil. Pan evolved, similarly, from a groovy natural force to a model for Christianity's Devil.

Picknett suggests that Mary Magdalene was Jesus's lover, disciple and intended successor; and that St Peter smeared her name after Jesus's death. Throughout "Lucifer", she touches on the female, disparaged by male-dominated ideologies from Eve to Mary Magdalene and witch

burnings, and contrasts early polytheistic religions with a monotheistic male god.

Picknett also gives readers a heads-up on John the Baptist. Jesus was John's disciple and stole his ideas. The Holy Grail is the platter on which John's head rested. The Cathars owned his head, and worshipped him as the Morning Star.

Picknett, unlike modern Christians, views Jesus as a necromancer, sex magician and as the usurper of John the Baptist. According to her, Leonardo da Vinci also believed that John the Baptist was much superior to Jesus, and she finds examples in da Vinci's sketches and paintings to support this theory. For example, da Vinci's sketch for The Virgin and Child with St Anne shows Jesus (who looks like a maggot) poised to slap John the Baptist. A severed head is hidden in the background. I found many of the author's artistic observations difficult to accept.

Not only is da Vinci a true Luciferian spirit who placed subliminal messages about John the Baptist in his works, he also created the Shroud of Turin and placed his own image on it. Picknett also declares with utmost certainty that da Vinci was homosexual, which has not been proven.

From da Vinci's heretical leanings we go to the always painful Inquisition and witch trials, with lots of information about torture and injustice. Women, again, are the evil ones here. "Lucifer" ends with standard information on the occultists Dee and Crowley, and a nicely written epilogue.

Despite its research, facts and interpretations, "Lucifer" feels unfocused. Is it about Christian heresies, Leonardo da Vinci, witchhunts, the misrepresentation of women, or John the Baptist?

Readers might become dizzy from jumping back and forth in time, and between regions and religions.

The facts, many of them unreferenced, are relentless. Any one of the book's many major ideas could be an entire work unto itself – if, that is, enough information exists for it to be written.

Some of the facts are simply wrong: 25 students were not killed in the Columbine High School shootings of 1999; 15 perished, including the two shooters. This is admittedly a small error, but does not help Picknett's

credibility. Her interpretation of artwork is also unconvincing; you need a lot of imagination to make out the severed heads and phalluses.

Warts aside, “The Secret History of Lucifer” is not a bad read, and some people really enjoy books like these – which is fine.

The facts and alternative ideas are fun, but until books like these have clearer specifics, better references, and more focused arguments, it might be wiser to read them for entertainment rather than to find hidden truths.

Mike Pursley

FORTEAN TIMES VERDICT  
LOTS OF INFORMATION (AT TIMED UNFOCUSED), BUT FUN