

JESUS' TOMB NOT FOUND; CAMERON'S "TITANIC FRAUD"

On March 4, "Titanic" director James Cameron and TV-director Simcha Jacobovici released what they called a documentary on the Discovery Channel claiming they have evidence of a Jerusalem tomb that allegedly houses the remains of Jesus and his family. In the week prior to the showing, Bill Donohue hit the air waves challenging what he dubbed a "Titanic Fraud."

Not a Lenten season goes by without some author or TV program seeking to cast doubt on the divinity of Jesus and/or the Resurrection. Last April, NBC's "Dateline" featured the wholly discredited and downright laughable claims of Michael Baigent, and two years ago ABC treated us to a special that questioned every aspect of the Resurrection. This year we have the Cameron-Jacobovici thesis.

Israeli archeologist Amos Kloner was in charge of the 1980 investigation of the tomb that Cameron-Jacobovici have seized on 27 years later to make their allegations. "The claim that the burial site has been found is not based on any proof, and is only an attempt to sell," Kloner said. He added, "I refute all claims and efforts to waken a renewed interest in the findings. With all due respect, they are not archeologists." Indeed, Kloner branded their claims "impossible" and "nonsense." Moreover, he said there is "no likelihood" that Jesus and his relatives had a family tomb. "It makes a great story for a TV film," he concluded.

Joe Zias, who spent a quarter-century at Rockefeller University as an archeologist, said that "Simcha has no credibility whatsoever." Zias wasn't shooting from the hip: Jacobovici's credibility explodes when one considers that he still believes the 2002 tale about an ossuary with the inscription, "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus." On June

18, 2003, an Israel Antiquities Authority committee unanimously condemned this claim as a modern forgery. Agreeing with this decision were Harvard's Frank Cross and Tel Aviv University professor Edward Greenstein.

Cameron and Jacobovici not only were criticized by people like Donohue, but by Christian theologians and Jewish archeologists. Indeed, they received almost no support from anyone.

Fortunately, the media gave the league the opportunity to frame the issue as a seasonal attack on Christianity that occurs during Lent.