

SCIENCE CHANNEL RESURRECTS JESUS' TOMB HOAX

Bill Donohue

The Science Channel has an Easter gift for Christians: It is resurrecting the Jesus tomb hoax first perpetrated ten years ago. "Biblical Conspiracies: Jesus Family Tomb?" airs on April 15 at 10:00 p.m.

The program probes the "potentially explosive" finding regarding the "Jesus family tomb." If the claims were validated, it would mean that Christians must rethink the Resurrection. As it turns out, there is nothing to rethink. But the Science Channel needs to rethink its reputation lest it be dubbed the Superstition Channel.

The show is produced by Associated Producers for the Science Channel. Conveniently, Simcha Jacobovici is the executive producer for Associated Producers. He is described in the Science Channel press release as a "biblical historian"; he narrates the film.

Jacobovici is not a historian, nor does he have any credentials as an archeologist. He is a filmmaker who dabbles in areas where he has no expertise. Worse, his previous work has been discredited by experts in Israel, Europe, and the United States.

In 2007, Jacobovici co-authored a book with Charles Pellegrino, *The Jesus Family Tomb*, that claimed the Jesus family tomb had been found. The Foreword to the book was written by James Cameron, of "Titanic" fame. He said the authors succeeded in their efforts "beyond any reasonable doubt." On CNN, I told him he was promoting a "Titanic" fraud.

When I debated Pellegrino on the "Today" show, I told him

“there’s not one citation in the book, there’s not one footnote, there’s not one endnote. Both of us have doctorates. We know the way science proceeds. You go through a peer review or you present your findings in a scientific journal. James Cameron was right—he said this reads like a detective novel because it is a novel.”

I was wrong about one thing. I later found out that Pellegrino does not have a doctorate: Victoria University said he was never awarded a Ph.D.

The Jacobovici-Pellegrino-Cameron claim extends back to 1980 when Israeli archeologist Amos Kloner led a probe of the tomb that they seized on 27 years later. “The claim that the burial site has been found is not based on any proof,” he said, “and is only an attempt to sell. I refute all claims and efforts to waken a renewed interest in the findings. With all due respect, they are not archeologists.”

Many experts ripped apart their thesis in 2007. David Mevorah, curator of the Israel Museum, said, the chances of the filmmaker’s claim being true “are more than remote...They are closer to fantasy.” William Dever, archeologist and professor emeritus at the University of Arizona, said that “It looks more like a publicity stunt than any kind of real discovery...They’re not scholars. They are not experts.”

“It’s what I would call ‘archeo-porn’” commented Jonathan Reed, professor of religion at the University of La Verne. Garrett G. Fagan at Penn State said, “Modern architects of fantastic finds try to provide an air of legitimacy by invoking scientific jargon. They’re not scientists but they need to dress themselves in the clothes of science to pass muster.”

Alan Segal, professor of religion at Barnard College, raised some indisputable points. “The New Testament is very clear on this. Jesus was put in a tomb that didn’t belong to him and

then he rose and there was nothing left. Why would Jesus' family have a tomb outside of Jerusalem if they were from Nazareth? Why would they have a tomb if they were poor?"

Ted Koppel moderated a panel discussion on a Discovery Channel film on this subject and concluded, "This is drama. This is not journalism."

In 2008, Princeton professor James Charlesworth held a Jerusalem conference that brought together over 50 scientists to discuss this issue. No one was persuaded that there was any breakthrough. Charlesworth questioned, if this really were Jesus' ossuary, would the followers of the person they believed was the Son of God leave an inscription of Jesus' name that was merely "graffiti, just scratching"? Why was there "no ornamentation"? And why would the followers of the Son of God choose such a "lousy" looking tomb?

The only veneer of authenticity about this program is Simcha Jacobovici's hat: he is still wearing that stupid same flat cap he wore when I debated him a decade ago. Time to move on, Simcha, in more ways than one.