

Dear Wes,

11/7/89

Sounds like a great book. I've already asked some who use the local libraries, city and Ft. Detrick, to ask them to get it. I'm a friend of the local manager of the local Walden stores and when I see her I'll suggest it to her.

And if everything goes as I'd like it in about a month or so I'll be getting a copy. I'm by no means an authority on that period but I've been reading about it off and on for years. From the time the first of the scrolls was deciphered.

And I've been sort of feuding with Roy Meacham. You may remember him from the Post and what was called criticism of the theater on WRC-TV. He's moved up here and has been heavily engaged in anti-Semitism and Israel-bashing in the local papers, which are not very much but apparently like that hate mongering. He regards us all as yokels and his stuff often is hurried and trashy. Aside from false. Anyway, that business also got me interested in the period of which you write all over again.

Your letter was waiting when I got back from Johns Hopkins. There for an evaluation and recommendation because there was something of a conflict between my family doctor, who regards me as a poor surgery risk, and the cardiologist, who wants to begin with catheterization. The Hopkins cardiologist agrees with the local one and as of now it will be about Thanksgiving week. He expects me out and OK to proceed with a seminar I have every year at Hood College (Have you ever spoken there?) Political assassinations are a history/political science course there, hat any whodunit, the prof is a dear friend and each course closes with this seminar. I enjoy it and (says he, boasting unashamedly) the professors, who say they have trouble holding student attention for an hour, are amazed that this old man has done it for up to six, last time, an extra one Columbus Day, 4 hours and 40 minutes, I'm 76 now and old in body, anyway. It is both surprising and meaningful how much the bright students get from this course in terms of general education, making their own analyses, etc. I never get a nutty question. Anyway, the Hopkins authority appears to be optimistic for the first step or I'd have to cancel the seminar, scheduled for 12/7.

I suppose if I gave it much thought I could come up with some potential column items but as you may not recall, each time in the past I had a purpose, never self-promotion. I've not been thinking of them lately, haven't gotten any new and spectacular records (they continue to stonewall me), so as of now I've nothing in mind. I'll write if I get something interesting.

Lots of luck with the book. Sounds like a great idea and I hope the opposition of the offended extremists helps sell it.

Best,

Wd

Dear Hal - Don't buy. Even \$16 a Crown is a ball-breaker.

This is surely the first time I have ever written this kind of note. But I have put my life and thought, such as they are, into this book. And (see reverse for first comments), it seems to have worked. I spent more time (five years) and concentration on this than any other; I was well-served by my editors, a rarity these days. Novelist-pals and other friends helped me in editing, advice, research. I will never be a Kazantzakis or a Werfel, but I can do no better than The Lost Disciple. If I fail to do all I can to push it, I will feel as if I had let down an unusually gifted child.

It is also visually the most beautiful of my thirteen books. The cover (again see reverse) is in rich reds, warm grays; the two maps are meticulously reproduced. Atheneum did itself proud, spent handsomely in producing it; but it is not a rich company, and it is not, alas, spending much to advertise it.

So, with some embarrassment, I am urging my book on you like any other common peddler. I recognize that \$19.95 is just too much for many of us, me included. But let me suggest that it is a super Christmas or other gift in the \$20 range. If you cannot spring for the price, God knows I will understand. But PLEASE lean on your local library desk until they order it. If you like it, please ask your friends to do the same at their libraries, or to order it at their book shops or as I am about to propose:

Politics & Prose, a real book store is eating some of its profit by charging only \$1 for handling, packaging and UPSing it (it should be \$4), a total of \$20.95. Or just drop by the store if you are near. When P & P gets your order I will go by there and inscribe the book or books to you or whomever you wish. As many of you know, I am a thoughtful inscriber, not just a "best wishes-er." The form should be workable. If not, call me at 301-593-5943. Or for info or to order by phone, call Politics & Prose, 202-364-1919. Of course, if you get The Lost Disciple elsewhere, that's fine. Send it to me with a return stamped mailer and I will inscribe it, or if you are near, I can meet you somewhere. But I'd pick Politics & Prose who, let me say, I chose and who is not paying for this pitch.

Best, Les Whitten

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THE LOST DISCIPLE:

The Book of Demas
 Leslie H. Whitten Jr. Atheneum, \$19.95
 ISBN 0-689-12040-0

Whitten, prize-winning reporter and author (*A Day Without Sunshine*), here imaginatively reconstructs the tumultuous career of Demas, a disciple of the Apostle Paul, who is mentioned only three times in the New Testament. According to his record in the fictional Thessalonian Apograph, Demas was the well-born son of Roman-Jewish parents who turned reluctantly to the teachings of Jesus as they were articulated by a young woman whom he later married, and by other followers of Christianity in the Roman province of Judea. Both attracted and repelled by the charismatic Paul, a "scolding runt ... and the bearer of words about love," Demas struggles with his identity, and with his ambivalence about the Jesus story, eventually leaving Paul to follow his own mission. Richly embroidered scenes of violence, lust and eroticism capture the colorful early panorama of the Middle East as Whitten weaves his powerful story about a provocative, tirelessly questioning voyager.

Also, The New Republic: Paul and Demas make "...a fine counterpoint ... Whitten has done a lot of research to convey the sights, sounds and smells of the ancient world..."

Kirkus Reviews: "...Demas' barbaric adventures are compelling..."

Advertising Age: Whitten is a "terrific novelist."

A disciple's quest for the real Jesus

Reviewed by Patrick Reardon.
 A Tribune reporter

The "Lost Disciple" is a book of faith that will scandalize many believers. It is a novel that asserts that many of the miracles attributed to Jesus were not miraculous, that Jesus probably did not rise from the dead, that Jesus might not be the son of God, that Jesus was not as censorious about sins of the flesh as his later interpreters, particularly Paul of Tarsus. In fact, at one point in the

Books

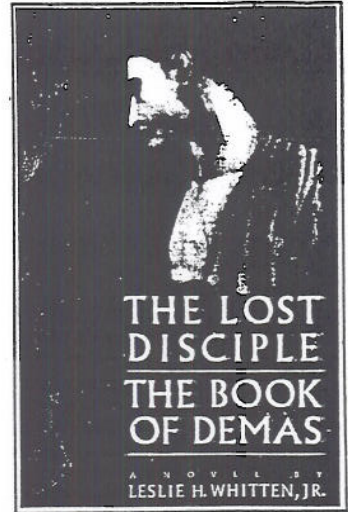
book, Mary Magdalene says that, as a young man, Jesus had an affair with a widow in Nazareth.

Many devout followers of Jesus will be troubled by these assertions, which run sharply counter to traditional Christian teachings. Some will be angered by the novel and see it as an assault on their beliefs. Some will dismiss Whitten as a heretic—at best, misguided, at worst, evil-minded.

Yet, for all its unorthodoxy, "The Lost Disciple" appears to be one man's sincere and heart-felt attempt to come to grips with the meaning and message of Jesus.

The man is Leslie H. Whitten Jr., a former investigative reporter who now writes political thrillers and has also published a translation of "Les Fleurs du Mal" ("Flowers of Evil") by the once-notorious French poet Charles Baudelaire.

In a news release from his publishers, Whitten describes himself as a Christian "who prays and is trying to be a better person, mainly by not hurting other people. One who is moved almost to tears, and by love, every time I take the Communion, the wine and the bread."



The protagonist of Whitten's novel is Demas, a half-Roman, half-Jewish lawyer in 1st-Century Palestine whose life becomes intertwined with the lives of the early leaders of Christianity—Paul, Peter and most of the other original Apostles.

Demas, like Whitten, has a career that takes him throughout his world and brings him into contact with many levels of society. And, like Whitten, Demas has the skills of a dogged detective, abilities he uses to locate and interview eyewitnesses and to sift evidence in his search for the truth about Jesus.

This could make for heavy sledding, but with an artisan's skill, Whitten weaves his religious speculations together with refreshingly human portraits of the early church fathers, fine historical detail and compelling earnestness.

Still, a reader doesn't need to agree with Whitten's answers to acknowledge the importance of his questions.

(ChiTrib:condensed to fit)

The Library Journal

Whitten, Leslie H., Jr. *The Lost Disciple: The Book of Demas*.

Atheneum. Oct. 1989.
 ISBN 0-689-12040-0. \$19.95.

The same story is different when told by two, three, or four storytellers, as Whitten shows in relating the Jesus history as told by the men who wrote the books of the New Testament. Myth, mysticism, fact, are told through the eyes of the very human men who recorded this history. Whitten excels as reporter and storyteller in his well-researched chronicle of Demas, the Lost Disciple (mentioned three times in the New Testament). Men's observations of history are revealed as inseparable from their own dogmatic egos. Whitten's brilliance is in his observation of how little humanity has evolved over 20 centuries of interpreting prophets and politics. Highly recommended.—M. J. Hethcote, San Francisco, Cal.

"Superb historic novels require the skills of the translator, the storyteller, the historian. In writing *The Lost Disciple*, Leslie Whitten has applied the gift for insight that has made him an outstanding translator, his power as a storyteller, manifest in his earlier fiction, and a relentless search for historic evidence. His book and his hero, Demas, the half-Roman, half-Jewish voyager in the sunrise of Christianity, are magnificent—a truly spiritual as well as literary achievement."

—Roderick MacLeish
 author, critic, journalist

"In demythologizing the men around Jesus, Leslie Whitten makes them warm, human, believable. In re-creating their world, he gives us insight into how faith ruled politics in Middle Eastern societies in their times—and in ours."

—Milton Viorst
 author and Mideast correspondent
 for *The New Yorker*