

THE DA VINCI CODE:
IS
CHRISTIANITY
TRUE?

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INTRODUCTION

Dan Brown's book *The Da Vinci Code*, released in 2003, with the movie to open May 18, 2006 with Tom Hanks in the lead role, has sold more than 30 million copies worldwide and has had a significant influence on the popular imagination about Jesus and Christianity.¹ This is due in part to the sensationalist mix of characters interwoven in the plot of Brown's novel. It is also a function of the way in which the book taps into "alternative" scholarship on Jesus and the early church by the "Jesus Seminar" and other writers on Jesus, Gnosticism, and feminism.

The Da Vinci Code raises several important questions that have a direct bearing on the nature and truthfulness of Christianity: Was Jesus God? Was Jesus married? Are the Gospels reliable? Is the Bible true? Did Christianity arise to suppress women, or, as Brown calls it, "the sacred feminine"? In this brief booklet, we will take a closer look at some of the alleged "historical facts" in Brown's novel to see whether his claims, such as Jesus' marriage to Mary Magdalene, can be sustained by responsible historical research.²

For those who haven't read the book (and have no intention to see the movie) but who still want to be used by God to engage the various claims concerning the nature of Christianity made by *The Da Vinci Code*, it will be helpful to begin with a brief summary of the plot of the work. This will be followed by a discussion of the book's relevance and an assessment of each of the six major claims set forth by Dan Brown's novel, followed by an overall conclusion regarding the truthfulness of these claims.

Plot Summary

While in Paris on business, Harvard symbolologist Robert Langdon receives an urgent late-night phone call. The elderly curator of the Louvre has been murdered inside the museum.

Near the body, police have found a baffling cipher. In his quest to solve the enigmatic riddle, Langdon is stunned to discover that it leads to a trail of clues hidden in the works of da Vinci, clues visible for all to see, and yet ingeniously disguised by the painter.

Langdon joins forces with a gifted French cryptologist, Sophie Neveu, and learns that the late curator was involved in the Priory of Sion, a secret society whose members included Sir Isaac Newton, Botticelli, Victor Hugo, and da Vinci, among others. The curator has sacrificed his life to protect the Priory's most sacred trust: the location of a vastly important religious relic, hidden for centuries.

In a breathless race through Paris, London, and other European locations, the pair match wits with a faceless powerbroker who appears to work for Opus Dei, a clandestine, Vatican-sanctioned Catholic sect believed to have long plotted to seize the Priory's secret. Unless Langdon and Neveu can decipher the labyrinthine puzzle in time, the Priory's secret—and a stunning historical truth—will be lost forever.

As the inside cover teases, readers are treated to:

- A mind-bending code hidden in the works of Leonardo da Vinci
- A desperate race through the cathedrals and castles of Europe
- An astonishing truth, concealed for centuries, unveiled, at last

A mind-bending code in the works of Leonardo da Vinci? A desperate race through Europe? (Somehow this brings to mind the experience of American tourists "doing Europe" in a week.) An astonishing truth, concealed for centuries, unveiled at last? The code, the race, and the truth all center on the "revelation" that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene, and that the two had a child, a daughter named Sarah, eventually issuing in the bloodline of the Merovingians, a French

royal dynasty. Astonishing, to be sure—but true?

Fact or Fiction?

For many, the immediate reaction may be to shrug off claims such as these by noting that, transparently, *The Da Vinci Code* is merely a novel, with obvious embellishments of the truth as are to be expected in this kind of genre. Why take these claims seriously and seek to refute them on the basis of historical evidence, some may argue, when it may be better simply to enjoy the book, well-written as it is, for its entertainment value?

This, however, would be easier to do if Dan Brown were not strenuously maintaining that his book is not merely fiction but fact, which considerably raises the ante regarding his claims. In fact, page 1 of *The Da Vinci Code* contains the astonishing assertion: “All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate.” And the New York Daily News, cited on Dan Brown’s own website, says, “His research is impeccable.”³ Is it?

Amy Bernstein, in *Secrets of the Da Vinci Code*, thinks not. She writes, “For while all the plot inventions in *The Da Vinci Code* add up to a reckless joy ride through pseudo-history, those in possession of the actual facts will continue to present him with some hefty speeding tickets. But Dan Brown already knows that the revenues derived from his book sales will certainly pay for them.”⁴

As it turns out, even much of the non-biblical information in the book is demonstrably inaccurate:

- There is no evidence for the encoding of symbols in Leonardo da Vinci’s paintings.
- The Priory of Sion is not a medieval organization.
- The Council of Nicea did not discuss the Christian canon, much less replace

the Gospel of Thomas and other apocryphal Gospels with the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

The demonstrable inaccuracies in Brown’s presentation of non-biblical data, therefore, do not inspire confidence in the quality of his research when biblical information is at stake. As will be seen, not only does Brown largely rely on secondary sources, the primary sources he cites are late and unreliable documents that in no way match the biblical records themselves with regard to accuracy, authenticity, or credibility.

Not only does Brown’s novel present a largely revisionist account of history, *The Da Vinci Code* essentially adopts a postmodern perspective of reality. As Brown writes, “[H]istory is always written by the winners . . . the winner writes the history books. As Napoleon once said, ‘What is history, but a fable agreed upon?’”⁵ In its cavalier approach to history, *The Da Vinci Code* is by no means alone. In fact, the novel is part of an increasing trend of blurring fact and fiction in which conventional genre categories are blurred if not entirely disregarded and where writers invent parts of their biographical or autobiographical accounts with impunity.

Albert Mohler cites the example of Pulitzer Prize-winning historian and biographer Edmund Morris and his 1999 biography of Ronald Reagan, *Dutch*.⁶ Morris openly acknowledges that it was his intention to capture Reagan’s essence by a mixture of historical narrative, biographical interpretation, and fiction. The publisher of the book, Random House, even had the audacity to advertise the book as Morris telling the truth “in an altogether new way.” (This, incidentally, is not going to work for my children—making up a story about why, say, they hit their brother or sister and then claiming they are “telling the truth in a new way”!))

Another recent instance of this phenomenon

is James Frey's bestselling book *A Million Little Pieces*, a "book of the month" choice by Oprah Winfrey. Even though in his book, Frey is "Bending the Truth in a Million Little Ways" (and some not so little ones), the publisher, Doubleday, chose to market the book as a memoir rather than a novel.⁷ Frey, who exaggerates his predicament prior to his subsequent "redemption" to render the latter more impressive, justified his embellishments of the truth by asserting, cavalierly, that the "writer of a memoir is retailing a subjective story," by which he apparently means that events "retold" in an autobiography need not actually have taken place, even though, it may be pointed out, this has the deceptive effect of misleading one's audience.⁸

A third and final case in point is E. L. Doctorow's new novel *The March*, where the author freely concedes that, among other things, he made up a condolence letter from General Sherman to General Hardee after the latter, like Sherman, lost a son.⁹ Mr. Doctorow claims that his books are rooted in history without being weighed down by facts. "I'm always being asked how I have the temerity to do what I do, which is make things up," he said.¹⁰ It is indeed troubling that this author sells fiction as fact, but at least he admits that he made things up. By contrast, Dan Brown still insists that everything in his book is not fiction but fact.

Many more examples could be given,¹¹ but perhaps it is the statement by the owner of the Chateau de Villette, one of the sites mentioned in the book, that best sums up the prevailing postmodern spirit of the age with regard to the subjective nature of truth. He has the following to say about *The Da Vinci Code*: "The book is fiction," the owner conceded, "but it's based on truth."¹² Hence the claim by some that a conspiracy theory such as the one underlying *The Da Vinci Code* may be false in the details but still true in the overall reconstruction of the facts.¹³ This is twisted logic indeed.

Not that Brown did significant research in the primary sources. In fact, little in *The Da Vinci Code* is original. As mentioned, Brown draws extensively on a 1982 non-fiction book, *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln, whose underlying documents have been proven a hoax. He also relies significantly on two books by Margaret Starbird, a lapsed Catholic and self-proclaimed heretic, *The Goddess in the Gospels: Reclaiming the Sacred Feminine* and *The Woman with the Alabaster Jar: Mary Magdalene and the Holy Grail*.

Similar to the creator of the now-canceled NBC series "The Book of Daniel," who expressed dismay over the Christian outrage concerning the blasphemous and offensive nature of his series, Brown professes surprise at the negative reaction to his novel by many believers. Brown says his purpose is merely to raise questions to facilitate discussion. But the book is not quite as neutral as Brown claims. For example, he alleges that "the New Testament is based on fabrications" (though this is not a problem, because faith, in its very essence, is the "acceptance of that which we imagine to be true, that which we cannot prove"),¹⁴ and one of the main characters in the book remarks caustically that "almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false."¹⁵

An Analogy

For those who have not read the book, and have no intention of doing so, an analogy, told by Paul Maier, professor of ancient history at Western Michigan University, may help to appreciate the genre represented by Brown's novel.¹⁶ Here is the story as told by Maier:

Imagine that someone were to write a novel about George Washington, the nation's founder, rather than Jesus Christ, the church's founder. At the

start, the author assures the reader that all his material is based on fact, then goes on to present the following scenario:

While doing research at Mount Vernon into the life of the father of our country, a veteran scholar is murdered. While dying, he leaves a long trail of intricate clues for his granddaughter and a friend so that they might avenge his death. After solving the clues despite their Byzantine complexity, the two finally learn an awful truth: George Washington was really a member of a secret society that worshiped King George III of England and his queen, Charlotte Sophia. In fact, the reason for the American reverses early in the Revolutionary War was that Washington, a true but clandestine Tory, was secretly communicating Colonial war plans to the British via Benedict Arnold, Washington's secret illegitimate son. At Yorktown, while awaiting a British support fleet, Washington was preparing to surrender to Cornwallis, but when De Grasse arrived with his fleet of French ships to aid the American side, Washington had to accept Cornwallis's surrender instead.

At the end of his life, Washington's conscience got the better of him, and he wrote a confession that was buried with him in his tomb at Mount Vernon. The scholar who discovered it was then murdered by the CIA, who feared that his find would destroy the patriotic mystique of America's founding father and demoralize the country. When the FBI and CIA learn that the granddaughter and her friend know the awful truth, an all-points bulletin is issued for the pair. After a harrowing series of misadventures, the two escape capture. But no, they will not reveal the "truth" about Washington either.

As Maier concludes, "Readers with only a smattering of knowledge about American history but a great appetite for conspiracy might well buy into such worthless madness, since it contains just enough tangential truth—real people, real places, real situations—to be credible. While the parallel with *The Da Vinci Code* is certainly imperfect, Dan Brown has accomplished a very similar hoax, successful largely because so many today have 'only a smattering knowledge' about Jesus and Christianity."¹⁷

We turn now to a summary and assessment of some of the specific claims made by *The Da Vinci Code*.

Specific Claims

What are some of the more significant claims set forth in *The Da Vinci Code*? We will single out the following six theses which are among the most important and central to the book:

1. *JESUS IS NOT GOD*: The Church did not recognize Jesus as divine until the fourth century A.D. at the Council of Nicea. Jesus' elevation to divinity was a ploy concocted by Emperor Constantine designed to consolidate his power in the Byzantine Empire.
2. *JESUS WAS MARRIED AND HAD A CHILD*: The Church suppressed evidence of Jesus' secret marriage to Mary Magdalene and the birth of their offspring, a daughter named Sarah, in order to cement its own ecclesiastical power. Mary was pregnant at the time of the crucifixion and later moved to France.
3. *THE FOUR GOSPELS ARE NOT RELIABLE AND WERE LATE IN BEING ACCEPTED INTO THE CANON*: The four canonical Gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John - were only accepted into the canon in the fourth century A.D. in the place of the earlier and more reliable Gnostic Gospels.

4. *THE "DA VINCI CODE"*: Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting, *The Last Supper*, features Mary Magdalene, not the apostle John, at Jesus' right hand, which proves that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene. This is one of several hidden codes Leonardo concealed in the painting.
5. *CHRISTIANITY SUPPRESSED THE "SACRED FEMININE"*: Jesus intended Mary Magdalene, not Peter, to be the one through whom his legacy was carried forward, but the early church, owing to a bias against women, suppressed the "evidence" of Jesus' marriage to Mary Magdalene and elevated Peter instead.
6. *THE PRIORY OF SION, A MEDIEVAL ORGANIZATION, GUARDED THE "SECRET" OF JESUS' MARRIAGE TO MARY MAGDALENE*: This society was allegedly founded in Europe in 1099 and boasted men such as Isaac Newton, Victor Hugo, and Leonardo da Vinci among its members.

Why Bother?

Before engaging these claims in light of the best available historical evidence, we must briefly address one possible objection by those who don't believe in the conspiracy theory underlying *The Da Vinci Code* but who see little value in confronting its claims. "What does it matter?" some may say. "Why bother to set the record straight with regard to a work that is transparently a work of fiction, not historical fact?" However, there are several important reasons why it would be ill-advised to ignore the phenomenon *The Da Vinci Code* has become:

- More than 36 million copies of the book have been sold and, as men-

tioned, a movie, with Tom Hanks in the starring role and Ron Howard as director, is scheduled to be released May 13, 2006. The book has had a vast influence on popular culture; the movie will further extend this influence in vast proportions. As Dan Brown's own website modestly states, *The Da Vinci Code* "has become one of the most widely read books of all time."

- TIME magazine named Dan Brown one of "The World's 100 Most Influential People."
- This is a God-given opportunity to talk to people about the Bible and about Jesus Christ. Christians have a scriptural mandate to defend the Christian faith in every generation (cf. Jude 3).
- Biblically informed believers have an obligation to educate those who are unaware of the scriptural teaching on the subject. Owing to widespread biblical illiteracy, many are genuinely ignorant about what the Bible says. As Laurie Goodstein writes in a *New York Times* piece, "there is evidence that Mr. Brown's novel may be shaping the beliefs of a generation that is famously biblically illiterate."¹⁸

But why not just appreciate the book as a well-written novel that is transparently fiction and not worry about some of the inaccurate information in the book? Apart from fact that the book is blasphemous and slanderous of the reputation of numerous people, including Jesus, Mary Magdalene, Constantine, da Vinci, Newton, and others, there are additional reasons why we should care. Thus the novel seeks to reinforce the notion that the Church is deceptive, the Bible is full of fiction, Jesus is not God, and so on. In all these respects it is important to set the record straight.

Also, as mentioned, *The Da Vinci Code* is not

a stand-alone phenomenon, but rather is symptomatic of larger trends in American culture. As Albert Mohler, J. P. Moreland, Kevin Vanhoozer, and I document in a recent book, *Whatever Happened to Truth?*, we live in a day where truth is increasingly viewed as relative and subjective, and as David Liefeld demonstrates in a recent essay subtitled “Postmodern Conspiracy Culture and Feminist Myths of Christian Origins,” American culture is virtually obsessed with conspiracy theories, no matter how implausible.¹⁹

There is no absolute truth, many increasingly believe, but only truth for “you” and “me.” What may be true for one person may not be true for another. This contributes to a sense of uncertainty and even paranoia that is so skeptical toward any finality of knowing that it is prone to believe conspiracy theories, even those transparently contradicted by facts and available sources. Truth is viewed as provisional and evolving, subject to constant revision as new facts surface that need to be incorporated. As Christians who are committed to speaking truth to a culture that has largely abandoned the notion of absolute truth, we need to be aware of these larger currents if we want to communicate the true and saving gospel of Jesus Christ effectively.

THE CLAIMS IN THE DA VINCI CODE: FACT OR FICTION?

Is Jesus God?

According to *The Da Vinci Code*, Jesus did not claim to be God, nor did any of his first followers or anyone else in the Church up to the fourth century A.D. believe that Jesus was God.

“My dear,” Teabing declared, “until *that* moment in history [i.e. Constantine], Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet . . . a great

and powerful *man*, but a man nonetheless. A mortal.”

“Not the Son of God?” [Sophie Neveu]

“Right,” Teabing said. “Jesus’ establishment as ‘the Son of God’ was officially proposed and voted on by the Council of Nicea.”

“Hold on. You’re saying Jesus’ divinity was the result of a *vote*?”

“A relatively close vote at that,” Teabing added. “Nonetheless, establishing Christ’s divinity was critical to the further unification of the Roman empire and to the new Vatican power base. By officially endorsing Jesus as the Son of God, Constantine turned Jesus into a deity who existed beyond the scope of the human world, an entity whose power was unchallengeable. This not only precluded further pagan challenges to Christianity, but now the followers of Christ were able to redeem themselves *only* via the established sacred channel—the Roman Catholic Church.”²⁰

Is it true that Jesus never claimed to be God and that no one believed he was God prior to the fourth century A.D.? (Bart Ehrman, chairman of the religious studies department at University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, and author of *Truth and Fiction in The Da Vinci Code*, calls this argument “bizarre.”)²¹ Was Jesus pronounced divine merely for political reasons by Constantine? A survey of New Testament passages dealing with Jesus’ own claims and the beliefs of the early church will show otherwise.

Paul (A.D. 50s–60s)

Repeatedly in his letters, the apostle Paul clearly refers to Jesus as God, speaking for the early church at large. The passages cited below are listed in the presumed order of writing:²²

- 1 Corinthians 8:4–6: “We know that an

idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, . . . yet for us there is but *one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live*. But not everyone knows this.”

- Romans 9:5: “Theirs [the Jews’] are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of *Christ, who is God over all*, forever praised! Amen.”
- Philippians 2:5–7: “Your attitude should be the same as that of *Christ Jesus, who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped*.”
- Colossians 2:9: “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.”
- Titus 2:11–13: “For the grace of God . . . teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness . . . while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of *our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ*.”

Not only the apostle Paul, but also all four evangelists and other New Testament writers witness to the fact that Jesus himself claimed to be God and that he was acknowledged to be such by his earliest followers.

Matthew (A.D. 60s)

- Matthew 1:23: “Behold, the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel—which means, ‘*God with us*.’”
- Matthew 16:16: “Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the *Son of the living God*.’”
- Matthew 26:63–64: “The high priest said to him, ‘I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.’ ‘Yes, *it is*

as you say,’ Jesus replied. ‘But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.’”

The first evangelist and Peter identify Jesus as “God with us” and as “the Son of the living God,” respectively, and Jesus himself claims to be the Son of God and Son of Man depicted in the book of Daniel.

Mark (A.D. 50s/60s)

- Mark 1:1: “The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the *Son of God*.”
- Mark 15:39: “Surely this man was the *Son of God!*”

In the interim between these two references, Jesus is repeatedly acknowledged as Son of God in Mark’s Gospel.²³

Hebrews (A.D. 60s)

- Hebrews 1:3: “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the *exact representation of his being*, sustaining all things by his powerful word.”
- Hebrews 1:8: “But about *the Son* he says, ‘Your throne, *O God*, will last for ever and ever.’”

Strikingly, the author of Hebrews calls Jesus “the exact representation” of God’s being and identifies Jesus, “the Son,” with God referred to in Psalm 45:6.

Peter (A.D. 60s)

- 2 Peter 1:1: “Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who through the righteousness of *our God and Savior Jesus Christ* have received a faith as precious as ours.”

According to the apostle Peter, Jesus is not merely Savior but also God, on par with God the Father.

John (A.D. 80s–90s)

- John 1:1: “In the beginning was the

Word, and the Word was with God, and *the Word was God*.”²⁴

- John 5:18: “For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even *calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God*.”
- John 8:58: “‘I tell you the truth,’ Jesus answered, ‘before Abraham was born, *I am!*’ At this, they picked up stones to stone him [on account of blasphemy], but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.”
- John 10:30: “I and the Father are one.”
- John 20:28: “Thomas said to him, ‘*My Lord and my God!*’ ”
- 1 John 5:20: “. . . And we are in him who is true—even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the *true God* and eternal life.”

John, one of Jesus’ closest followers, regards Jesus as the pre-existent Word through which everything was created. He also makes clear that Jesus himself, as understood by his opponents, called God his own Father, “making himself equal with God.” Jesus claimed oneness with God the Father and was worshipped already by his first followers such as Thomas. Beyond this, the early Christians also prayed in Christ’s name and baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (e.g., Matthew 28:18–20).²⁵

Conclusion

Scripture attests to the fact that Jesus claimed to be God on par with God the Father and that his followers believed he was the Messiah and the Son of God. All but two of the Twelve and many others suffered martyrdom for this belief. The New Testament, covering the range from the A.D. 30s through 90s, demonstrates that the early church (Acts), Paul (writing in the A.D. 50s and 60s), Peter, the author of Hebrews, and the evangelists, most pronouncedly John (writ-

ing in the A.D. 80s and 90s), believed Jesus to be God.²⁶ Jesus’ deity is emphatically not a fourth-century A.D. invention by Constantine concocted for political reasons as is alleged by *The Da Vinci Code*.

Was Jesus married?

Brown claims Jesus’ marriage to Mary Magdalene is “a matter of historical record.”²⁷ Is it?

Teabing says, “[O]ne particularly troubling earthly theme keeps recurring in the gospels, Mary Magdalene.” He paused. “More specifically, her marriage to Jesus Christ.”²⁸ Langdon, too, says, “Jesus as a married man makes infinitely more sense than our standard biblical view of Jesus as a bachelor.” “Why?” Sophie asked. “Because Jesus was a Jew,” Langdon said. . . . “According to Jewish custom, celibacy was condemned, and the obligation for a Jewish father was to find a suitable wife for his son. If Jesus were not married, at least one of the Bible’s gospels would have mentioned it and offered some explanation for His unnatural state of bachelorhood.”²⁹

The New Testament Evidence

Nice try for shifting the burden of proof and for trying to construe an argument from silence! But, to the contrary, if Jesus had been married, the Gospels would surely have mentioned it because of Jesus’ above-documented claim and his early followers’ belief that he was the Son of God. Rather than being roundly and universally condemned in ancient Judaism, as Brown claims, celibacy was in fact highly valued at Qumran and in Judaism at large for people dedicated to God. Indeed, Jesus himself taught that some were called to celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of God (Matthew

19:11–12).

For this reason, it would not have been unusual for a Jewish male such as Jesus who claimed to be the Messiah and Son of God to have remained unmarried. To the contrary, there are major theological reasons why this should have been expected. So much for Jesus; now what does the New Testament say about Mary Magdalene, Jesus' purported "wife"? Is there any evidence for Dan Brown's contention that Mary was Jesus' wife and that she was pregnant with their first child at the time of the crucifixion, as Brown's novel suggests?³⁰ The relevant New Testament passages are the following:

- Luke 8:2–3: Mary (called Magdalene) had seven demons exorcised by Jesus and was one of a group of women who helped support Jesus out of their own means.
- Mary is not the same woman as the sinful woman who anoints Jesus in Luke 7:36–50, as was erroneously affirmed by Gregory I in A.D. 591 and the Roman Catholic Church from then on until 1969 (though this was hardly part of a widespread "conspiracy" to suppress "the sacred feminine" as Brown alleges).
- Matthew 27:55–56; Mark 15:40–41; John 19:25: Mary Magdalene is standing at the foot of the cross with a group of women when Jesus died.
- Matthew 27:61; Mark 15:47 and parallels: Mary watches until Jesus' body is taken down from the cross and is wrapped in linen and placed in a tomb.
- Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1; Luke 24:10: Mary Magdalene is one of the women who went to anoint Jesus on the third day after the crucifixion and burial.
- John 20:13–17: Looking into the tomb, Mary sees two angels who ask her

why she is crying. In a moving recognition scene, Mary encounters the risen Jesus, who tells her not to hold onto him until he has ascended to God the Father.

The obvious conclusion from all of these passages is that there is not even a hint that Mary Magdalene was Jesus' wife. Rather, Mary is one of Jesus' women followers who played a significant role especially subsequent to Jesus' burial as the first human witness to the resurrection.

The following arguments further underscore this conclusion:

- It is unimaginable that Mary Magdalene's marriage to Jesus would not be mentioned in Scripture if it were true.
- Jesus' alleged marriage conflicts with the claim that Jesus is God because God, being sinless, would not marry a sinful woman.³¹
- The Bible says that Jesus is spiritually "engaged to be married" to the Church in heaven.³²
- If Mary Magdalene was Jesus' wife, why is she identified in the Bible as Mary "Magdalene" rather than as the wife of Jesus?³³
- Why mention Jesus' mother, "father," brothers and sisters, disciples, and wives of apostles in the New Testament, but never the wife of Jesus?

The answer is obvious: the reason why the New Testament never mentions Jesus' marriage and why it never refers to Mary Magdalene as Jesus' wife is because the marriage never took place and Jesus and Mary Magdalene were not, in fact, husband and wife.

Conclusion

There is not a shred of evidence from the Bible (or, one might add, any early patristic writings or other late documents, on which see below) that Jesus was married, or married to Mary Magdalene. As even the self-styled

agnostic Bart Ehrman, who teaches at UNC-Chapel Hill, contends, “[I]n none of our early Christian sources is there any reference to Jesus’ marriage or to his wife.”³⁴

Brown’s Sources

If Jesus’ alleged marriage with Mary Magdalene is unsupported by the New Testament, what are Brown’s sources for this claim? Answer: The second- and third-century Gnostic Gospels, particularly the Gospel of Philip (called by the name of Philip, one of the Twelve, but not in fact authored by him). The designation “Gospel” is rather misleading, for the Gospel of Philip has no narrative framework. It was probably written in Coptic (or Greek) some time toward the end of the second or the beginning of the third century A.D.

According to the Gospel of Philip, the existential malady of humanity is its differentiation into two sexes. Perhaps the best-known instance of this teaching is found in the Gospel of Thomas where Peter says to his fellow disciples: “Let Mary go out from among us, because women are not worthy of the Life.” Jesus agrees, but says, “See, I shall lead her, so that I will make her male, that she too may become a living spirit, resembling you males. For every woman who makes herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven” (114). (So much for Brown’s contention, incidentally, that the Gnostic documents are pro-women!)

Brown’s “exhibit #1,” then, is Gospel of Philip 59:9–10, which reads as follows:

There were three who always walked with the lord: Mary his mother and her sister and Magdalene, the one who was called *his companion*. His sister and his mother and *his companion* were each a Mary.³⁵

In this passage, Mary Magdalene is called Jesus’ “companion” (*koinōnos*). According to

Dan Brown, “As any Aramaic scholar will tell you, the word *companion*, in those days, literally meant *spouse*.”³⁶ First of all, however, the person to talk to in this case would not be an Aramaic scholar, but one proficient in Coptic or Greek, the original language in which the Gospel of Philip was written.

More importantly, and contrary to Brown, the Greek term *koinōnos* does not mean “wife” or “spouse” (which would be the Greek word *gynē*), but “associate,” “close follower,” or “friend.” This is borne out clearly by the fact that the word *koinōnos* appears ten times in the New Testament and not once implies a marital or sexual relationship.³⁷

By calling Mary Magdalene Jesus’ “associate,” “close follower,” or “friend,” the author of the Gospel of Philip most likely distinguishes this Mary, a non-relative, from Jesus’ two relatives mentioned in the same passage, namely Jesus’ mother (also called Mary) and her (or his?) sister. And what is said about these is not that one of them was Jesus’ wife, but that all three “always walked with the Lord” (i.e., followed his teachings and were his disciples).

Brown’s “exhibit #2” is another passage in the same document, Gospel of Philip 63:34–64:5, which says,

And the companion of the [. . .] Mary Magdalene. [. . . loved] her more than [all] the disciples [and used to] kiss her [often] on her [. . .]. The rest of [the disciples . . .]. They said to him, “Why do you love her more than all of us?” The savior answered and said to them, “Why do I not love you like her? When a blind man and one who sees are both together in darkness, they are no different from one another. When the light comes, then he who sees will see the light, and he who is blind will remain in darkness.”³⁸

The present passage does not only speak of

Mary as Jesus' "companion," but also mentions that Jesus kissed her on her . . . , though unfortunately this is where the passage breaks off. Most scholars believe that the kiss mentioned in this passage is in all probability a kiss of fellowship (compare, for example, 1 Corinthians 16:20). Alternatively, kissing is symbolic of a close spiritual relationship rather than physical intimacy. Oddly enough, earlier in the same document, it says that children are conceived by kissing (Gospel of Philip 59:1: "For it is by a kiss that the perfect conceive and give birth. For this reason we also kiss one another")!

We conclude that neither passage constitutes credible evidence that Mary was Jesus' wife or that Jesus and Mary were engaged in a sexual or romantic relationship.

Conclusion

We have already seen that there is no New Testament evidence whatsoever that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene. What is more, our study of the sources cited by Brown has shown that not even these, properly interpreted, suggest that Mary was Jesus' wife. Certainly none of the "evidence" from these late, derivative, non-authoritative sources is able to overturn the evidence from the four canonical Gospels (evaluated above) that there is no credible support for the theory that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene.

We register one additional observation here. In typical apocryphal fashion, some of the Gnostic documents Brown cites posit a Mary Magdalene-Peter rivalry based on the fact that Jesus after his resurrection appeared to Mary Magdalene before showing himself to Peter. If you had been Peter, head of the Twelve, would you not have been jealous? At least this is the reasoning underlying these Gnostic documents. But does the New Testament support the notion of a Peter-Mary Magdalene rivalry? We will take up this question further below.

Are the Gospels reliable? How was the canon established?

Dan Brown says that our present Gospels were only included in the Christian canon in the fourth century A.D. at the Council of Nicea in the place of the Gnostic Gospels. Allegedly, this was initiated by the Emperor Constantine for political reasons.

Teabing, commenting condescendingly to Sophie, says, "The Bible is a product of *man*, my dear. Not of God. The Bible did not fall magically from the clouds."³⁹

And is it true that the emperor Constantine commissioned "a new bible which omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ's human traits"?⁴⁰

The Nature of Evidence and the Pre-eminence of the Four Canonical Gospels

First of all, Teabing here erects a false dichotomy: either the Bible is the product of man or of God. The Bible teaches *both* that Scripture is inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16) *and* that it was written by men who were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). What is at stake here is the character of Scripture as divine revelation, an absolutely crucial point. Starting with the Enlightenment, many scholars began to study the Bible as any other book, viewing it merely as a reflection of the development of human consciousness with regard to God. *The Da Vinci Code* taps into this reservoir of critical Enlightenment scholarship. But Scripture clearly claims for itself that it is the Word of God, not merely the word of men.⁴¹

But what about Teabing's claim that Constantine commissioned a "new bible" that omitted the Gnostic Gospels and instead instated Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John? First, we must remember that our evidence is only as good as the reliability of our sources.⁴² We are

not arguing that we should believe the Bible blindly, but neither should we uncritically believe whatever contradicts the Bible. Rather, to paraphrase Ronald Reagan, we should “believe but verify,” that is, believe intelligently by (a) analyzing all the extant sources; (b) determining the quality of the sources; and (c) go with the best sources available while discarding the sources that are secondary and lack credibility.

In the present instance, our available sources are the following:

- The canonical Gospels and the rest of the New Testament
- Later apocryphal writings, especially the Gnostic writings
- The Church Fathers (the patristic writings)
- The Church Councils (conciliar documents)

It is not hard to determine that the four canonical Gospels are by far the best evidence that we have. The apocryphal Gospels are all late; many are Gnostic, an early Christian heresy. Incidentally, when Dan Brown calls Nag Hammadi and the Dead Sea Scrolls “the earliest Christian records,”⁴³ he errs on both counts—the Nag Hammadi documents are neither “the earliest” Christian records, nor are they Christian at all, and the Dead Sea Scrolls are Jewish sectarian documents that precede Christianity! What is more, when Brown says that there are more than 80 Gospels, this figure is vastly inflated. There are at the most about 20 Gospels, and hardly any of these has a narrative framework or a passion narrative.

Replacing the Biblical with the Gnostic Jesus?

By way of brief excursus, it seems that, at least in part, books such as *The Da Vinci Code* seek to replace the biblical Jesus with the Gnostic Jesus. But this is a precarious move indeed, for clearly the Gnostic Jesus is very different from the Jesus of the Bible. Consider

some of the basic tenets of Gnosticism:

- A denial of sin (1 John 1:5–10)
- A denial of the full humanity of Christ (1 John 4:2)
- A denial of the need for substitutionary atonement (1 John 2:1–2)
- A different way of salvation
 - Self-knowledge
 - Secret knowledge reserved for initiates (mystery religions)
- A denial of absolute truth
- Truth is experiential and subjective
- The quest, being in process, is what counts—seeking, not finding
- A rebellion toward authority and tradition

Gnosticism thus bears a much closer resemblance to esoteric mysticism or postmodern eclecticism than to biblical Christianity. For this reason, the effort to replace the biblical with the Gnostic Jesus must be judged as highly problematic. We return to the issue of canon in order to assess the claim by *The Da Vinci Code* that the Emperor Constantine commissioned “a new bible which omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ’s human traits.” Is this, in fact, the case?

The Formation of the Christian Canon

When the ancient Church compiled the canon, it recognized which writings bore the stamp of divine inspiration. Four criteria were used: (1) apostolicity, that is, direct or indirect association of a given work with an apostle; (2) orthodoxy, that is, whether a writing conformed to the “rule of faith”; (3) antiquity, that is, whether a writing was written during the apostolic era; and (4) usage, that is, whether it was already widely used in the churches of the early period.⁴⁴

There is abundant historical evidence that the four canonical Gospels, and only these, were recognized as part of the church’s canon early on in the process of canonization. The four Gospels were foundational virtually from the

start based on church usage and their apostolic origin, which formed the basis for evaluating and rejecting later Gospels. On the other hand, none of the Gnostic Gospels such as those bearing the names of Thomas, Philip, Peter, or Mary were ever part of the Christian canon.

Paul's letters were considered Scripture already by the apostle Peter writing in the A.D. 60s (2 Pet. 3:16). The first impetus for the canon came from the heretic Marcion in c. A.D. 140. The four canonical Gospels were recognized as authoritative as early as Tatian and Irenaeus in the second century A.D. Irenaeus, in c. A.D. 180, already strongly argued for a four-Gospel canon, comparing it to the four winds and the four quarters of the earth.⁴⁵ The canon is essentially attested in the Muratorian Canon (c. A.D. 190), including the four canonical Gospels.

Eusebius makes clear that the canon was well established before the time of Constantine, writing of the "holy tetrad of the Gospels."⁴⁶ He also cites the second-century Father Irenaeus: "Now Matthew published . . . a written gospel . . . , while . . . Mark also . . . handed down to us in writing the things which were preached by Peter, and Luke also, who was a follower of Paul, put down in a book the gospel which was preached by him. Then John, the disciple of the Lord, . . . himself also gave forth the gospel, while he was living at Ephesus in Asia."⁴⁷

The Council of Nicea and the Nicene Creed

But what about the novel's handling of early church documents? Is it true that the impetus of recognizing Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as canonical came from the Emperor Constantine at the Council of Nicea? Stunningly, contrary to the book's claims, the subject of the canon was not even discussed at the first ecumenical Council of Nicea (A.D. 325). This is documented, among many other places, in the recent authoritative book on the subject, *Nicaea and*

its Legacy, by Lewis Ayres, professor of church history at Emory University.⁴⁸

Some may say that they do not have the expertise to check out the contradictory claims with regard to the Council of Nicea and that this is merely a case where scholars differ. Yet it is important to realize that the proceedings at the Nicene Council are not open to question. Our sources do not leave us in the dark regarding what was discussed at this important meeting. The conciliar documents record both the topics and the ultimate outcome of the Council. Most important is the well-known Nicene Creed, which reads as follows:

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only begotten of his Father, of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance (*homoousios*) with the Father. By whom all things were made, both which be in heaven and in earth. Who for us men and for our salvation came down [from heaven] and was incarnate and was made man. He suffered and the third day he rose again, and ascended into heaven. And he shall come again to judge both the quick and the dead. And [we believe] in the Holy Ghost. And whosoever shall say that there was a time when the Son of God was not [Arius], or that before he was begotten he was not, or that he was made of things that were not, or that he is of a different substance or essence [from the Father] or that he is a creature, or subject to change or conversion—all that so say, the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes them.⁴⁹

As the documents make clear, the primary

subject at the Nicene Council was Arius's view that Jesus was a lesser god than God the Father. Arius was willing to say that Jesus was "of a similar nature" (*homoiousios*) as the Father, but not that he was "of the same nature" (*homoousios*; one iota difference in the Greek).

But Arius's formulation was judged as deficient and as falling short of biblical orthodoxy, and Arius was condemned as a heretic. The question was not: "Was Jesus divine?" but rather: "How do we account for Jesus' humanity in light of his deity?" and: "How can both God and Jesus be God?"⁵⁰

Also, it is wrong to make Arius—who denied the deity of Christ and taught that he was a created being—the representative for all pre-Nicene Christianity as *The Da Vinci Code* suggests. Our survey of the New Testament witness to Jesus' deity above made very clear that the deity of Christ was strongly affirmed by an overwhelming consensus of New Testament writers.

Incidentally, the vote (not on the canon) at the Council of Nicea was by a very wide margin, not "a close vote at that" as Brown claims. In fact, only 2 of 318 bishops failed to vote for denunciation of Arius, Theonas of Marmarica and Secundus of Ptolemais, who were both exiled and branded as heretics.

Conclusion

There is no evidence that the Gnostic Gospels were ever part of the Christian canon, while there is overwhelming evidence that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were considered to be canonical from the earliest days of the Church. Dan Brown's assertion that the change from the Gnostic to our present canonical Gospels was initiated by the Emperor Constantine at the Council of Nicea is completely false. In fact, that Council did not even discuss the canon, focusing instead on Arius's contention that Jesus was only of similar but not of the same substance as God the Father.

Is there a "Da Vinci code"?

Dan Brown says regarding Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting *The Last Supper* that the person on Jesus' right is actually not the apostle John but Mary Magdalene, and this is one of many codes embedded in his paintings.

"Hold on," Sophie said. "You told me the Holy Grail is a woman. The Last Supper is a painting of thirteen men."

"Is it?" Teabing arched his eyebrows. "Take a closer look."

Uncertain, Sophie made her way closer to the painting, scanning the thirteen figures—Jesus Christ in the middle, six disciples on His left, and six on His right. "They're all men," she confirmed.

"Oh?" Teabing said. "How about the one seated in the place of honor, at the right hand of the Lord?"

Sophie examined the figure to Jesus' immediate right, focusing in. As she studied the person's face and body, a wave of astonishment rose within her. The individual had flowing red hair, delicate folded hands, and the hint of a bosom. It was, without a doubt . . . female.

"That's a woman!" Stophie exclaimed.

. . . "Who is she?" Sophie asked.

"That, my dear," Teabing replied, "is Mary Magdalene."⁵¹

Dan Brown proceeds to affirm that the painting reveals a hidden letter "M" in the painting that stands for "matrimony" or "Mary Magdalene."

The Evidence

However, while this reconstruction of Leonardo's painting certainly wins a prize for ingenuity, closer scrutiny of these claims reveals that the reconstruction is too clever by

half. In fact, the person on Jesus' right is not Mary Magdalene but the apostle John. This is in keeping with the observation that John is often depicted as effeminate in paintings of that period.⁵²

The following arguments also speak decisively against an identification of the person on Jesus' right in Leonardo's painting with Mary Magdalene:

- If the person on Jesus' right is Mary Magdalene, where is the twelfth disciple? Dan Brown does not address this issue, which is a major oversight since Scripture is clear that Jesus and the Twelve (including Judas) were at the Last Supper.
- Da Vinci is clearly dependent on John 13:23–24, where Peter motions to John—not Mary—to find out who would betray Jesus (see Judas' position in the painting). Incidentally, Brown's contention that Peter, in the painting, makes a "threatening gesture" toward Mary, is as ingenious as it is unlikely (see below). Almost certainly, da Vinci sought to recreate the depiction of Peter motioning toward John the apostle in John 13:23–24.

Conclusion

The person on Jesus' right in Leonardo da Vinci's painting *The Last Supper* is not Mary Magdalene but the apostle John. Therefore, there is no "Da Vinci code." The claim at the heart of Brown's novel is patently false. But if there is no code, there is also no conspiracy to cover up supposed "evidence" of Jesus' marriage with Mary Magdalene.

Was Christianity invented to suppress women and the "sacred feminine"?

According to Dan Brown and *The Da Vinci Code*, the reason why until now the "historical fact" of Jesus' marriage to Mary Magdalene has not been widely known is because the Church has suppressed it! Instead, a male-oriented hierarchy consolidated ecclesiastical power on the basis of the claim that Jesus staked the fortunes of his Church on the apostle Peter.

The relevant passage includes a quote of a passage from the Gospel of Mary Magdalene. Then Sophie: "You're saying the Christian Church was to be carried on by a *woman*?" "That was the plan. Jesus was the original feminist. He intended for the future of His Church to be in the hands of Mary Magdalene." "And Peter had a problem with that," Langdon said, pointing to *The Last Supper*. "That's Peter there. You can see that da Vinci was well aware of how Peter felt about Mary Magdalene."⁵³

According to Brown, the Roman Catholic Church usurped Mary Magdalene's place by establishing a male-oriented hierarchy that has suppressed what he calls the "sacred feminine." The Roman Catholic Church's identification of Mary Magdalene with the woman of Luke 7:36–50, a prostitute, was the result of "a smear campaign launched by the early Church."⁵⁴

The conclusion in the book is that the Holy Grail (originally stemming from a romance novel, *Perceval*, by Chrétienne de Troyes in the twelfth century A.D.) is something much more important than a chalice from the Last Supper that held the blood of Christ—it is the womb of the woman who bore Christ's daughter.⁵⁵

The New Testament Evidence

What does Scripture say?

- Many Scripture passages affirm the primacy of Peter.
- In Matthew 16:18, Peter is said to be the rock upon which Christ will build his church.
- At the end of John's Gospel, Peter is reinstated by the risen Christ, subsequent to Jesus' encounter with Mary Magdalene (John 21:15–19).
- In the book of Acts, this is shown to be realized historically as Peter preaches the message at Pentecost (Acts 2), is called to authenticate that the Holy Spirit had come on the Samaritans (Acts 8:14–17), is sent to Cornelius' house (Acts 10), etc.
- Was Mary given the keys to the kingdom? Did Mary preach the Pentecost sermon? Was she called to authenticate the coming of the Holy Spirit to the Samaritans? Was she sent to Cornelius?

Brown says that “Peter was something of a sexist”⁵⁶—hence an anti-female bias is traced all the way back to the “first pope”! This, to be sure, nicely comports with recent feminist scholarship on Jesus' and the early church's stance toward women, according to which Jesus was the “first feminist” but the second-century church reasserted male power.⁵⁷

The trajectory from initial doctrinal diversity to later enforced unity which underlies the conspiracy theory in *The Da Vinci Code*, in turn, harks back to theories such as that of the German scholar Walter Bauer, who in his widely influential book *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Early Christianity* (1934, English translation 1971) popularized the view that there was no “orthodoxy” in the first-century church but only a variety of Christological and theological views. Only in the second century, according to Bauer, did power, not truth, decree what was

right doctrine in order to consolidate ecclesiastical control in the hands of the Catholic Church.⁵⁸ This theory has been kept alive by scholars such as Helmut Koester and James Robinson⁵⁹ and has recently received a new lease on life through the writings of Elaine Pagels, Bart Ehrman, and the “Jesus Seminar.”⁶⁰

While not lacking adherents, however, this model is fundamentally at odds with the New Testament portrayal of the state of early Christianity. Consider the following passages:

- Acts 2:42: The early Christians devoted themselves to “the apostles' teaching”
- 1 Corinthians 15:3–4: Paul received the gospel and passed it on to the Corinthians
- Romans 1:1–4, 15–17: The gospel is rooted already in the Old Testament
- 2 Timothy 1:13–14: Timothy is charged with “guarding the good deposit” entrusted to him

This does not mean that there were not exceptions to this rule; certainly there were those who differed and held to a “different gospel.” Yet the very fact that Paul can refer to deviant teaching as a “different gospel” (Galatians 1:6) proves that at this early stage in the history of the church (the A.D. 50s) there was already a formulation of the gospel that commanded wide acceptance and served as the standard for evaluating the orthodoxy of differing formulations.

A decade later, Paul called on Timothy to “command certain persons *not to teach false doctrines* any longer” (1 Tim 1:3), pronouncing an anathema on “whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the gospel..., which he entrusted to me” (1 Tim 1:11). Passages such as these make very clear that the “from diversity to unity” thesis popularized by Bauer, and more recently Ehrman, is not borne out by the message of the New Testament.⁶¹

But what is the actual historical evidence for the alleged rivalry between Peter and Mary Magdalene? As mentioned briefly above, there is no biblical evidence for such a rivalry. What, then, is the basis for such a claim? As in other cases, Brown's "evidence" is found in one of the Gnostic Gospels, in the present case the so-called "Gospel of Mary [Magdalene]." Here is what the Gospel of Mary says:

Peter in answer spoke with reference to things of this kind, and asked them [the disciples] about the Savior: "Did he then speak privily with a woman rather than with us, and not openly? Shall we turn about and all hearken unto her? Has he preferred her over against us?"

Then Mary wept and said to Peter: "My brother Peter, what do you then believe? Do you believe that I imagined this myself in my heart, or that I would lie about the Savior?" Levi answered (and) said to Peter: "Peter, you have ever been of a hasty temper. Now I see how you exercise yourself against the woman like the adversaries. But if the Savior has made her worthy, who then are you that you reject her? Certainly the Savior knows her surely enough. Therefore did he love her more than us [by making her the first witness of the resurrection and recipient of divine revelation]."62

As a close reading of this excerpt reveals, in context, the issue at stake is the revelation Mary received of the risen Christ, not her claim to ecclesiastical supremacy over Peter. It is doubtless true that several of the Church Fathers' writings reveal an anti-women bias, which is deplorable. But this does not alter the fact that Jesus vested the future of his Church in the hands of Peter and the Twelve, not in Mary and their alleged physical offspring, "Sarah" (inci-

dentally, it is hardly a coincidence that Jesus and Mary, according to Brown, had a daughter rather than a son; the name "Sarah," likewise, is complete fiction).

Conclusion

It was never Jesus' plan to entrust the fate of his church to Mary Magdalene. There is absolute silence in the Scriptures in this regard. At the same time, there is overwhelming evidence that Jesus intended to build his church on the apostle Peter by virtue of his confession that Jesus was the Christ and Son of the living God. This does not make Peter the first pope, nor does it make him infallible (see Galatians 2:11–21). But it does confirm that Jesus, in keeping with Jewish traditional social structures, not to mention God's original design (see Genesis 2), appointed the Twelve (all men) as his core group and Peter as their pre-eminent spokesman and representative.

Was the Priory of Sion, the supposed guardian of the secret, a medieval organization?

Dan Brown alleges that the Priory of Sion, the supposed guardian of the "secret" of Jesus' marriage to Mary Magdalene, is a medieval organization. Is it?

*"The Priory of Sion—a European secret society founded in 1099—is a real organization. In 1975, Paris's Bibliothèque Nationale discovered parchments known as Les Dossiers Secrets, identifying numerous members of the Priory of Sion, including Sir Isaac Newton, Botticelli, Victor Hugo, and Leonardo da Vinci."*63

The Evidence

However, the parchments to which Brown is referring were shown to be fraudulent, the concoction of a mysterious Frenchman, Pierre

Plantard, an anti-Semite with a criminal record for fraud. This was acknowledged by Plantard himself in 1993 and exposed in a series of French books and a 1996 BBC documentary. These “parchments” are not a reliable, credible source. In fact, records indicate that the Priory of Sion is not a medieval society but a recent right-wing political organization (established in 1956).⁶⁴

Conclusion

Just like the claim that Jesus was not considered to be God until the fourth century A.D., the claim that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene, the claim that the canonical Gospels replaced the Gnostic Gospels at the Council of Nicea, and the claim that Christianity was invented to suppress women, the claim that the Priory of Sion was charged with guarding the secret of Jesus’ marriage to Mary Magdalene is without credible support. According to *The Da Vinci Code*, the Priory of Sion was entrusted with the secret that the Holy Grail was the womb of Mary Magdalene. This cannot be true if the Priory was only established in 1956.

SO WHAT’S THE VERDICT?

What, then, are we to make of the claims lodged by *The Da Vinci Code*? As we have seen, the evidence does not support any of these claims. We conclude, therefore, that:

- Jesus is God
- Jesus was not married, to Mary Magdalene or anyone else
- The Gospels are reliable
- The canon always included Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and never the Gnostic Gospels
- The Council of Nicea did not discuss the canon, but the question of whether or not Jesus was of the same essence as the Father (contra Arius)
- There is no “Da Vinci code”

- Christianity was not established to suppress the “sacred feminine”
- The Priory of Sion is not a medieval organization
- *The Da Vinci Code* is a work of fiction, no facts

As mentioned, Dan Brown says that virtually everything we used to believe about Christianity is false. To the contrary, as we have demonstrated, virtually everything Dan Brown says about Christianity, Jesus, and the Bible is untrue.

EPILOGUE

You may have read this booklet starting out believing *The Da Vinci Code*’s version of Christianity, believing that Jesus was only a great human teacher, not God. You may have been skeptical of the trustworthiness of Scripture and skeptical toward the Church and its tendency to put ecclesiastical power over truth. You may believe that the Church has always suppressed women and that it still does to this very day, and that it is wrong to do so, because women are just as gifted (and human!) as men.

But if you have read thus far, you probably also realize that many of the claims of *The Da Vinci Code* are not well founded and that a much more credible version of the truth emerges from the most reliable historical evidence as set forth in Scripture. If so, it is my prayer that the Holy Spirit will take the verses quoted concerning Jesus’ deity above and convince you that Jesus was in fact “more than a carpenter,” as a popular book has it, and that you will seriously consider the implications of such a realization.

What is more, I challenge you to consider the truthfulness of Scripture’s claim, not only that Jesus is God and Savior, but that you and I are sinners who stand in need, not merely of reformation but of redemption. If by the grace of God you have come to see yourself as a sinner

(see Romans 3:23), he invites you to accept his free gift of eternal life in his Son, Jesus Christ (see Romans 6:23). If this is your heart's desire, you may do so right now by praying the following simple prayer:

Great God, I know that I'm a sinner and that Jesus died on the cross for me to take my place. I thank you for what he has done for me and accept his sacrifice on my behalf. Lord Jesus, please come into my life and make me into the person you want me to be. Help me to read your Word, the Bible, and to join together with other believers in a church that loves you and seeks to serve you. Thank you for coming into my life and for hearing my prayer. In Jesus' name, Amen.

If you have prayed this prayer, you have just made the most important decision in your life! I know that God will prove to be faithful as you seek to follow him. If you want to talk to someone about your newfound faith, you are welcome to call Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary at (919) 761-2491 or e-mail me at akostenberger@sebts.edu. To God alone be the glory, now and forever. Amen.

FOR FURTHER READING

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Doubleday, 2003).
- ² The following plot summary is adapted from the inside cover of the book, also cited on Dan Brown's personal website, www.danbrown.com.
- ³ See the previous note.
- ⁴ Amy D. Bernstein, "Decoding the *Da Vinci* Phenomenon," in *Secrets of the Da Vinci Code* (U.S. News & World Report, 2004), 15.
- ⁵ Brown, *Da Vinci Code*, 256.
- ⁶ R. Albert Mohler, "Truth and Contemporary Culture," in *Whatever Happened to Truth?* (gen. ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger; Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), 53–54.
- ⁷ Michiko Kakutani, "Bending the Truth in a Million Little Ways," *The New York Times* Critic's Notebook (January 17, 2006).
- ⁸ Cf. Edward Wyatt, "Oprah Calls Defense of Author 'a Mistake,'" *The New York Times* (January 26, 2006) and "Live on 'Oprah,' a Memoirist Is Kicked Out of the Book Club," *The New York Times* (January 27, 2006); Virginia Heffernan, "Ms. Winfrey Takes a Guest to the Televised Woodshed," *The New York Times* (January 27, 2006).
- ⁹ Cited in Janet Maslin, "Using History as a Guide, But Skipping the Details," *The New York Times* (September 27, 2005).
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹ Such as Martha Sherrill's new book, *The Ruins of California* (New York: Penguin, 2006): see Edward Wyatt, "Memoir Becomes Novel, Secret Remains Secret," *The New York Times* (January 30, 2006).
- ¹² Cited in Sharon Waxman, "Sprinkling Holy Water on 'The Da Vinci Code,'" *The New York Times* (August 7, 2005).
- ¹³ See the forthcoming book by Darrell L. Bock, *The Missing Gospels* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006).
- ¹⁴ Brown, *Da Vinci Code*, 341.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 235 (emphasis original).
- ¹⁶ Paul L. Maier, in Hank Hanegraaff and Paul L. Maier, *The Da Vinci Code: Fact or Fiction?* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 2004), 37–38.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 38–39.
- ¹⁸ Laurie Goodstein, "Defenders of Christianity Rebut 'The Da Vinci Code,'" *The New York Times* (April 27, 2004).
- ¹⁹ Andreas Köstenberger, gen. ed., *Whatever Happened to Truth?*; David R. Liefeld, "God's Word or Male Words? Postmodern Conspiracy Culture and Feminist Myths of Christian Origins," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48/3 (2005): 449–73.
- ²⁰ Brown, *Da Vinci Code*, 233.
- ²¹ Bart D. Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction in The Da Vinci Code* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 15.
- ²² All scriptural citations are from the New International Version (NIV) unless indicated otherwise.
- ²³ See, e.g., Mark 1:13, 24; 5:7; 9:7.
- ²⁴ That Word is identified in John 1:14, 17 as Jesus Christ.
- ²⁵ For further study, see especially Murray J. Harris, *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992) and Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).
- ²⁶ To this may be added the evidence by early Church Fathers such as Clement who wrote, "We must think of Jesus Christ as we do of God" (2 Clement 1:1, c. A.D. 100s) and even enemies of the faith such as the pagan scholar Celsus (c. A.D. 178) who said Jesus had "declared himself divine" (cf. Origen, *Against Celsus*, 1.38; 2.63) and Pliny the Younger who wrote in c. A.D. 112 to the Roman emperor Trajan that Christians were singing "a hymn to Christ as a god" (*Letters* 10.96–97).
- ²⁷ Brown, *Da Vinci Code*, 244.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 245.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 255.
- ³¹ Erwin W. Lutzer, *The Da Vinci Deception* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 2004), 56.
- ³² E.g., Matthew 9:15 and parallels; John 3:29; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:21–33; Revelation 21:9; 22:17.
- ³³ Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction*, 154.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 153.
- ³⁵ James M. Robinson, gen. ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (rev. ed.; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 145.
- ³⁶ Brown, *Da Vinci Code*, 246.
- ³⁷ Matthew 23:30; Luke 5:10; 1 Corinthians 10:18, 20; 2 Corinthians 1:7; 8:23; Philemon 17; Hebrews 10:33; 1 Peter 5:1; 2 Peter 1:4.
- ³⁸ Robinson, *Nag Hammadi Library*, 148. The square brackets indicate places where the original wording is missing.

- ³⁹ Brown, *Da Vinci Code*, 231.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 234.
- ⁴¹ E.g., Hebrews 4:12: “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight . . .”
- ⁴² Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction*, xxii–xxiii.
- ⁴³ Brown, *Da Vinci Code*, 245.
- ⁴⁴ For helpful treatments on the formation of the Christian canon see especially D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 726–43 (regarding criteria for apostolicity see esp. pp. 736–37) and L. M. McDonald, “Canon,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments* (ed. Ralph Martin and Peter H. Davids; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997), 134–44 (for ancient references regarding criteria for canonicity see p. 135).
- ⁴⁵ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.11.
- ⁴⁶ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.25.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.8. See also 6.14 (citing Clement of Alexandria) and 6:25: “only four Gospels” (i.e. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John).
- ⁴⁸ Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- ⁴⁹ Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series, Volume XIV: The Seven Ecumenical Councils (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, repr. 1983), 3.
- ⁵⁰ Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction*, 14–15.
- ⁵¹ Brown, *Da Vinci Code* 243.
- ⁵² See, e.g., his *St. John the Baptist*, which is located at the Louvre in Paris, France.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, 248.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 244.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 238.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 248.
- ⁵⁷ See especially the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, which has come under increasing criticism in recent years even by other feminist scholars. But see Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner, ed., *Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9–15* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005).
- ⁵⁸ Walter Bauer, *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1934); ET: *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).
- ⁵⁹ James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971); James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990 [1977]).
- ⁶⁰ Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Vintage, 1979); *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (New York: Random House, 2003); Bart Ehrman, *The Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); *Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not Make It into the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
- ⁶¹ See esp. Paul Trebilco, “Christian Communities in Western Asia Minor into the Early Second Century: Ignatius and Others as Witnesses against Bauer,” *JETS* 49/1 (2006), who writes, “Bauer’s thesis does not stand up to scrutiny with regard to the situation in Western Asia Minor. . . . what Bauer calls “heresy” is neither the earliest form of Christian faith, nor is it in the majority. . . . By contrast, in the period from around 65 to 135, we can argue that there were strong and influential voices which stood for what later became “orthodoxy,” notably voices in both the Pauline and Johannine traditions. Further, . . . , we find a strong concern to discern what the authors regarded as acceptable belief and practice—which is in continuity with what later became orthodoxy.” For other important recent critiques of Bauer’s thesis see Darrell L. Bock, *Missing Gospels* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), Chapter 5; and Charles E. Hill, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- ⁶² Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha*, Volume One: Gospels and Related Writings (rev. ed.; trans. R. McL. Wilson; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 394.
- ⁶³ Brown, *Da Vinci Code*, 1.
- ⁶⁴ See Laura Miller, “The Last Word: The Da Vinci Con,” *The New York Times* (February 22, 2004).

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