

*Evaluating the
Da Vinci
Phenomenon*

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PREFACE

This booklet aims to meet a specific need. As I have read the responses to *The Da Vinci Code*, I have found many good, book-length treatments. Several of these works are quite valuable. They tend, however, to be a bit too detailed for popular readers who want a quick response to the issues that *The Da Vinci Code* raises. I have also seen pamphlet-length responses, some better and some worse. The problem with the pamphlets is that they tend to oversimplify the issues.

What I thought we needed was something longer than a pamphlet but shorter than a book. A booklet would be about right. It should be researched thoroughly enough to be accurate and credible, but popular enough to avoid getting bogged down in detail. It ought to tackle the big issues about the person of Jesus and the founding of Christianity without getting mired in disagreements over art criticism or more recent history. Above all, it should be offered cheaply enough that people could afford to hand copies to their acquaintances.

Since I didn't see anyone else writing such a work, I decided to try it myself. I don't claim that anything in this booklet is profound or original. Dan Brown raises several important questions. I want to answer them. I want these answers to be short

and clear enough for a popular reader, while being thoughtful and detailed enough to avoid oversimplification.

The booklet can be useful to two kinds of readers. The first is the average Christian who had read or heard about *The Da Vinci Code*, and who wonders how its claims affect his faith. The second is the non-Christian who has read the book or seen the movie, and who thinks that Dan Brown just might be on to something.

This booklet does not attempt to prove the truth of Christianity. What it does do is to evaluate (fairly, I hope) a proposal that, if true, would undercut certain aspects of the Christian faith. If you think that my evaluation is correct and that Dan Brown is wrong, that does not necessarily compel you to become a Christian. It does, however, eliminate what could be an obstacle to a right understanding of Christianity.

Please take the trouble to get to know the Jesus of the New Testament. I believe that you will discover a person Who truly deserves your worship and your trust.

ONE

Coming to a Theater Near You

Though it is billed as a novel, *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown is really a mystery thriller. Since its publication in 2003 the book has become wildly popular. By August of 2005, it had been translated into 44 languages and had 36 million copies in print. Anchor Books was supposed to release another 5 million paperback copies during March of 2006. Broadway Books is publishing a 200,000 copy “special illustrated edition.” The movie version of *The Da Vinci Code*, directed by Ron Howard, stars Tom Hanks as Robert Langdon, Audrey Tautou as Sophie Neveu, and Ian McKellan as Leigh Teabing.

The Da Vinci Code is a fast-paced whodunit that begins with a murder in the Louvre. Most of the action in the book takes place during a single day. Besides the detective story, however, *The Da Vinci Code* also articulates a theory about the nature of Jesus and the origin of Christianity. This theory has caught the attention of many Christians. Their objections have created some surprise in literary circles. Why would Christians want to respond to a work of fiction? Why do they take it so seriously?

Dan Brown himself gives one answer to that question. In an introductory comment before the beginning of the story, he writes that “all descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents,

and secret rituals in the novel are accurate." The documents and rituals to which he refers are fundamental to the plot. They are also the heart of Brown's theory about Jesus and the origins of Christianity.

Brown has a website in which he responds to frequently asked questions about *The Da Vinci Code*. In answer to one of those questions, Brown insists that "the artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals depicted in this novel all exist." He opines that even though the characters in the book may be fictional, "it is my belief that some of the theories discussed by these characters may have merit." Responding to scholars who have challenged his proposal about Christianity, Brown asserts that "these scholars and I obviously disagree." Brown adds, "Since the beginning of recorded time, history has been written by 'the winners'... Many historians now believe (as do I) that in gauging the historical accuracy of a given concept, we should first ask ourselves a far deeper question: How historically accurate is history itself?"

The Da Vinci Code is clearly meant to be more than fiction. As a matter of fact, Dan Brown draws most of the theory behind *The Da Vinci Code* from the book *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln. *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* purports to be a work of research rather than of fiction. It articulates the theory that Jesus was married, had children, and founded a dynasty that came to rule Europe. Brown's work relies so heavily upon *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* that Baigent and Leigh sued him (unsuccessfully) for plagiarism.

The theory that Brown advances in *The Da Vinci Code* depends upon several controversial assertions. Three of these claims are particularly important—and debatable. The first is that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene (who was also an

apostle) and that the two of them had children together. The second is that New Testament Christianity is merely the winner among a variety of competing faiths that were held by the early followers of Jesus. The third is that the early followers of Jesus believed in the “sacred feminine” or goddess principle, an idea that they inherited from ancient Judaism.

The last claim is easily the strangest. Through the book’s characters, Brown argues that all the world’s ancient religions incorporated some form of goddess worship. The sacred feminine linked fertility with divinity and viewed sexual intercourse as a means of communing with the divine. According to Brown, ancient Judaism recognized this principle and had Yahweh (the masculine deity) cohabiting with Shekinah (the feminine deity) in the temple. Brown insists that the sacred feminine was part of Jesus’ teaching. Jesus’ marriage to Mary Magdalene embodied the goddess principle. The sacred feminine was accepted within the Jesus movement until it was crushed out by Constantine at the Council of Nicea (325 AD). Christianity has been a violent and morally impoverished movement ever since.

What this means is that New Testament Christianity did not exist until Nicea. That is Brown’s second claim. Brown uses the characters in his story to argue that Jesus was a merely human prophet who founded a church that had female leaders and even female apostles. The most important of these female leaders was Mary Magdalene. After the death of Jesus, rival factions in the church struggled for power. Male domination became a key issue. Constantine used the Council of Nicea to create a male-dominated version of Christianity that would suit his political purposes and unify his empire. Part of this new Christianity included the deity of Christ. In order to substantiate this new religion, the Council of Nicea compiled the New

Testament, including only those writings that would support the new doctrines. Many other documents—including many gospels—were excluded. Backed by the power of Constantine, this new Christianity was able to squelch other versions of the Jesus story, eventually making the claim that it was the only orthodoxy.

Ultimately, all of Brown's claims depend upon the theory that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene, that the two of them had children together, and that Mary was an apostle. Brown thinks that this is the deep, dark secret that Christianity has brutally suppressed through the centuries. He advances the bulk of his evidence on this point.

Brown notes that Mary Magdalene traveled with Jesus (Luke 8:1-3). He argues that Jewish males were expected to marry and that failure to marry was a scandal for them. He cites Hippolytus, a Second-Century theologian, for evidence that Mary Magdalene was an apostle. He quotes from a Gnostic document, the Gospel of Philip, which has Jesus kissing Mary and which calls her Jesus' "companion." The term "companion" is important to Brown: he insists that this is an Aramaic word that is reserved for lovers and spouses. Finally, Brown cites the Gospel of Mary Magdalene (another Gnostic document) to demonstrate that Jesus showed special favoritism towards Mary.

Brown's proposal is obviously subversive to Christianity. If he is correct, then Christianity as it is known today cannot be true. People who believe Brown's theory cannot also believe the Bible. Through *The Da Vinci Code*, Brown's ideas have been propagated to millions of people.

That is why Christians are taking issue with *The Da Vinci Code*. Christians want to respond to people who find *The Da Vinci*

Code persuasive. If their response is going to be effective, however, it must address all three issues that Dan Brown raises. That is exactly what I intend to do over the next several chapters.

TWO

The Gospel of the Goddess

Dan Brown, the author of *The Da Vinci Code*, advances a theory that subverts Christianity by making three distinct claims. The first claim is that Jesus was married to and had children with Mary Magdalene, who was also an apostle. The second claim is that New Testament Christianity was at best one of several competing faiths among the early followers of Jesus. The third is that the earliest followers of Jesus acknowledged a “sacred feminine” or goddess principle that corresponded to the ancient beliefs of both paganism and Judaism.

According to Brown, acknowledgement of a goddess or feminine deity was common among the world’s ancient religions. These religions paid homage to the sacred feminine in order to ensure fertility and wholeness. As Brown tells it, goddess worship dignified women and fostered peaceful, humane attitudes wherever it flourished.

In Brown’s opinion, one aspect of goddess worship involved using sexual relations as a mode of worship. Intercourse was thought to bring people into contact with the sacred feminine. In other words, sex functioned as a way of communing with the transcendent.

The protagonists of *The Da Vinci Code* argue that Jesus acknowledged this goddess principle. He is supposed to have learned it from ancient Hebrew religion, in which Yahweh (the male god) and Shekinah (the goddess) were thought to cohabit in the temple.

Jesus' marriage to Mary Magdalene also reflected their celebration of the sacred feminine. So important was Mary Magdalene to the true followers of Jesus that they have continued to reverence her as a symbol of the divine feminine: she is the so-called "Holy Grail."

According to the fictional characters who speak for Brown, Constantine was responsible for inventing a new form of Christianity that rejected the sacred feminine. Seeking to unite his empire, Constantine used his influence to create and enforce a Christian orthodoxy that denied the goddess principle, deified Jesus, and sought to expunge all record of the marriage between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. Having purged the goddess principle, Christianity after Constantine became a malignant and violent religion that repressed women and vilified human sexuality.

How much of Brown's presentation is accurate? Was the sacred feminine actually a characteristic of ancient religions? Is its presence really the key to wholeness, peace, and the dignity of women?

Brown is correct that many ancient religions recognized both male and female deities. He is also correct that these deities sometimes consorted with each other. This was true of Egyptian religion, with which early Israel was well acquainted. In Phoenician or Canaanite religion, the coupling of the storm god Baal and the fertility goddess Asherah were thought to bring prosperity to the land. Later on, the Greeks and Romans worshipped Aphrodite or Venus as the goddess of fertility. Her temple in Corinth was a center of sacred prostitution. During the First Century, the city of Ephesus was devoted to worshipping a goddess who combined the name and powers of the Greco-Roman Diana or Artemis with the fertility of the Middle-Eastern Astarte. No one doubts that the worship of goddesses was widespread in the ancient world.

Was goddess worship universal, however? The compilation of Hebrew and Aramaic documents known as the *Tanakh* indicates that it was not. This fact is important, because the *Tanakh* had been collected and widely recognized by the people of Israel for centuries before Jesus was born. The *Tanakh* was the authoritative religious text among the Jews of Jesus' day, and its documents were later accepted by Christians as their Old Testament.

The *Tanakh* presents an alternative to the goddess worship of the Egyptians and Canaanites. It depicts a single God, Yahweh, who is neither male nor female. Indeed, according to the *Tanakh* both men and women are made in the image of this God. As the only true God, Yahweh demands absolute loyalty from the people whom He chooses, namely, Israel.

The documents of the *Tanakh* record that the people of Israel sometimes worshipped foreign gods and goddesses. This polytheistic worship, however, is depicted as an aberration and a betrayal of Israel's covenant relationship with Yahweh. The prophets of Israel repeatedly denounced the worship of all gods and goddesses other than Yahweh. Israel finally and completely abandoned the worship of alien gods after the nation was defeated and carried captive by the Babylonian emperor, Nebuchadnezzar, during the Sixth Century BC. The *Tanakh* and other historical documents make it clear that, by the time of Jesus, Israel had been intensely committed to monotheism for hundreds of years.

Brown suggests that ancient Israel acknowledged the divine feminine, worshipping a goddess named Shekinah who consorted with Yahweh in the temple. Not a shred of legitimate, historical evidence exists to support this assertion. In the *Tanakh*, the "shekinah" is the glory or radiance that surrounds Yahweh. It is sometimes described as blazing light, sometimes as thick cloud

or smoke. Never is it depicted as a deity separate from Yahweh, especially not as a goddess with whom Yahweh has relations.

Brown has accepted a fabrication regarding Yahweh and Shekinah. What about his views on the effects of the divine feminine? Did goddess worship really dignify women, produce wholeness, and lead to peaceful attitudes?

The answers to these questions are not hard to find. The ancient civilizations that employed the goddess principle were uniformly warlike and demeaning to women. Egypt, Canaanite Phoenicia, Philistia, Assyria, Babylonia, Greece, and Rome were all patriarchal nations that viewed women primarily as possessions. Women were treated as beasts of burden and as tools for the gratification of male sexual desire and for the production of children. The first religion to dignify women was the monotheistic worship of Yahweh. The worshippers of Yahweh saw the image of God reflected in all human beings, both male and female.

The goddess worshippers not only oppressed women, they also stooped to other forms of savagery. Those who worshipped Asherah and Baal, for example, also butchered human babies as sacrifices to Molech. During its periods of goddess worship, Israel pursued this practice in sacred groves dedicated to the purpose. The documents in the Tanakh detail the perversion of Israel during those times. The prophets of Israel railed against this injustice.

As a Jewish teacher, Jesus knew all of this very well. He was reared in a culture that viewed goddess worship with horror. According to the oldest records of His life, He taught that monotheism—the worship of Yahweh alone—was the center of true religion. Contrary to Brown, not a shred of valid, historical evidence indicates that Jesus ever worshipped a goddess or acknowledged the “sacred feminine.”

Brown wants his readers to believe that Jesus followed ancient Israel in affirming the goddess principle. This is pure

fabrication. Brown also wants his readers to believe that goddess worship results in wholeness, peace, and the dignity of women. This, too, is pure fabrication. Furthermore, he wants his readers to believe that the early followers of Jesus accepted the divine feminine until the time of Constantine, who reinvented Christianity to suit his own purposes. That is the claim that we shall explore in the next chapter.

THREE

Many Christianities?

One of the claims that Dan Brown makes in *The Da Vinci Code* is that the original followers of Jesus believed something quite different from the Christianity of the New Testament. According to Brown, the original Christians knew that Jesus was married. They viewed Jesus as essentially human. They recognized Mary Magdalene as an apostle. They acknowledged the divine feminine as an aspect of their faith. Brown suggests that all of this began to change as the result of an ongoing power struggle among Jesus' followers—a struggle that focused particularly upon male domination. This struggle came to a head at the time of Constantine, who for political reasons chose to promote the views of one faction. Led by Constantine, the Council of Nicea (325 AD) elevated Jesus to the level of deity, denied His marriage, diminished the stature of women, eradicated the divine feminine from Christianity, and invented a New Testament that would support these views. Though this combination of teachings had been relatively rare before Constantine, it rapidly became "orthodoxy" when it was backed by the power of the Roman government.

There is a grain of truth in Brown's theory. As a matter of fact, the First Century AD was a time of religious ferment. As word about Jesus reached the various Jewish sects and mystery

religions, different sorts of combinations arose out of the mix. Groups like Mandaeans, Sabians, Ebionites, Cerinthians, and Docetists combined elements of Christian teachings with elements from other religious traditions.

One of the earliest and most powerful revisions of Christianity was the religious philosophy called *Gnosticism*. Gnosticism borrowed a good bit of its system from Middle Platonism, fitting in other categories from Zoroastrianism, and, in some versions, elements from Christianity (not all forms of Gnosticism attempted to absorb Christian elements). Paul wrote his letter to the church at Colosse in order to refute an incipient form of Gnostic ideas. Decades later, John wrote letters in the attempt to refute a more developed example of the Gnostic system.

Gnosticism existed in many varieties, but all varieties held certain principles in common. They all taught that the true God is ultimately unknowable, but that this God gives rise to other, lesser gods (called *Eons*), who in turn give rise to still others. The entire system of gods was called the *Pleroma*. All Gnostics held that the division between matter and spirit corresponds exactly to the division between evil and good, so that matter is always evil, and spirit is always good. Consequently, they believed that the human body is always evil. Only the spirit is good. This philosophy left them with three questions to answer.

The first question was, How could a good (spiritual) God create an evil (material) world? Their answer was that the true God did not create the world. Rather, God gave rise to Eons, and they to other Eons. Eventually, one of the lower members of the Pleroma (a feminine member, as it happens) experienced a kind of fall and, in her fallen condition, gave rise to an ignorant, obtuse being called the *Demiurge*. This Demiurge is the God of

the Old Testament, and He created the material world as part of His malice.

The second question was, Who was Christ and how was He related to the man named Jesus? Gnostics agreed that Christ was not a human, but that He was a powerful member of the Pleroma. They disagreed about His relation to the human Jesus. Some of them (the Docetists) taught that there never was a human Jesus, but that the Christ merely projected the appearance of a human body. Others of them (the Cerinthians) taught that the Christ Spirit came upon the human Jesus at His baptism, and then abandoned Him shortly before the crucifixion. Both of these theories denied the true humanity of the Christ, insisting that a good Christ could only be pure spirit and could not have a material body.

The third question was, How are people supposed to live if Gnosticism is true? Gnostics answered this question in two different ways. Most of them said that since the material body is evil, it must be disciplined and its desires denied. Therefore, the majority of Gnostics had a very low view of pleasurable activities such as eating, drinking, and sexual relations.

A small minority of Gnostics, however, gave the opposite answer. They argued that the body is so evil that it is completely irredeemable. Whatever is done with the body makes no difference, and therefore bodily desires may be freely indulged. The worship of these minority Gnostic cults came to be characterized by frenzied and sometimes bizarre sexual rituals.

This minority movement among Gnostics is the historical group that most closely resembles Dan Brown's descriptions of the early followers of Jesus in *The Da Vinci Code*. Besides adopting sex rituals, these Gnostics sometimes focused upon feminine members of the Pleroma such as Sophia. Of all professing Christians

in the ancient world, these come the closest to approximating Brown's view of the goddess principle. But these people were never a majority even among Gnostics. They represented only a splinter of those groups and individuals who claimed to be followers of Jesus.

All Gnostics, even the non-Christianized ones, claimed to possess secret knowledge or "gnosis" that had been delivered to them by some member of the Pleroma. Christianized Gnostics recognized Christ as the Eon who had imparted this gnosis. They taught that He had delivered it through some of His lesser-known disciples such as Thomas, Philip, and Mary Magdalene. These disciples had passed along Christ's teachings through secret oral tradition or had written it down in hidden documents. Gnostics kept both the oral traditions and the documents as closely guarded secrets. Thus, Gnosticism developed its own set of scriptures that included texts such as the Apocryphon of John, the Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles, the Gospel of Philip, and the Gospel of Mary of Magdala. A collection of about fifty Gnostic texts was discovered near the Egyptian town of Nag Hammadi in 1945.

Biblical writers knew about Gnostic influences. The apostle Paul was aware of spurious writings bearing his name as early as late 50 or early 51 AD (2 Thess 2:2). By about 60 AD he had encountered an early amalgam of Gnostic and Jewish categories. He wrote his epistle to the Colossians in order to refute it. Before the end of the First Century, the apostle John was writing epistles to refute a more fully-developed version of Gnosticism.

To summarize, during the last half of the First Century, a conflict developed among those who claimed to be followers of Jesus. On one side were the Gnostics (or at least proto-Gnostics),

who asserted that they held a secret oral tradition that went back to Jesus Himself. Later on, they also claimed to possess documents that had been committed to them secretly by such persons as Thomas, Philip, and Mary Magdalene. On the other side of the conflict were writers such as Paul and John, who declared that their teaching had been given to them directly by Jesus. These writers were sharply anti-Gnostic. They insisted that allegiance to Gnostic doctrines separated one from God. Such doctrines, they said, consisted of empty deceit and humanly-invented traditions (2 John 7-9; Col 2:8-9).

Everyone who has studied early Christianity knows that this conflict occurred. Everyone also knows that the conflict grew even more intense during the Second Century. What does this mean for *The Da Vinci Code*? Does it support Brown's thesis?

In the first place, Gnosticism only partially resembles the early "Jesus religion" that Dan Brown depicts. For example, most Gnostics condemned marriage and did not engage in sexual activity, let alone sex rites. Also, Gnostics uniformly held a very low view of women, much lower than New Testament Christianity. Gnosticism was *not* a liberating religion for women.

More than that, the appearance of Gnosticism raised two related problems: first, whether it was possible to tell what Jesus and His early followers actually taught, and, second, which (putatively apostolic) documents were to be accepted as authentic and authoritative. These are the very questions that must also be answered in evaluating Dan Brown's proposal in *The Da Vinci Code*. What is Christianity, and how do we know?

These are not new questions. They have been asked since the First Century. They were addressed explicitly during the Second Century, at which time they received answers that have been accepted as adequate by most Christians for the past 1,800 years. Our next task will be to review those answers.

FOUR

Spotting an Imposter

Irenaeus was too young to have known the apostles. He was born about twenty years after the death of the last apostle, John. Though he never met John, he was trained in Christianity by Papias and Polycarp, two men who had themselves been taught by the apostle. Irenaeus became a Christian at a very early age, eventually assuming the responsibility of pastor to the church in Lyons. The years of his ministry (mid-to-late Second Century) are the very years when Gnosticism was at its strongest.

Gnostics claimed to possess a secret tradition handed down orally from Christ through some of the more obscure apostles. Some Gnostics also claimed to hold secret books written by people such as Thomas, Philip, and Mary Magdalene. They even had a gospel that they claimed had been written by Peter. These books were supposed to present the details of Gnostic belief.

Modern historians (Walter Bauer and Elaine Pagels, for example) have sometimes seen Gnosticism and New Testament Christianity as parallel developments among the early followers of Jesus. That is not how the apostles Paul and John viewed Gnostic ideas, however. Both men claimed that they were perpetuating the authentic teaching of Jesus, and both wrote to expose Gnostic theology as an imposter.

Consequently, Christians of Irenaeus' generation were confronted with two systems. Each system claimed that it could trace its traditions and scriptures through the apostles to Christ. Faced with these two systems, pastors like Irenaeus had to engage in debate at two levels. First, they had to debate the legitimacy of Gnostic ideas in general. More fundamentally, however, they were forced to debate the question of authority. Which set of writings and traditions really represented the authentic teachings of Christ?

Irenaeus became the most important thinker to wrestle with this question. He knew that he could not simply assert that orthodoxy was true: why should anyone take *his* word for it? Rather, he had to find a way to answer the Gnostics' claim that they possessed a secret tradition and even secret scriptures. He developed his answer in five books entitled *Against Heresies*.

Irenaeus began with facts that all parties acknowledged. Everyone agreed that the apostles had founded certain churches. The congregations at Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome were examples of apostolic churches. Irenaeus observed that the succession of pastors in the apostolic churches was well known. Beginning with the apostles, each church could trace the names of its pastors in order. The original pastor of each church had been trained by one or more apostles, and then each pastor had trained his successor. Therefore, each of the apostolic churches had an acknowledged tradition of pastoral teaching that reached all the way back to the apostles.

Irenaeus then noted that the teaching of all the apostolic churches and their pastors was virtually identical. What was taught in Rome was also taught in Corinth and Antioch, and vice versa. This teaching was so uniform that it could even be summarized in a short statement known as the "rule of faith."

This uniformity could not be the result of collusion between the churches, for they were too widely separated to have conspired. In fact, the churches had not even been founded by the same apostles. Wherever apostolic churches were found, however, they all taught the same things.

For Irenaeus, only one explanation was possible. All the apostles must have believed the same things. They all must have taught the same things to the pastors of the apostolic churches. Those pastors must all have perpetuated the same apostolic teachings through the years. In the place of a secret Gnostic tradition, Irenaeus boldly presented a very public and obvious tradition among the pastors. The only way of accounting for this tradition was that it had to stem from the apostles themselves.

This public tradition also provided the key to determining which writings were genuinely apostolic. If a putatively apostolic writing contradicted the teachings of the apostolic churches, it had to be a forgery. Only those writings that reflected the teaching of the apostolic churches should be recognized as authoritative Scripture. (Incidentally, this is much the same approach that Paul took in 2 Thess 2:2—if a writing contradicted his known teaching, it was to be rejected, even if it had his name on it!)

Using this method, Irenaeus argued that apostolic churches had already recognized certain writings as genuine. These authentic writings included nearly all of the books that constitute the present New Testament, including all four of the canonical gospels. Irenaeus was very specific that only these four gospels must be accepted as genuine narratives of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

Irenaeus' reasoning was overwhelming. Against the Gnostic claim of a secret tradition he advanced a public tradition that could obviously be traced to the apostles. Against the Gnostic

claim of secret apostolic writings, he advanced writings that had been received and held publicly by the apostolic churches themselves. Irenaeus exposed Gnosticism as an imposter pretending to be Christianity. While the Gnostics continued to reassert their claims, they never really recovered from his critique. Gnosticism continued to linger for some time, but after Irenaeus it became a dwindling philosophy. It has long since been relegated to the museum of curious theological antiquities.

In *The Da Vinci Code*, Dan Brown makes specific claims about differences that existed among the early followers of Jesus. Some Gnostic groups are the closest to fitting his description, but even they do not fit it very well. Gnostics were ethical dualists, teaching that all matter is evil, including the human body. Most Gnostics were ascetics who took a very self-denying posture toward bodily pleasures such as eating, drinking, and sex. Virtually all Gnostics were misogynists who relegated women to a very inferior station. The Gnostic scriptures were ill-supported inventions that could not stand up in the face of careful evaluation. Brown suggests that New Testament Christianity was a late invention, but Christian apostles such as Paul and John were already opposing core Gnostic ideas during the latter half of the First Century. Brown argues that the New Testament was invented by the Council of Nicea in the Fourth Century, but according to Irenaeus, the apostolic churches already knew and accepted nearly all of the New Testament writings (including all four gospels) before the middle of the Second Century.

True, multiple versions of Christianity did exist during the First Century. But these divergences bear very little resemblance to the theories in *The Da Vinci Code*. A good bit of Dan Brown's theory is pure fabrication.

FIVE

The Apostle Mary

The early Christian community had to invent an entirely new vocabulary. In order to develop their new terminology, the followers of Jesus took old words and invested them with new, technical meanings. The word for *shepherd* became the title of a church office (*pastor*), as did the word for an old man (*elder*) and a word for a servant (*deacon*). The word for the evening meal became the name of a Christian ritual (*the supper*). Christians even used the word for an assembly to designate the church itself.

Christians adapted these words and made them into technical terms, but they also continued to use them in their older, more general sense. Technical and non-technical uses are intermingled in Christian literature. Sometimes this intermingling can create confusion, because occasionally a usage is not clear.

One of the words that the early Christians invested with new meaning was the word *apostle*. Originally this word simply referred to a person who was sent as a messenger or envoy. The first Christians used it to denote the leaders whom Jesus had appointed to govern the community of His followers. Alongside this formal, official usage, however, they also kept using the word in its general, non-technical sense. For example, Acts 14:14 calls Barnabas an apostle, probably because he had been sent as

a messenger from the church at Antioch. In a similar vein, Paul refers to Epaphroditus as an apostle of the church at Philippi. Epaphroditus had been sent from Philippi to deliver a message and gift to Paul in prison (Phil 2:25).

This “double usage” of terms within early Christianity is directly relevant to one of Dan Brown’s assertions in *The Da Vinci Code*. Brown alleges that early Christianity included female apostles, particularly Mary Magdalene. He thinks that this represents a more dignified understanding of the role of women that was later lost when Constantine converted Christianity into a patriarchal religion.

Brown bases his theory about female apostles upon two ancient documents. One is a commentary by Hippolytus, who pastored a faction of the Christian church in Rome during the late Second and early Third Centuries. The second document is the Gospel of Mary, a Gnostic text written (at the earliest) during the Second Century.

Hippolytus’ remarks occur in his commentary on the Song of Songs, also known as the Song of Solomon. In context, Hippolytus is discussing the role of women as witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus. To understand Hippolytus’ reference, it is necessary to review the order of events after the resurrection.

On Easter morning, certain women (including Mary Magdalene) went to the tomb of Jesus and were met by the angel (Matt 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-8). The angel announced to the women that Jesus had arisen. Then he instructed the women to tell Jesus’ disciples that Jesus was going into Galilee and would meet them there. The women, however, were so afraid that they kept this angelic announcement secret. Subsequently, a second episode occurred (Mark 16:9-11; John 20:11-18). Jesus appeared personally to Mary Magdalene outside the empty

tomb. Following that episode, Mary went and announced to the disciples that she had seen the risen Lord Jesus. Luke abbreviates his account of both of these instances (Luke 24:1-11), but adds the useful information that at least four women were involved as witnesses of these events.

When Mary Magdalene and the other women announced that they had seen Jesus, the disciples refused to believe them. Later on, Jesus appeared (unrecognized, at first) to two disciples on the road to Emmaus. These disciples explicitly mentioned the testimony of the women, which they still did not believe (Luke 24:22-23). Jesus rebuked these men for their unbelief and then revealed who He was.

In sections 24-26 of his commentary, Hippolytus refers to these women, including Mary Magdalene, as “female apostles,” stating that “Christ Himself came to them so that the women would be apostles of Christ.” Hippolytus also has Jesus rebuking the male apostles, stating that He Himself had appeared to the women because “I wanted to send them to you as apostles.”

Almost certainly Hippolytus is using the word *apostle* in its usual, non-technical sense of “messenger.” The resurrection accounts clarify why he would. The women were commissioned by the angel, and later by Jesus Himself, to announce the resurrection to the disciples. Since an apostle (in the general sense) is a person who is sent to deliver a message, Hippolytus was quite correct to apply the word to these women. For Hippolytus to call them *apostles*, however, does not place them in the formal office of apostle, any more than Barnabas or Epaphroditus were official apostles.

The second document to which Dan Brown appeals is the Gospel of Mary. The first part of this Gnostic gospel has been lost, but the surviving text opens with Jesus instructing His

disciples and then departing. After His departure the disciples are overcome with grief at the task Jesus has assigned to them, but Mary Magdalene stands and encourages them. Peter appeals to Mary, remarking that Jesus loved her more than the rest of women. He asks her to reiterate whatever words of Jesus she remembers. Mary responds by claiming that she has received a special revelation through a vision of Jesus, and she relates what Jesus said to her. When she finishes, Andrew objects that he does not believe Mary because what she says is too strange. An incredulous Peter also protests that Jesus would not have revealed so much privately to a woman that He did not reveal openly to the male disciples. Mary bursts into tears and asks whether Peter really thinks that she is deluded or lying, whereupon Levi rebukes Peter for being too hot-tempered and for treating Mary as if she were an enemy. He argues that if Jesus made Mary worthy, then they must not reject her. He concedes that Jesus loved Mary more than He loved the male disciples.

How is Mary Magdalene perceived by the author of the Gospel of Mary? First, she is seen as one toward whom Jesus held great affection. Second, she is one to whom Jesus gave a remarkable, special revelation. Incidentally, neither of these points is necessarily objectionable on the face of it. For all we know, Jesus may have held Mary Magdalene in greater affection than any other women or even than His male disciples. The New Testament simply does not address this issue. The New Testament does, however, present women as the recipients of special revelation (i.e., as prophets). Corinth had women who prophesied (1 Cor 11:5), and Philip the Evangelist had four daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:8-9). No reason exists to think that Mary Magdalene could not have received special revelation from Jesus, though several reasons can be given for

denying that she received the revelation that is narrated in the Gospel of Mary.

Even so, nothing in the text of this Gnostic gospel indicates that Mary was an apostle. Beloved by Jesus, yes. A recipient of revelation, yes. None of that, however, equals apostleship.

What is more, the Gospel of Mary displays the typical Gnostic contempt of women. Peter objects that Mary's femaleness is what makes her an unlikely recipient of special revelation (an observation which is at odds with the teaching of the New Testament). Levi's response is not that females are worthy recipients, but that Jesus has *made* Mary worthy *in spite of* the fact that she is a female. In other words, the Gospel of Mary does not have an elevated view of women, but a rather demeaning view. This is typical of Gnostic thought.

Dan Brown would like us to believe that early Christianity recognized at least one female apostle: Mary Magdalene. He would also like us to believe that the presence of one or more female apostles is proof that early Christians held a higher view of women than the later, patriarchal revision of Christianity by Constantine. For proof, Brown relies upon a discussion in Hippolytus and a conversation in the Gospel of Mary. As we have seen, however, neither of these documents supports the idea that Mary or any other woman ever held apostolic office in early Christianity. In short, *The Da Vinci Code* does not present a bit of convincing evidence for the apostleship of Mary Magdalene.

SIX

Did Jesus Marry?

The real core of *The Da Vinci Code* is the notion that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married and had children together. According to Dan Brown, this notion is so shocking that Christians since Constantine have carefully suppressed the evidence that proves it. Brown seems convinced that the whole Christian faith would collapse if Jesus had a wedding.

This theory forces us to answer two questions: first, *could* Jesus have married and had children? and second, *did* He? Each question deserves an answer, and if either question is answered contrary to Brown's assumptions, his whole theory will deflate like a punctured tire. If Jesus *could* have married, then Christianity does not depend upon the question of whether He *did*. If Jesus *did not* marry, then Christianity does not depend upon the question of whether He *could*.

Brown seems to assume that the Jesus who is worshipped by the Christian churches could not have married. He never attempts to substantiate or even examine this assumption. He simply advances evidence that he considers adequate to show that Jesus did actually marry and have children. What is his evidence?

Brown admits that the New Testament documents never hint that Jesus was married, but he points out that they do show that Mary Magdalene traveled with Jesus (Luke 8:1-3).

He argues that Jewish males during the First Century were not allowed to remain unmarried. Brown also claims that the Gospel of Mary has Jesus showing favoritism to Mary. Finally, he asserts that the Gospel of Philip has Jesus kissing Mary Magdalene. Furthermore, the Gospel of Philip calls Mary a “companion” to Jesus, and Brown declares that the word for “companion” in Aramaic is reserved for spouses and lovers.

Brown’s actual evidence for the marriage of Jesus relies almost exclusively upon four ancient sources: the Gospel of Luke, the Gospel of Mary, the Gospel of Philip, and First Century Jewish social custom. This is not a large amount of evidence. It can be evaluated in a few paragraphs. If Brown’s evidence is deficient, then no particular reason exists to believe that Jesus was ever married or that He had children.

Luke 8:1-3 states, “And it came to pass afterward, that he went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were with him, and certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, and Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod’s steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance.” Dan Brown is correct that, according to this passage, Mary Magdalene did travel with Jesus. So did Joanna. So did Susanna. So did many other women. Nobody argues that Jesus was married to all these women. Since Luke treats them all identically, this passage makes no contribution at all toward discovering whether Jesus was married.

What about First Century expectations for Jewish males? Brown alleges that for a man to remain unmarried was a scandal in Jewish culture. The evidence, however, indicates otherwise. As a matter of fact, males commonly chose to remain single

among the Essenes and within the Qumran community. The New Testament documents depict John the Baptist as a man who remained single. They also seem to indicate that Saul of Tarsus remained single. Even Jesus talked about men who made themselves “eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake” (Matt 19:12), an allusion to voluntary celibacy. While the overwhelming majority of Jewish men did choose to marry, singleness was not the scandal that Brown asserts. Nothing about Jewish customs from the First Century indicates that Jesus had to be married.

The evidence from the Gospel of Mary has already been reviewed. That document has Peter saying that Jesus loved Mary more than all other women. It also has Levi saying that Jesus loved Mary more than He loved the male disciples. These comparisons clearly indicate that the references in the Gospel of Mary are not to romantic love, but to the kind of caring concern that Jesus exercised toward all people, male or female. Could Jesus have felt greater compassion or even affection for Mary Magdalene than for others? Possibly. Even if He did, however, this is no evidence for a marriage. The Gospel of Mary does not even mention marriage.

Like the Gospel of Mary, the Gospel of Philip is a Gnostic document. It was probably written in Greek during the latter half of the Third Century. No copies of the Gospel of Philip were known to exist until a Coptic translation was discovered during the mid-Twentieth Century at Nag Hammadi in Egypt. The text is in very poor condition. Parts of it cannot be reconstructed with certainty. The section that is germane to *The Da Vinci Code* makes three assertions about Jesus and Mary Magdalene. The first assertion is that she was the *companion* of Jesus (Dan Brown asserts that the word for companion in Aramaic can only be applied to spouses and lovers). The second assertion is that Jesus loved her more than all His disciples. The third assertion is that Jesus used to kiss Mary.

Brown argues that by calling Mary the companion of Jesus, the Gospel of Philip is hinting at a marriage or at least a relationship of sexual intimacy. According to Brown, the Aramaic word for *companion* only applies to spouses and lovers. This is a puzzling remark for a couple of reasons. First, the Gospel of Philip was not written in Aramaic. It was written in Greek, and the surviving manuscript is a translation into Coptic. In both of those languages, the word for *companion* means *companion*. Furthermore, Brown is wrong about the Aramaic. Even if the Gospel of Philip had been written in Aramaic, the word for *companion* still means *companion* and certainly does not necessitate marriage or physical intimacy. To all appearances, Brown is just making this up.

The Gospel of Philip does state that Jesus loved Mary Magdalene more than all His disciples. To Brown this implies romantic love and marriage, but that is hardly likely. The statement in the Gospel of Philip is really quite similar to the one in the Gospel of Mary. Both appear to be saying the same thing, namely, that Jesus felt a great deal of compassion or affection toward Mary. This would not be unthinkable, even given a traditional, Christian understanding of Jesus. It is miles away from a marriage, however.

The Da Vinci Code makes much of the fact that Jesus is supposed to have kissed Mary Magdalene. What Dan Brown seems to have forgotten, however, is that a kiss was a traditional greeting among friends during the First Century, just as it is in some parts of the world today. The kiss of greeting was certainly practiced in the early church. It is mentioned more than once in the New Testament. If Jesus and Mary Magdalene kissed one another in greeting, this should surprise no one. It is certainly no evidence of a marriage. Indeed, by itself it does not indicate anything more than a casual acquaintance. Incidentally, the Gospel of Philip does

not say *where* Jesus was supposed to have kissed Mary. Typically, the kiss of greeting would have been administered on the cheek.

However many leaky buckets you pile on top of each other, they still aren't going to hold water. Brown wants us to believe that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were husband and wife, but every one of his arguments has huge holes in it. The evidence for a marriage simply does not exist. Any suggestion that Jesus ever married is an unsupported assertion. No evidence—none—exists to back up this claim.

The evidence that Jesus fathered children enjoys even less support. A review of Brown's ancient sources reveals that none of them even mentions children. The suggestion would have astonished New Testament Christians and Gnostics alike. The suggestion that Jesus had children is a speculation of the Middle Ages, not an ancient belief supported by evidence.

Did Jesus marry? The answer to this question is almost certainly negative. But *could* Jesus have married? Would a married Jesus really undermine the Christian faith? That is the next question that must be answered.

SEVEN

The Jesus of the New Testament

Using *The Da Vinci Code* as his mouthpiece, Dan Brown argues that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene, that the two of them had children together, and that these facts completely subvert the traditional understanding of Jesus and orthodox Christianity. Brown's hypothesis raises two questions: (1) *did* Jesus marry? and (2) *could* Jesus marry? The first of these questions has already been answered with a clear *no*. What remains is to ask whether Jesus could have married and begotten children, or whether a married Jesus would undermine the Christian faith.

Most Christians are initially shocked by the strangeness of this question. A married Jesus—and especially a Jesus with children—is not a possibility that they have even considered. Nevertheless, the teachings of the New Testament provide the necessary information to be able to develop an answer. In order to understand that answer, however, we must take a brief detour. Before we can decide whether Jesus could have married, we must first discover what the New Testament teaches about Jesus.

The New Testament teaching about Jesus can be summed up in three propositions. First, Jesus Christ possesses a complete divine nature. Second, Jesus Christ possesses a complete human nature. Third, Jesus Christ is one person.

By insisting that Jesus Christ is one person, the New Testament writers were responding to Gnostic-like ideas. Gnosticism saw the Christ as a divine, spiritual being who mediated secret knowledge or “gnosis” to some humans. Because they thought that matter was evil, Gnostics could not admit that the Christ ever took a human body. They thought that He either projected the illusion of a body (Docetism), or else that He came upon the human Jesus at the baptism, subsequently leaving Him before the crucifixion (Cerinthianism). Both Gnostic options distinguished the divine Christ from the human Jesus.

John responded to this Gnostic distinction in his epistles. He insisted that Jesus and the Christ are one and the same person. Jesus Christ is come in the flesh; Jesus *is* the Christ (1 John 2:22; 2 John 7). To deny these truths is to mark one’s self as a liar and antichrist. The willingness to confess them is one of the marks of God’s Spirit as opposed to the spirit of antichrist (1 John 4:2-3). The one who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God (1 John 5:1). By writing these things, John is plainly condemning a Gnostic understanding of Jesus in the clearest possible terms. The biblical view is that Jesus Christ is one and only one person.

Jesus Christ possesses a complete divine nature. This is directly affirmed in John 1:1, which states that the Word (a name for Jesus) was God. The Jesus of the New Testament claimed divine names and attributes (John 8:58). He received worship (John 9:35-38). He is the radiance of the Father’s glory and the exact image of His person (Heb 1:3). Paul calls Jesus God and Savior (Titus 2:13). Clearly, the Jesus of the New Testament is a fully divine person. He is God.

Equally clearly, the Jesus of the New Testament is human. He was the sort of person Who could grow tired and hungry.

He took a human nature in order to reverse the penalty of human sin (1 Cor 15:21-22). His human nature was essential in order for Him to defeat the enemy of humanity (Heb 2:15). In order to earn the right to save humans, Jesus had to submit in human obedience to the Father (Heb 5:7-9). The humanity of Jesus Christ was not an illusion: it was real. The Jesus of the New Testament is a fully human person.

The Jesus of the New Testament is a single person with two natures. From eternity He was true God, possessing a complete divine nature. At His incarnation He added a complete human nature to His deity, becoming true man. As a theanthropic person—a God-man—the Jesus of the Bible is absolutely unique.

That very uniqueness has created huge questions for Christians. From the very beginning they have struggled to understand the relationship between the deity and humanity of Jesus. How can one person simultaneously be omnipotent and yet grow tired? How can He be omniscient at the very time when He confesses that He does not know the day or the hour of His own coming? How can He be omnipresent and yet localized in the manger, at the temple, or on the cross?

Christian theologians have answered these questions by attempting to state how the attributes of Jesus' natures relate to each nature and to the person. The language of this discussion is a bit technical, and there is some disagreement even among orthodox Christians. All agree that the properties or attributes of each nature communicate or are applied to the person *according to that nature*. Beyond that, the majority of Christian theologians insist that the properties or attributes of each nature *do not* communicate to the other nature.

In other words, the person Jesus Christ is omniscient according to the divine nature, but limited in knowledge according

to the human nature. He is omnipotent according to the divine nature, but He could be weak according to the human nature. He is omnipresent according to the divine nature, but spatially local according to the human nature (the majority of Christians agree that the human body of Jesus is not omnipresent). Theologians have inferred that whatever is true of one nature must also be true of the person, but not necessarily of the other nature.

Incidentally, this is one reason that Jesus' mother Mary can properly be called *Theotokos*, "God-bearer." She is the mother of the person of Jesus and not merely of His human nature. The person of Jesus is theanthropic. Neither the person nor the divine nature of Jesus began with Mary, but she was the mother of the person nevertheless. To suggest otherwise is to run the risk of dividing the person in two, resulting in a human Jesus and a divine Christ who are joined rather like Siamese twins. That is the error of Nestorianism, and it represents a giant step back toward Gnosticism.

This discussion is intricate. The path between dividing the person and confusing the natures of Jesus is a very narrow one. Theologians have used technical terms and intricate concepts to build fences along both sides of that path. Those technicalities may sometimes seem distracting to people whose main interest is simply to worship Jesus Christ. The discussion, however, is necessary.

One reason that it is necessary is that it provides the categories for dealing with issues like the marriage of Jesus. Granted, Jesus did not marry. Nevertheless, Dan Brown's hypothesis in *The Da Vinci Code* forces us to ask whether He *could* have married, or whether a married Jesus would completely destroy Christianity as it now exists. Now that we have examined briefly the New Testament teachings about Jesus Christ, we are in a position to answer that question.

EIGHT

Could Jesus Marry?

Author Dan Brown uses *The Da Vinci Code* to present a theory that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and that the two of them had children together. The premise of *The Da Vinci Code* is that this theory, if true, would overthrow the New Testament view of Jesus. According to Brown, the Christian church has carefully suppressed the evidence for Jesus' marriage and children.

As we have already seen, no ancient evidence supports the theory of a married Jesus. Brown says that all of his descriptions of ancient documents are accurate, but wherever his claims can be tested, they are found to be mistaken. Frankly, Brown's claims leave responsible scholars of all stripes shaking their heads in disbelief.

Suppose Brown's claims were true, however. Suppose the evidence showed convincingly that Jesus really was married and that He really did have children. Would this claim damage the Christian view of Jesus? Granted that Jesus did not marry; the question remains, *could* He?

In order to answer that question, we took a detour through the New Testament teachings about Jesus. There we discovered that the Jesus of the New Testament is both fully human and fully divine, but that He is only one person. The properties of

both natures (human and divine) are evident in the person, each according to its respective nature. Most theologians would agree, however, that the properties of each nature do not become evident in the other nature.

This helps Christians to understand some of the paradoxes of Jesus' personality. He was eternal according to His divine nature, yet His human nature came into existence. He was all-powerful according to His divine nature, yet He could be weary according to His human nature. He was all-wise according to His divine nature, but He could grow in wisdom according to his human nature.

How does this help to answer the questions about a married Jesus having children? Three factors are particularly relevant.

First, getting married and begetting children are human activities. Since Jesus was truly and completely human, He was certainly capable of marrying and, for that matter, of having children. This may seem surprising to those who have not thought much about the humanity of Jesus. If we think about Jesus' incarnation, however, we will also be surprised that He could be wrapped in swaddling clothes. We will be surprised that He would have to eat and sleep. Devout Christians have always stood astonished before these facts, but they have always admitted them. We ought to be surprised that Jesus Christ would be able to marry and to beget children. Our surprise, however, should not turn into denial. Jesus' full masculinity is a necessary consequence of His complete human nature.

Second, the Bible teaches that marriage, sexual relations, and having children are good and pure activities. Marriage was instituted by God Himself, before sin was in the world. Part of His original design in creation was for human beings to "be

fruitful and multiply," and humans have never multiplied by sprouting in cabbage patches. Sex was part of God's perfect plan for humanity. In the beginning God made humans as male and female. In spite of all the wrong things that can be done with human sexuality, Hebrews 13:4 bluntly declares that marriage is honorable and the bed (a metaphor for sexual relations within marriage) is undefiled. Writing to the Corinthians, Paul teaches that husbands and wives owe sexual intimacy to one another. According to the Bible, human sexuality is holy and good within the marriage covenant. If Jesus had chosen to marry and to have children, He would have been doing nothing sinful *per se*. A Jesus who married and fathered children would have been morally permissible.

What would Jesus' children have been like? Would they have been half-gods? Would they have possessed miraculous powers? Would they have been sinless, or would they have needed a Savior?

A third factor helps to answer these questions. Jesus is a theanthropic person. In other words, He has a complete human nature and a complete divine nature, united into a single personality. Each nature displays its attributes in the person, but not in the other nature.

Getting married and begetting children are human activities. If Jesus had married, He would have been a husband according to His human nature. If He had begotten children, He would have been a father according to His human nature. Since the properties of the divine nature do not display themselves in the human nature, Jesus' children would not have received anything from His divine nature. They could, perhaps, be called "children of God" in the same sense that Mary can be called "mother of God," but their nature and constitution would be purely and

simply human. They would not have been miraculous beings. Since they would have been born from a purely human mother, and since they would not have received Jesus' divine nature, they would have been sinners, standing in need of salvation.

Some might find it odd to suggest that Jesus' children (if He had begotten any) would need Him to be their Savior. Is that really any more unusual, however, than the fact that His mother, Mary, needed Him to be her Savior? Yet the Bible explicitly states that she acknowledged her need of a Savior (Luke 1:47).

The conclusion seems to be inescapable. As a genuinely human being, Jesus could have married. Nothing about His deity would have made a marriage unthinkable. No moral precept would have prohibited it. A married Jesus would not be incompatible with biblical Christianity in any way.

Neither would Jesus as a parent. As a true human, Jesus could have fathered children. Parenthood would not have contradicted His deity. No moral precept would have prohibited His fatherhood. His children would have been ordinary human beings, sinners like all others, standing in need of a Savior. A Jesus who begat children would not contradict biblical Christianity in any way.

If proof could be produced tomorrow that Jesus had married and fathered children, Christians would not have to alter their view of Jesus in any important way. Such a Jesus could still possess a complete divine nature. Such a Jesus could also possess a complete human nature. Such a Jesus would still be a single person. Christianity would not change.

The realization that Jesus *could* have married and fathered children destroys the heart of Dan Brown's theory. The whole premise of *The Da Vinci Code* is that Christianity has been trying to

cover up the marriage of Jesus since the time of Constantine. This cover-up was necessary (according to Brown) because a married Jesus would completely overturn New Testament Christianity. The Christian church could never afford to admit that Jesus was married or had children.

Wrong.

The only reason that Christians have never believed in a married Jesus is because they have never had a reason to do so. No one has ever presented convincing evidence that Jesus married or had children. If solid evidence could be presented that Jesus married, most Christians would recognize it. They see no reason, however, to make concessions to unsupported speculations and groundless hypotheses.

Could Jesus have married? Certainly. *Did* Jesus marry? Not a shred of plausible evidence exists to show that He did. Brown's theory fails on both counts.

This conclusion, however, raises another question that really needs to be answered. Jesus could have married, but He did not. If marriage is good, then why would Jesus choose to remain unmarried? That is the question to which we shall turn next.

NINE

The Mission of Jesus

Dan Brown, author of *The Da Vinci Code*, assumes that Jesus was married. He also assumes that a married Jesus is incompatible with a biblical view of Christ. We have seen that no credible evidence exists to show that Jesus ever married. We have also seen that the Jesus of the Bible *could* have married if He had wished. Brown's case is so thin that it has to be measured in angstroms.

A question remains to be answered, however. If Jesus could have married, why would He choose to remain single? A biblical understanding of Jesus provides an answer to this question.

The Jesus of the Bible was not simply a great teacher, a moral leader, or a religious example. In Jesus Christ, deity and humanity are united in one person. This joining of two natures is absolutely essential to the mission of Jesus. In His own words, that mission was "to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45). He was announced as "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

The apostle Paul explains the meaning of the Christian gospel by stating that "Christ died for our sins," and that "he rose again the third day" (1 Cor 15:1-4). Jesus' death and resurrection are news—they are events that occurred in space and time. Those

events mean something, and Paul summarizes their meaning in the phrase “for our sins.”

The death of Jesus was “for our sins.” This implies that we were guilty of sin. People today have trouble taking sin seriously. To most people, the whole concept of sin is rather like a joke. God, however, takes sin very seriously. To understand why, we must grasp that God is in His very nature a moral Lawgiver and Judge.

The whole point of a lawgiver and judge is to require justice. That is exactly what God does. At best, we are not wise enough to discover all justice for ourselves. Therefore, God reveals a moral law that embodies perfect justice. Because injustice demands retribution, God as Judge stands athwart the human race, dispensing retribution for every violation of justice. This is bad news for humanity because every human being is guilty of grave injustice.

We are sometimes puzzled that God seems to make such a big thing of sin. We need to remember, however, that courts do not allow criminals to determine the gravity of their crimes. One of the effects of doing injustice is that it erodes the moral sense and robs sinners of their ability to understand how bad their deeds really are. Criminals do not get to decide their own sentences. That is why we choose judges who are not criminals to judge those who are.

We are the criminals. We are the sinners. We are the ones who have violated justice and broken God’s law. It is not for us to say how serious our sins are. It is for God to determine that. He has expressed Himself clearly: “the wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23). God condemns us for our sins. He has to, or He Himself would become unjust.

A just judge cannot treat the guilty as if they were innocent. We know this intuitively. We recoil from judges who take bribes or who release the guilty over technicalities. We *expect* judges to judge. We *want* judges to judge. To *judge* means to assign suitable retribution for the violation of justice. Judges who will not do this become guilty of injustice themselves. They place themselves on the side and in the position of criminals.

If God is just, then He *must* judge our sins. He cannot do otherwise. If He were to neglect justice, He could no longer be the Lawgiver and Judge. He would, in effect, be willing Himself out of existence.

God condemns us for our sins—the Bible makes this clear. Nevertheless, God loves us—the Bible also makes this clear. In His justice, He has to condemn us, but in His love, He wishes to save us. The problem for God is to find a way to rescue us from guilt and to deliver us from condemnation while still upholding justice.

This is where Jesus Christ becomes central to God's purpose. God loved us and wished to provide a substitute who could bear the penalty of our sins for us. Such a substitute had to be perfectly sinless. He had to be a human in order to bear human sin. He also had to be an infinite being who could bear the massive guilt of the entire human race. Such a being could be no less than a theanthropic person, a God-man.

By His own testimony, that is why Jesus Christ was born on earth. In the manger of Bethlehem, God became a human in order that He might bear human sin. Throughout His life and ministry, Jesus successfully resisted every inducement to sin. He always did the right thing. He was perfectly just.

Jesus Christ did not die on the cross by accident. In His death, He took our place and died our death. He paid the price

for our sins. The apostle Peter writes that Jesus carried “our sins in his own body on the tree [the cross]” (1 Pet 2:24). Paul adds that God “made him [Jesus] to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness [justice] of God in him” (2 Cor 5:21). In other words, God charged the guilt of our sin against Jesus Christ, and Jesus accepted it freely. He paid for our sins by permitting God to condemn Him instead of condemning us.

If our sins are as bad as the Bible says, then Jesus’ love for us must have been truly enormous. He already knew us when He suffered on the cross and cried out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt 27:46). We were in His mind. He knew that His pain was for us and that His death would provide salvation for us. He freely gave Himself up to God’s condemnation in order that He might cleanse us and purify us (Eph 5:25-27).

Once Jesus had suffered the condemnation for our sins, He arose from the dead. Sin and death were now defeated enemies. When He came out of the grave, He displayed Himself to His disciples in full and radiant life. After He had encouraged them, He ascended into heaven, where He acts as High Priest and Advocate for those He has saved. He is preparing a place for them and will some day come to receive them again.

Jesus has provided the forgiveness of our sins, and He offers that forgiveness to us as a free gift. If we will repent of (change our minds about) our injustice and if we will trust Him, He will cleanse us of our sins and give us eternal life. Whoever calls upon His name will be saved (Rom 10:13).

Once we understand Jesus’ purpose and mission, we are able to perceive why He did not marry. The reason is not that He was unable to marry, or that marriage is somehow less

spiritual than celibacy. The reason is that His life was directed toward the cross. From the moment of His birth, His mission was to present Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. Marriage simply did not fit that purpose.

The worst part of *The Da Vinci Code* is that it misses the whole point of Jesus' life and death. Dan Brown is so caught up in theories about conspiracies and cover-ups that he offers no explanation for why we should be interested in Jesus at all. Frankly, the Jesus of *The Da Vinci Code* is a pretty bland figure. If Brown did not surround Him with intrigue, He would be simply boring.

The Jesus of the New Testament is anything but boring. He is a magnificent person in whom justice and mercy meet and make peace. He is full of power and compassion. He accomplishes His purpose in the most magnificent display of holy love that the universe has ever witnessed. The Jesus of the New Testament should attract more than mere interest. He merits our love. He has earned our trust. He deserves our worship.

TEN

It's a Wrap

Who doesn't enjoy a good mystery story, especially when it has a pinch of intrigue and a dash of conspiracy? If *The Da Vinci Code* were nothing but a story, Christians would find little to dispute. We might not like Dan Brown's depiction of Jesus, but if it were presented as mere fiction, we would most likely remain silent about the offense.

The problem is that Brown does not intend to write fiction about Jesus. Even though the story of murder, suspicion, pursuit, and vindication is made up, Brown rests the plot of *The Da Vinci Code* upon a theory about Jesus that he presents as factual. At the very beginning of the book, he stipulates that certain aspects of the book are fact. Specifically, he states that "[a]ll descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate."

From those documents and rituals, Brown constructs a theory about Jesus that involves several elements. First, he says that early Christians acknowledged the "divine feminine" or goddess principle. By conceptualizing deity as at least partly feminine, the early followers of Jesus developed a religion that promoted peace and wholeness, envisioned human sexuality as a means of divine communion, and dignified women.

Of course, many ancient religions worshipped goddesses. Among these religions, sexual intercourse was often viewed as a means of communion with the divine. Gnosticism, an ancient religion that sometimes used Christian language, admitted feminine deities. A few Gnostics even promoted sexual rites as a part of their worship, although most Gnostics were very strictly against sex in any form. This part of the truth fits Brown's theory.

The rest of the truth completely undermines Brown's thesis. Most goddess religions were very demeaning to women. Not uncommonly, they saw women as barely human or even subhuman. This was as true of Gnosticism as it was of Phoenician, Greek, or Roman religion. Moreover, the goddess religions were anything but peaceful. They tended to produce warlike nations that invaded neighboring countries and attempted to build empires. They often engaged in human sacrifice, including the torture and murder of children.

Contrary to Brown, religions that acknowledged a divine feminine were not peaceful. They did not dignify women. Except for the Gnostic cult, no early Christians were in any sense goddess worshippers. Even among the Gnostics, sex rites were rarely practiced. These rites were never practiced among mainstream Christians. *The Da Vinci Code* is simply wrong on these points.

The second element in Dan Brown's theory is that New Testament Christianity was a late invention, introduced at the Council of Nicea (325 AD) and enforced by the Roman emperor Constantine. According to this theory, the early Jesus movement had several branches, most of which were quite different from the Christianity of the New Testament. Constantine and his

council created the New Testament and invented the deity of Christ.

The grain of truth in *The Da Vinci Code* is that people did offer alternative explanations for Jesus. Even during the lifetime of the apostles, proto-Gnostics were denying that Jesus could be the Christ. Both Paul and John wrote against incipient Gnosticism. Both apostles denied that Gnosticism was Christian.

The opposition between Gnosticism and New Testament Christianity led to a crisis of authority. Each theology claimed to base its beliefs upon the teachings of apostles. Each claimed to possess an apostolic tradition and apostolic writings. Which, if either, could be believed?

Irenaeus provided the answer to this question. While the Gnostics appealed to a secret tradition and hidden writings, he appealed to the public teaching of the apostolic churches. These were the churches that everyone knew had been founded by apostles, such as Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome. Irenaeus reasoned that where the apostolic churches agreed, they must represent the genuine apostolic teaching. He noted that the apostolic churches agreed at every point of faith. Gnostics, however, disagreed with the apostolic churches. In fact, Gnostics even disagreed among themselves. Irenaeus concluded that the faith of the apostolic churches must be accepted as the true faith taught by the apostles. He insisted that the Scriptures recognized among the apostolic churches must be regarded as genuine and authentic.

Gnosticism never recovered from the argument of Irenaeus. He appealed to the public teaching of apostolic churches and the public writings of the apostles. This severely undermined the status of the Gnostics, who could only appeal to hidden writing and secret traditions. In other words, Irenaeus had refuted

the Gnostics and argued for nearly the whole New Testament more than a hundred years before Constantine became emperor. Therefore, *The Da Vinci Code* is simply wrong on these points.

Part of Dan Brown's theory is that Mary Magdalene was a female apostle whom Jesus intended to lead His church. Brown bases this argument largely on a reference from a Third Century writer, Hippolytus, who refers to Mary and other women as "female apostles." In everyday usage, however, the word *apostle* simply referred to someone who had been sent with a message. This corresponds exactly to the commission that Jesus gave to the women who first witnessed His resurrection. He commanded them to tell Peter and the apostles that He had risen. In the ordinary sense, these women were "apostles," or messengers. This does not mean that they were appointed to the office of apostle or that they became leaders of the church.

One of the Gnostic gospels (the Gospel of Mary) has Mary Magdalene receiving special revelation from the Savior. Even if this happened, it is not a problem for New Testament Christianity. New Testament Christians believed that women could receive revelation and prophesy, just as they could in the Old Testament. For women to prophesy, however, does not place them in the office of apostle. Prophets and apostles are not the same thing. In short, no credible evidence exists that Mary Magdalene was an apostle. Once again, *The Da Vinci Code* is just plain wrong.

Of course, the most conspicuous part of Dan Brown's theory in *The Da Vinci Code* is the suggestion that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and that the two of them had children. Brown bases this theory upon several arguments: the fact that Mary traveled with Jesus; a supposed prohibition in Jewish culture against men remaining unmarried; a reference in the Gospel

of Mary to the fact that Jesus loved Mary more than the other apostles; a similar reference in the Gospel of Philip, coupled with an allusion to Mary as Jesus' "companion," a term that (according to Brown) could only refer to spouses or lovers in the Aramaic language.

As we have seen, many women traveled with Jesus, so Mary Magdalene was no exception. Jewish men were not forbidden to remain single: examples to the contrary abound. The Gospel of Mary proves nothing except that Jesus was fond of Mary. The same can be said about the Gospel of Philip. Like the rest of the Gospel of Philip, the word *companion* is not even in Aramaic, but in Coptic. In both languages (and in Greek) it simply means companion. No credible evidence exists for a married Jesus. *The Da Vinci Code* is wrong again.

In one way, this is a moot point. Suppose Jesus had married: it would have changed nothing important about His person. The New Testament teaches that Jesus is fully God. It also teaches that He is fully human. As a human, Jesus could have married if that is what He had chosen to do. Dan Brown, however, seems to think that a married Jesus would completely subvert New Testament Christianity. Yet again, *The Da Vinci Code* is wrong.

The Da Vinci Code is wrong about the divine feminine. It is wrong about Constantine inventing New Testament Christianity. It is wrong about the apostleship of Mary Magdalene. It is wrong about Jesus being married. It is even wrong about whether the Jesus of the Bible *could* have married. When it comes to the main points of his theory, author Dan Brown is certainly consistent. He is consistently wrong.

As a mystery, *The Da Vinci Code* might be an interesting read. As a theory about Christianity, however, it definitely fails.

If you find it plausible, you might also be interested to know that John F. Kennedy is still alive. On a yacht with Elvis. In the Bermuda Triangle. Monitoring alien transmissions. From Hangar 18. For the Trilateral Commission.

The evidence for one is as good as the evidence for the other.

APPENDIX ONE

The Gospel of Judas

Not often do archeological discoveries and the publication of ancient manuscripts make headline news, but this is one of those times. The Gospel of Judas is the celebrity document, one of four ancient texts that were included in Codex Tchacos. The discovery and publication of this gospel has been hailed as a major breakthrough in the study of early Christianity. Special excitement has been generated because the Gospel of Judas depicts Judas Iscariot as a hero rather than a traitor.

The recovery and reconstruction of Codex Tchacos makes a fascinating story in its own right. It includes the plundering of ancient graves, illegal trade in antiquities, robbery, deception, betrayal, intrigue, and conspiracy. So interesting is the story that it has been published separately by National Geographic.

The text of the Gospel of Judas that is contained in Codex Tchacos is the only one known to exist. As far as we know, no one has read this document for well over a thousand years. As an artifact and a curiosity, it is enormously valuable. Its discovery and publication are to be welcomed.

The date of Codex Tchacos is almost certainly between 240 and 320 AD. It is written in Coptic, an ancient Egyptian language that used a modified Greek alphabet. The actual Gospel of Judas is considerably older than the codex, however. Irenaeus

of Lyons described it during the latter half of the Second Century. Given the time that the gospel would have taken to come to the attention of Irenaeus, it must have been written no later than about 150.

Irenaeus treats the Gospel of Judas as a Gnostic gospel, and the actual text of the document confirms his assessment. Gnosticism was a network of ancient religions that combined elements from Middle Platonism, Zoroastrianism, sometimes Christianity, and occasionally Judaism or other sources. Gnosticism exhibited bewildering variety. Some forms pretended to be Christian while others did not.

All Gnostics agreed about certain core insights, however. They all agreed that matter was evil and spirit was good. They all agreed that the true and ultimate god was not the creator of the material world. They all agreed about the existence of a *Pleroma*, a chain of divine beings who stood between the ultimate god and the malevolent creator of the material world. They all agreed that some humans had sparks of divinity trapped within them, and that these spirits could be liberated and return to the Pleroma. They all agreed that salvation consisted in liberation from the material body through the reception of secret knowledge or “gnosis.” They all agreed that the gnosis had to be mediated to humans by one of the members of the Pleroma.

The “Christian” versions of Gnosticism recognized Christ as the one who brought gnosis to humans. Obviously, the Christ could not have been a human, and Gnostics disagreed about the relationship between the divine Christ and the human Jesus. Docetic Gnostics believed that there was no human Jesus—the Christ simply projected the appearance of a body. Cerinthian Gnostics believed that the Christ spirit came upon Jesus, perhaps at His baptism, and then left Him before or during the crucifixion.

The writers of the New Testament were certainly aware of early Gnostic ideas, and they wrote vigorously against them. Paul's epistle to the Colossians opposed an incipient version of Gnosticism that merged elements of Jewish legalism with a Gnostic view of Jesus. John's first two epistles sharply contradicted an early predecessor of Cerinthianism. John actually opens his first epistle by insisting that "our hands handled" the Word of Life. This blunt assertion of Jesus' materiality was a direct denial of Gnostic teaching.

The Gospel of Judas is undoubtedly Gnostic. Judas alone of the disciples recognizes that Jesus is not from earth but from "the immortal realm of Barbelo." In response, Jesus takes Judas aside and imparts to him Gnostic secrets. He congratulates Judas on being the privileged one among the disciples, but warns Judas that he will have to face rejection and recrimination. He tells Judas: "you will exceed all of [the other disciples]. For you will sacrifice the man that clothes me."

In other words, the Gospel of Judas presents a Cerinthian view of Jesus. Christ is clothed by the material body of Jesus; in order to return to the immortal realm, the human must be sacrificed. Judas' job is to arrange the sacrifice, ensuring that Jesus gets turned over to His enemies so that death will free the spirit within. Judas fulfils this responsibility, incidentally receiving "some money" as he hands Jesus over. From the point of view of the Gospel of Judas, this is not a betrayal, but a duty. Judas is vindicated in performing this duty by being transfigured in a luminous cloud.

Obviously, the Gospel of Judas presents a different view of both Jesus and Judas than the New Testament does. This comes as no surprise. The Gnostic view of Jesus has always been well known. The role that Judas plays in this gospel was

described by Irenaeus during the Second Century. Therefore, the document offers few surprises.

As a matter of fact, the document contributes little or nothing to the state of knowledge about either Gnosticism or early Christianity. It presents the same cosmology that students of Gnosticism have always known. It reproduces a standard, Gnostic view of Jesus. It reiterates a typical Gnostic spirituality. It is a rehash of the same teachings that were known to and opposed by Irenaeus, John, and Paul.

We know which churches were founded by apostles. We know that the apostolic churches taught the same beliefs with great uniformity. We know that these beliefs correspond to the teachings of the apostles in their authentic writings. These teachings together form the substance of New Testament Christianity. The Christianity of the New Testament rested itself upon public criteria.

The Gnostics appealed, not to any public criteria, but to secret teachings and hidden writings. Books like the Gospel of Judas were not meant for wide circulation: they were intended only for the elite, the spiritual. Gnostics disagreed sharply with the Christians of the apostolic churches. They disagreed sharply with the authentic apostolic writings. They even disagreed with one another on many points.

Irenaeus noted the difference between the public tradition of the apostolic church and the secret tradition of the Gnostics. He argued persuasively that the former had to be acknowledged as genuine, but that the latter could not be. One of the documents that he dismissed as a forgery was the Gospel of Judas. His assessment was correct. The recovery of the Gospel of Judas is a significant and welcome event. Some degree of excitement is

appropriate. The document really adds nothing to the stock of knowledge, however. It is a curiosity and an artifact of significance, but it does not contribute greatly (or at all!) to understanding Jesus, Judas, Gnosticism, or early Christianity. With respect to these areas of study, its discovery and publication changes exactly nothing.

APPENDIX TWO

A Note about Sources

The purpose of this booklet has been to give quick answers to some of the questions that are raised in *The Da Vinci Code*. Specifically, this booklet deals with issues related to Jesus and the origins of New Testament Christianity. Some people may want more complete answers to those questions. Other people may wish to explore other questions that *The Da Vinci Code* raises, for example, those in the areas of history or art criticism. Many books have been written about *The Da Vinci Code*. Not all of them are listed here. I have listed some of the noteworthy ones, however, with brief evaluations.

Abanes, Richard. *The Truth Behind The Da Vinci Code*. Eugene, Oreg.: Harvest House Publishers, 2004.

Written by a journalist rather than a scholar, this short (96 page) book is a very readable listing of some of the most significant errors in *The Da Vinci Code*. In addition to dealing with questions about Jesus and early Christianity, Abanes delves into Brown's historical and artistic claims. Though he tends to rely upon secondary sources, Abanes generally offers good answers.

Biagent, Michael, Richard Lee, and Henry Lincoln. *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*. New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, 1982, 1983.

If you wonder where Dan Brown got his theory, this is the book to see. It's all here: the Knights Templar, the Priory of Sion, the marriage of Jesus, the survival of His bloodline. Dan Brown built *The Da Vinci Code* around the supposedly airtight research in *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*. The book's authors were not flattered, however. They actually sued Brown for plagiarism. They lost.

Bock, Darrell L. *Breaking the Da Vinci Code: Answers to the Questions Everyone's Asking*. Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004.

A person who wants to read just one full-length response to *The Da Vinci Code* had better make it this one. This is the best evaluation in print. Darrell Bock is a competent scholar in the fields of New Testament, Jesus Studies, and Second Century Christianity, widely recognized for his contributions in these disciplines. He brings sound scholarship and critical skill to bear on the novel, but he maintains objectivity and balance. Bock deals with all of the issues that are important for Christianity, and he does it in a highly understandable and readable presentation.

Brown, Dan. *The Da Vinci Code*. New York: Doubleday, 2003.

This is the book! A mystery thriller with a good bit of conspiracy and intrigue thrown in, *The Da Vinci Code* bases its plot upon a supposedly factual theory about Jesus and ancient Christianity.

Cox, Simon. *Cracking the Da Vinci Code: the Unauthorized Guide to the Facts Behind Dan Brown's Bestselling Novel.* New York: Barnes and Noble, 2004.

“Unauthorized” is a good word for this volume. It is arranged as a kind of cyclopedia, listing persons, places, and events from *The Da Vinci Code* in alphabetical order. Each listing gets a short article that describes and discusses the topic. Cox is careful not to disagree overtly with Brown, though he steers clear of some of Brown’s errors. He does repeat some mistakes, however, and adds several of his own. This is not a particularly useful book.

Ehrman, Bart D. *Truth and Fiction in The Da Vinci Code.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Bart Ehrman is widely recognized as an authority on Jesus Studies and Early Christianity. While he sees and exposes some inaccuracies of *The Da Vinci Code*, he is primarily interested in using the discussion as an opportunity to promote a critical vision of the development of the New Testament and of early Christian faith. The book is readable and informative, but expect Ehrman to arrive at consistently radical conclusions.

Garitte, Gérard, ed. *Traité d’Hippolyte sur David et Goliath, sur le Cantique des cantiques et sur l’Antéchrist.* Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, 1965.

Hippolytus’ commentary on the Song of Solomon is not widely available. Those wishing to read it for themselves will have to consult a scholarly edition. The publication that I have listed reproduces the Georgian text and includes a Latin translation, along with an introduction in French.

Green, Michael. *The Books the Church Suppressed: Fiction and Truth in The Da Vinci Code*. Oxford, UK, and Grand Rapids, Mich.: Monarch Books, 2005.

Michael Green has written a very readable work that performs two important tasks. First, it offers a survey of the formation of the New Testament canon, answering questions about canonicity. These answers are detailed enough to be thorough but simple enough to be understood. Second, Green provides a significant overview of ancient Gnosticism and interacts with current students of Gnostic thought. This is a useful volume.

Hanegraaff, Hank, and Paul L. Maier. *The Da Vinci Code: Fact or Fiction?* Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004.

This is one of the shortest published responses to Dan Brown, a trade paperback of about eighty pages. Some of the research that went into the book is good, and some useful information can be found here. The book seems to be a bit over-sensationalized, however, and its tone makes it less suitable for giving to a non-Christian enquirer.

Kasser, Rodolphe, et al., eds. *The Gospel of Judas*. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2006.

Here is the published edition of the Gospel of Judas, translated from Codex Tchacos. The actual document is rather brief, around thirty pages. The book also includes an introduction and several interpretive essays that comment on the Gospel of Judas and evaluate its significance.

Krosney, Herbert. *The Lost Gospel: The Quest for the Gospel of Judas Iscariot.* Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2006.

This book tells the story of the discovery and publication of the Gospel of Judas Iscariot, a process that spanned decades and was surrounded by intrigue and scholarly infighting. It is a fascinating story that is nearly as good as *The Da Vinci Code* itself. Be cautioned, however, that Krosney assumes the correctness of radical interpretations of early Christian history.

Lutzer, Erwin W. *The Da Vinci Deception.* Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004.

Written by a pastor/theologian, this work is one of the more useful responses to *The Da Vinci Code*. In fairness, I should point out that the author would disagree with my answer to the question of whether Jesus could have married. As ever, Lutzer's writing is excellent.

Olson, Carl E., and Sandra Miesel. *The Da Vinci Hoax: Exposing the Errors in The Da Vinci Code.* San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004.

Catholics have more against *The Da Vinci Code* than Protestants do. For Protestants, the questions revolve around the person of Jesus and the nature of early Christianity. For Catholics, however, many aspects of history are called into question. Olson and Miesel are Catholic writers who attempt to address the full range of problems posed by *The Da Vinci Code*. The book is worth a read for those who have the time.

**Robinson, James M., gen. ed. *The Nag Hammadi Library*.
Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1978.**

This is the authoritative compilation and translation of the Gnostic manuscripts discovered at Nag Hammadi in Egypt. For translations of these primary sources, here is the place to go. The book includes both the Gospel of Philip and the Gospel of Mary.

**Rudolph, Kurt. *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*.
New York: Harper and Row, 1987.**

For those who want a comprehensive treatment of the various versions of Gnostic religion, Rudolph surveys the history and nature of Gnosticism in considerable detail. His discussion is brief enough for a single volume but thorough enough to explore the diversity of Gnostic systems and texts (including discussion of a Gnostic group that has survived to the present day in Iraq). The book includes plenty of illustrations and is quite accessible, but it is long enough to be daunting for those who are not truly interested.

APPENDIX THREE

How We Know About Gnosticism

Gnosticism as a religious system began to develop during the First, flourished during the Second, and began to decline during the Third Centuries. Gnostic ideas continued to resurface periodically, showing up during the Middle Ages in groups like the Bogomils and the Albigenses. Some of these ideas can be found today in the writings of the Freemasons.

For centuries, most of our knowledge about Gnostics came from the writings of their opponents. As Christian orthodoxy flourished, Gnostic writings fell into disuse. Copying manuscripts by hand was an expensive business. Most people did not wish to take the time or trouble to reproduce texts that were not considered useful. Of course, the Catholicism of the Middle Ages was quite willing to burn books with which it disagreed, and most surviving Gnostic documents suffered this fate.

Several early Christian theologians wrote against Gnosticism, however, and their writings continued to be copied. Some of the most significant of these “heresiologists” were Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Tertullian. For centuries the writings of these theologians provided most of what people knew about Gnostic beliefs.

Incidentally, one scholar (Bart Ehrman) is fond of saying that a “heresiologist” is a “heresy hunter.” Strictly speaking, that

is not correct. Just as a biologist studies living organisms or an oncologist studies cancer, a heresiologist studies heresies. People like Irenaeus did not go around hunting and persecuting people with whom they disagreed, but they did make a careful study of theologies that departed from New Testament Christianity.

People have often wondered how thorough and accurate the heresiologists might have been. After all, they were writing about theologies that they regarded as deadly. Could they have been tempted to exaggerate or to twist the facts in order to win an argument?

A good researcher has to entertain suspicions like these. As long as scholars possessed only the writings of the heresiologists, however, they had no way to answer the question. There was no standard to which they could compare the opponents of Gnosticism.

That began to change during the late Nineteenth Century with the discovery of a few Gnostic writings such as the Gospel of Mary. Then, in 1945, Egyptian farmers at Nag Hammadi discovered a clay jar containing a number of ancient books. Eventually these books found their way into the hands of scholars, where they were carefully translated and evaluated. The trove at Nag Hammadi yielded around 50 original Gnostic writings. These documents have been published in English in a single volume entitled *The Nag Hammadi Library*, edited by James M. Robinson.

Viewed against the texts from Nag Hammadi, the writings of the heresiologists can now be evaluated. Their overall picture of Gnosticism appears to have been quite correct. Tertullian tends to be more accurate than Hippolytus, who seems more interested in the sensational or scandalous aspects of Gnosticism. Most accurate of all is Irenaeus, whose research has been substantially

vindicated by the find at Nag Hammadi. One thing is clear: the heresiologists were not just making it up. Irenaeus, in particular, appears as a very careful student of the theologies with which he was disagreeing.

Gnostic writings are still being discovered. The Gospel of Judas was found during the 1970s, though it was not published until 2006. No one knows what else the sands of Egypt or the libraries of monasteries may yield. The Gospel of Judas, however, has changed nothing in our ability to evaluate Gnosticism and early Christianity. It seems unlikely that any new finds will overturn our present understanding of the origins of Christianity.

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