



“THE DA VINCI CODE” EXAMINED

BY
STEVEN LLOYD

Now when Jesus came into the parts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, ‘Who do men say that the Son of man is?’ And they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist; some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, ‘But who say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.’” And Jesus answered and said unto him, ‘Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but your Father who is in heaven’ (Matthew 16: 13-17).

The question Jesus asked His disciples at Caesarea Philippi is as pertinent today as the day he asked it. The Jesus seminar called into question all that Jesus taught and wrought; then decided the whole matter, point by point, on the premise that miracles are to be written out of the equation.

Others attempts have been made to cast doubt or to downright deny the identity or nature of Jesus depicted by the writers of the New Testament. Perhaps the most recent, but by no means original, attempt comes from the fictional pen of Dan Brown through his book, *The Da Vinci Code*.

An authoritative figure in the book that supports the radically different view of Jesus, sums it up when he says, "...almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false" (p. 235).

I am persuaded that there are two primary issues at stake. The first is the reliability of the New Testament documents. The second is the identity of Jesus of Nazareth. The first is attacked and removed in order to prepare for the reader to accept the radically different view of the second.

I want to walk the reader through the line of reasoning given in the story that is used to defend the book's claims. Secondly, I want to respond to that line of reasoning.

Some readers may be wondering why I would or should spend any time at all on a work of fiction. It is because the author, Dan Brown, believes the evidence he gives in this fictional work is true and that it supports the claims of the book. The book has also weakened the faith of some who have read the book. So for their sakes also, I want to respond to the claims of the book.

THE HYPE

The Da Vinci Code has sold over six million copies, is being translated into a host of other languages, and is, at the writing of this paper, being developed into a major motion picture.

The Library Journal characterized the work as "a compelling blend of history and page-turning suspense," a "masterpiece," that "should be mandatory reading."

On Dan Brown's web site he has provided a FAQ sheet. One of the questions asked is, "How much of the novel is true?" Mr. Brown writes,

The Da Vinci Code is a novel and therefore a work of fiction. While the book's characters and their actions are obviously not real, the artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals depicted in this novel all exist (for example, Leonardo Da Vinci's paintings, the Louvre Pyramid, the Gnostic Gospels,

Hieros Gamos, etc.). These real elements are interpreted and debated by fictional characters. While it is my belief that the theories discussed by these characters have merit, each individual reader must explore these characters' viewpoints and come to his or her own interpretations. My hope in writing this novel was that the story would serve as a catalyst and a springboard for people to discuss the important topics of faith, religion, and history.

PLOT SUMMARY

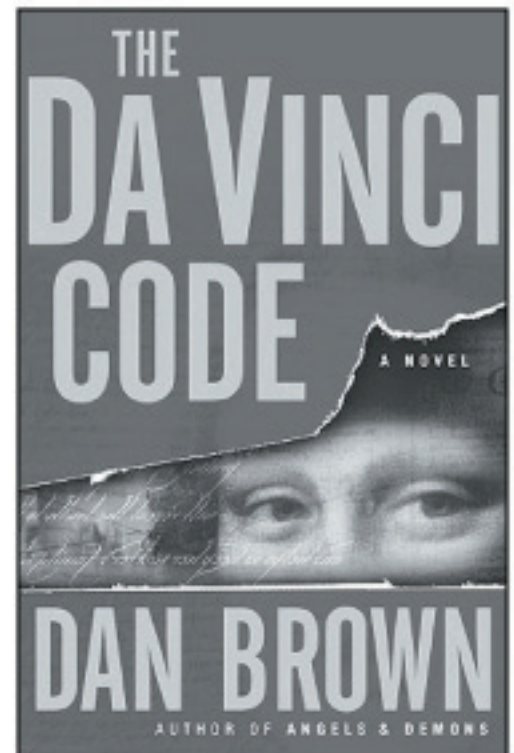
Dan Brown summarizes the plot in this fashion:

A renowned Harvard symbologist is summoned to the Louvre Museum to examine a series of cryptic symbols relating to Da Vinci's artwork. In decrypting the code, he uncovers the key to one of the greatest mysteries of all time... and he becomes a haunted man.

Here are some of the details. The curator of the Louvre Museum, Jacques Sauniere, is murdered. Having been shot, but not dead yet, he surrounds himself with a number of cryptic clues that sends Robert Langdon, Harvard symbologist and Sauniere's granddaughter, a cryptologist, on a scavenger hunt of a lifetime, a search for the Holy Grail.

As the plot unfolds, so the proposed truth of the Holy Grail is unveiled. The secret of the Grail has been guarded by the secret order of the Priory of Sion and Knights Templar for centuries. If the secret were ever made known, a very significant paradigm shift would occur.

The Holy Grail was first thought to be the cup or chalice from which Jesus drank at the Last Supper, or the cup that Joseph of Arimathea used to collect blood from Jesus' pierced body on the cross. But the proposed secret of the Holy Grail is that it is not a chalice at



all, but a person, Mary Magdalene.

Jesus and Mary married. They had a child, a little girl named Sarah. When Jesus died on the cross, there being no resurrection to the story, Mary and her daughter fled to Gaul—modern day France. Jesus left the work of spreading His ethics and of preserving his royal Davidic seed line to Mary.

PROPOSED EVIDENCE

The evidence that is supposed to support the story is as follows. The early church propagated lies that devalued the female and tipped the scales in favor of masculine prominence and leadership. Jesus commissioned Mary Magdalene with the responsibility of leading the church, but Peter had a problem with that, so declared Mary to be a prostitute in an attempt to cut her out of any leadership role. Mary disappeared with her child and resurfaced in Gaul. Her descendants are alive today via the Merovingian line of royalty.

The Priory of Sion, a mysterious organization that has kept this secret in hiding for centuries, believed that Constantine and his male successors waged a campaign that demoralized the sacred feminine, obliterating the goddess from modern religion forever (p. 124).

The Knights Templar, a military arm of the Roman Catholic Church, retrieved secret documents from beneath the ruin of the Temple in Jerusalem (p. 158). Whatever it was they unearthed, gave them limitless power and an unprecedented papal bull dubbing them as “a law unto themselves.” For thousands of years, the secret came to be known by the name Sangreal, which is another name for Holy Grail.” But according to the Priory of Sion, the Grail is not a



Dan Brown

cup at all.

A fictional character in the book by the name of Teabing, a scholar of the Holy Grail, argues that Constantine called together the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. to strengthen the Empire. He informs some of the uninitiated characters in the book that when the various church leaders met, they debated and voted on “the date of Easter, the role of the bishop, the administration of sacraments, and of course, the deity of Christ.”

To clarify, Teabing argues:

...until that moment in history, Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet...a great and powerful man, but a man nevertheless. A mortal. And Jesus' establishment as 'the Son of God' was officially proposed and voted on by the council of Nicaea (p. 233).

Here's how Dan Brown develops the case for his view of the Holy Grail and his refiguring of the identity and nature of Jesus Christ:

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

“It was all about power,” Teabing continued. “Christ as Messiah was critical to the functioning of Church and state. Many scholars claim that the early Church literally stole Jesus from His original followers, hijacking his human message, shrouding it in an impenetrable cloak of divinity, and using it to expand their own power. I've written several books on the topic.”

“The vast majority of educated Christians know the history of their faith. Jesus was indeed a great and powerful man. Constantine's underhanded political maneuvers don't di-

minish the majesty of Christ's life. Nobody is saying Christ was a fraud, or denying that he walked the earth or inspired millions to better lives. All we are saying is that Constantine took advantage of Christ' substantial influence and importance. And in doing so, he shaped the face of Christianity as we know it today" (p. 233, 234).

According to the story, Constantine commissioned and financed a new Bible that omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ's human traits and embellished those accounts that made him godlike. This, we are told, was "the most profound moment in Christian history" (p. 234).

How does Leonardo Da Vinci fit into the story to warrant his name in the title? Leonardo Da Vinci, it is purported, was one of the Grand Masters of the Priory of Sion and left hints concerning the true nature of the Holy Grail in his artwork. For example, in his famous painting, The Last Supper, the one positioned at Jesus' right hand is not John, as long supposed, but Mary Magdalene. The image was painted too feminine-like to have been a man. And, there is no chalice on the table; another hint that the real Grail is Mary.

Leonardo Da Vinci wrote of the Bible, "Many have made a trade of delusions and false miracles, deceiving the stupid multitudes." And, "Blinding ignorance does mislead us. O! Wretched mortals, open your eyes! Teabing says of these quotes,

The Bible is a product of man, my dear. Not of God. The Bible did not fall magically from the clouds. Man created it as a historical record of tumultuous times, and it has evolved through countless translations, additions, and revisions. History has never had a definitive version of the book.

I suggested earlier in this manuscript that I see two primary issues at stake. The first is the reliability of the New Testament documents and the second is the nature and identity of Jesus Christ. I hope you see that by removing the veracity of the first, you destroy the second. But we're not through yet. These are precisely the two points on which I

want to focus our attention.

Erwin Lutzer has written a response to Mr. Brown's book titled, *The Da Vinci Deception*. In it he writes,

Dan Brown's agenda is not so thinly veiled: this book is a direct attack against Jesus Christ, the church, and those of us who are his followers and call him Savior and Lord. Christianity, according to Dan Brown's novel, was intended to suppress women and to turn people away from the 'divine feminine.' Understandably, the book appeals to feminists, who see a return to goddess worship as a necessity to combat male supremacy.

The upshot of this theory is that Christianity is based on a big lie, or rather, several big lies. For one thing, Jesus was not God, but his followers attributed deity to him in order to consolidate male rule and to suppress those who worshipped the divine feminine. Indeed, according to Dan Brown, at the Council of Nicaea Constantine invented the idea of the deity of Christ so that he could eliminate all opposition, declaring those who disagreed to be heretics. Further, Constantine also chose Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as the only Gospels because they fit his agenda of male power. Eighty other viable Gospels were rejected because they taught that Jesus wanted Mary Magdalene to be the real leader of the church. "It was all about power," we're told.

RESPONSE

Because so much centers on Mr. Brown's claims concerning the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D., this may be a good place to begin.

Constantine did commission historian Eusebius to make fifty copies of the New Testament. They were to be copied on good parchment by tried scribes for use in the churches of Constantinople. F. F. Bruce says that although we are not told which books of the New Testament were in those Bibles, "The answer is not seriously in doubt. The copies contained all the books which Eusebius listed as universally acknowledged... in short, the same twenty-seven books as appear in our copies of the New Testament today." Eusebius accepted those books that had been received and used by the church for over 250 years. So the canon of the

New Testament was not voted on or determined.

It is not the case that the deity of Jesus was first proposed at the Council of Nicaea. The precise nature of His nature and relationship to the Father may have been debated, but the debate that occurred in 325 A.D at the Council intended to address two errors: Sabellianism and Arianism.

Sabellius believed there was only one person within the being of God who simply put on the appropriate mask at the appropriate time. He appeared to man as Father in one era of time. Then switched masks and played the role of Son. When the Son image had served its purpose, He put on the mask of Spirit.

Arius was concerned with how to define Jesus' special status with the Father.

That Jesus is the Son of God, or God incarnate was not debated. The council simply reflected on the meaning of various texts in the New Testament that had already been reputed as coming from the apostles and their close associates in the 1st Century.

ARE THE NEW TESTAMENT DOCUMENTS RELIABLE?

When writers address the subject of the “canon” of Scripture, they are referring to that authenticate collection of documents that form the standard that measures all things pertaining to life and godliness. “Canon” is a standard or rule stick by which a thing is measured. So, how did the New Testament canon of 27 books come into being?

This collection of books and letters came into being in the context of the history of revelation. First of all, consider this. Jesus Christ was God's supreme revelation of Himself and God to man:

- He was God in the flesh (Jn 1:14).
- In Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col 2:9).

- He is described as “the effulgence of his glory, and the very image of his substance (Heb 1:3).
- He is “the way, and the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6).
- John writes, “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (Jn 1:18).
- “God having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by diverse portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son...” (Heb 1:1, 2).

When Jesus ascended on high, He gave gifts to men “for the perfecting of the saints” (Eph 4:8-16). He gave those gifts by means of the Holy Spirit. Prior to His death, he told His intimate friends, the apostles, “It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I go, I will send him unto you” (Jn 16:7). When the Spirit came, he empowered the apostles to carry on the revelatory work of the gospel.

The apostles’ word was as authoritative as Christ’s word because of the supernatural guidance they received from the Holy Spirit, sent by Christ Himself. This being the case, Jesus could say to them: “Verily, Verily, I say unto you, he that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me” (Jn 13:20). He also said, “peace be unto you: as the Father hath sent me, even so send I you” (Jn 20:21).

The work of the apostles was so significant that Paul informs us the church was built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone” (Eph 2:20). The apostles were “ambassadors therefore on behalf of Christ, as though God were entreating by us: we beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:20).

The Lord told them earlier in His ministry, “...when they deliver you up, be not anxious how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that

speakeh in you” (Matt 10:18-20). “Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate beforehand how to answer: for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to withstand or to gainsay.” Jesus said the Holy Spirit would teach them all things, and bring to their remembrance all that He said to them (Jn 14:26; see also Jn 16:13).

Herman Ridderbos argues, “Their word is the revelatory word; it is unique, once-for-all witness to Christ to which the church and the world are accountable and by which they will be judged.” And, “It is evident, then, that the New Testament itself inseparably unites the central events of redemption on the one hand and their announcement and transmission on the other” (Ridderbos, 1963, p. 15).

The truth was initially communicated orally, but whether oral or written, it carries the same weight. Paul wrote the Thessalonians, “So then, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye were taught, whether by word, or by epistle of ours” (2 Thess 2:15).

Peter speaks of “the word spoken before by the holy prophets, and the commandments of the Lord and Savior through your apostles” and “epistles” of Paul as equally authoritative (2 Pet 3:2, 16).

The significance of the New Testament scriptures is found in that they are the fixed, written form of previous oral truth and tradition. The apostles did not transmit the truth only after it had been given a fixed form by the faith of the church, but because of the authority they received from Christ, superintended by the Holy Spirit, they became the bearers and custodians of the faith. Paul writes, “For neither did I receive it from men, nor was I taught it, but it came to me through revelation of Jesus Christ (Gal 1:12). He ties it together for us when he writes, “So then, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye were taught whether by word, or by epistle of ours” (2 Thess 2:15).

The truth of the new Testament is more than just a reproduc-

tion of what once occurred. It is the word of the living God; an authoritative word from Christ about Christ (Ridderbos, 1963).

The New Testament indicates that the written form and apostolic tradition is the form in which the church would be bound to the apostolic word. When the apostles died, oral tradition became less certain and less trustworthy. That, in turn, enhanced the value and significance of the written apostolic tradition. “The fixing of the apostolic tradition in written form, finally led to a written canon” (Ridderbos, 1963, p. 22). This, then, marked the beginning of the distinction between oral and written tradition, a distinction that culminated in the formation of the New Testament written canon.

The church did not institute a standard, nor is the canon merely a record of what the early church believed. It is the authoritative word of Christ about Christ. Herman Ridderbos writes, “The canon is not the product of the church; rather the church is to be the product of the canon (p. 25).

The canon was closed. It is by nature unrepeatable and exclusive (Jude 3). It is not just a record of the faith of the early church. It is itself revelatory in nature.

It could only exist permanently in a written form. The farther apart oral and written truth grew from one another the more dependent the church became on the recorded dimension of truth to safeguard the church against errors and legends. The written form became the exclusive rule and limit of the faith.

One writer has rightly affirmed that one’s view of the scriptures is dependent on one’s view of God. If God is omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent, then belief in the inspiration of the Bible is no leap of faith.

I wonder, too, how Dan Brown would respond to the very nature of the Bible itself. The harmony that exists among all 40 authors writing in a span of around 1500 years is remarkable. One of the editors of the Great Books of the

Western World will tell you that this set of books is filled with more error and contradictions than truth.

WHO IS JESUS OF NAZARETH?

In *The Da Vinci Code*, it is argued that the Knights Templar found a host of documents, thousands of documents that support the book's radical view of Jesus of Nazareth. These documents consist of other gospel accounts. The Grail expert in the book, Mr. Teabing says,

The scrolls highlight glaring historical discrepancies and fabrications, clearly confirming that the modern Bible was compiled and edited by men who possessed a political agenda—to promote the deity of the man Jesus Christ and use His influence to solidify their own power base (p. 234).

Hopefully, I have convinced you that the nature of the New Testament documents as read today, along with the Old Testament, make up God's written word to men. If we can open that door for our friends who are struggling with some of the assertions made in *The Da Vinci Code*, then we can turn to the Bible itself for evidence to support our belief that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God—God incarnate.

THE SON OF GOD

The first line of evidence I would like for you to consider are the confessions made concerning Him. No better source could be appealed to than the Father of heaven Himself. On two recorded occasions He referred to Jesus as His beloved Son in Whom He was well pleased (Matt 3, 17). Paul argues that by His resurrection from the dead, Jesus was declared to be the Son of God (Rom 1:4). Mr. Brown doesn't even address the evidence for the resurrection.

When Martha was asked if she believed Jesus was the resurrection and the life, she said, "Yea, Lord; I have believed that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, even he that cometh into the world" (Jn 11:27)

Perhaps the best-known confession in the Bible was made

by Peter. Jesus asked the probing question, “Who do men say that the Son of Man is?” After a few speculative views were reported, Jesus asked His disciples, “but who say ye that I am?” Peter responded, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16).

In his post-resurrection appearance to Thomas, Thomas, confessed, “My Lord and my God” (Jn 20:28).

If the New Testament documents are reliable, what are we to think of these early-recorded confessions?

WORTHY OF WORSHIP

A second line of reasoning I would like for you to consider is the fact that Jesus received worship. When He was tempted of the devil in the wilderness, Satan said he would surrender the kingdoms of the world to Him if He would fall down and worship Him. Jesus said, “Get thee hence, Satan for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve” (Matt 4:10). Jesus is saying that god is the only one worthy of our worship and praise and adoration, and yet Jesus received worship as God! After walking on water, Matthew says, “They that were in the boat worshipped Him” (Matt. 14:33).

Others were worshipped in the Bible who are not worthy of worship, but the ones being worshipped corrected the worshippers. Jesus never corrected his worshippers.

EQUAL WITH THE FATHER

A third line of reasoning involves the statements in which Jesus identifies Himself as being one with the Father. In fact, the implication was so clear in John 10:30 that the Jews took up stones to stone Him on the charge of blasphemy (10:33).

He is depicted as the perfect representation of the Father. He said, “if ye knew me, ye would know my Father also” (Jn 8:19). And “he that beholdeth me beholdeth him that sent me” (Jn 12:45). “He that hateth me hateth m Father

also” (Jn 15:23). And the declaration of his equality with God is unmistakable in Paul’s letter to the Philippians (2:5ff): “...who counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped...”

ATTRIBUTES OF DEITY

Fourthly, attributes of deity are ascribed to Him; He is holy (Jn 6:69; eternal (Jn 1:1; 8:58); has supernatural knowledge (Jn 1:42, 43; 11:14).

TITLES OF DEITY

Finally, titles ascribed to deity are given to Jesus. He is called Immanuel, which means God with us (Matt 1:23). He is called God in Jn 1:1, 14). John describes him as “true God” (1 Jn 5:20); Paul, “the great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). Paul also writes of him, “in him dwelleth all the fullness of the godhead bodily” (Col 2:9).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Mr. Brown is in error. The Council of Nicaea did not “make” Jesus divine by the wave of a theological hand. He was believed to be the Son of God and declared to be such by His resurrection from the dead—the evidence for which Mr. Brown does not even touch. Concerning his view of the reliability of the Bible, its integrity as a text of antiquity is remarkable. I recommend three books for further study on this matter: F. F. Bruce’s book, *Are the New Testament Documents Reliable?*, Hermann Ridderbos’ book, *Redemptive history and the New Testament Scriptures*, and the open chapters of Lee Strobel’s book, *The Case for Christ*.

The identity of Jesus is an issue about which we cannot afford to be wrong. He said Himself, “Except a man believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins” (Jn 8:24).

SOURCES SITED

- Brown, Dan 2003. *The Da Vinci Code*, Doubleday
- Bruce, F. F. *Are the New Testament Documents Reliable?*
- Lutzer, Erwin W. 2004. *The Da Vinci Deception*, Tyndale House
- Noll, Mark 1997. *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, IVPress.
- Ridderbos, Herman N. 1988. *Redemptive History and the New Testament Scriptures*, Presbyterian Reformed Publishing Company