

Decrypting The Da Vinci Code

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Since Dan Brown's book *The Da Vinci Code* was released in 2003, over forty million hardback copies have been sold world-wide. An additional paperback release of five million copies is planned this month. The movie, starring Tom Hanks and Ian McKellen, directed by Ron Howard, with a budget of \$125 million¹, will premier in May². Have you read the book? If not, you're probably one of the few that hasn't. It's a fast-paced thriller, with conspiracy, secrets and puzzles. The novel presents heaps of information along the way: from detailed descriptions of famous artwork and architecture to obscure second century manuscripts.

Even though it's a work of fiction, its author claims that it is carefully researched. The very first page of the book contains the significant statement, "All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate."³

But the book has ignited a firestorm of controversy in the Christian community, as few other works of fiction have. Dozens of books, several documentaries, and countless articles have been written refuting "facts" presented in *The Da Vinci Code*; books with titles like *Breaking the Da Vinci Code*, *The Gospel Code*, and *The Da Vinci Hoax*.

Why is the Christian community, both Protestant and Catholic, in an uproar about the book? What are these controversial "facts" that the book presents? What is the truth? What is it about this book that is so appealing to the world? And finally, what should our response be, as followers of Christ?

Factual / Historical Errors

Brown presents his novel as a mix a fact and fiction, but the lines between the two are exceptionally blurry. And people are understandably confused about what which parts of the book are true. The truth is that this book is a strong attack against Christ and His church, veiled as a fictional novel.

¹ Gordon, Devin. "Decoding Next Year's Hot Movie." *Newsweek Web Exclusive*, 29 Dec 2005. Accessed on 20 Jan 2006. <http://www.msnbc.com/id/10509149/site/newsweek/print/1/displaymode/1098/>.

² Trachtenberg, Jeffrey A. "The 'Da Vinci' Cash Cow." *The Wall Street Journal*, January 28-29, 2006: P5.

³ Brown, Dan. *The Da Vinci Code*. New York, NY: Doubleday, 2003, p. 1.

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The Da Vinci Code contains many errors, but because space and time is limited, this paper will focus on the following areas:

- The Divinity of Christ
- The Biblical Canon
- Constantine and the Council of Nicea
- The Gnostic Gospels
- Mary Magdalene
- A few other misrepresentations

Church History

Christianity is a historically-based faith. Jesus Christ lived, died, and rose again 2000 years ago in history. His disciples continued the work that He began and, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote the letters and accounts that have become our New Testament. Together with the Old Testament, they are the basis for our understanding God, ourselves, and the world He created. Their reliability and truth are critical to our faith. Countless years have gone into research, studying and verifying them and their history.

The characters in Brown's book make many statements about Jesus Christ, the Bible, the Christian church and its history. One of those statements is "The vast majority of educated Christians know the history of their faith."⁴ Sadly, this is probably false, or Brown's book would not be a best-seller right now.

The Divinity of Christ

Brown's character Leigh Teabing claims that Jesus' divinity was established in AD 324 at the Council of Nicea.⁵ He says that up until that point, Jesus was considered to be only a mortal prophet. He adds that, "Almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false."⁶

The truth is that Christians have always understood Jesus Christ to be God. Martyrs had proved they believed Jesus was divine for years by dying for that belief.⁷ Their exclusive truth claims were a major cause of their persecution by the Romans.⁸ The following verses from the Bible show that its authors believed Jesus to be the Christ, Messiah, God.

Luke 22:70-71 And they all said, "Are You the Son of God, then?" And He said to them, "Yes, I am." And they said, "What further need do we have of testimony? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth."

⁴ Brown, p. 234.

⁵ Brown, p. 231.

⁶ Brown, p. 233.

⁷ Lutzer, Erwin W. *The Da Vinci Deception*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2004, p. 13.

⁸ Veith, Gene Edward, Jr. *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture*. Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 1994, p. 230.

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John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

John 8:58-59 Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.” Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple.

1 Corinthians 12:3b ... no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.

Philippians 2:6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,

Philippians 2:11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

In addition, the Greek word translated Lord, *kyrios* (κύριος) was used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, for the Hebrew word *Adonai* (אֲדֹנָי), Lord, and for *Yahweh* (יְהוָה), God Himself.⁹ When early Christians said, “Jesus is Lord,” they were acknowledging Him as God.

Table 1 below lists some Church Fathers who all lived earlier than the Council of Nicea, who believed that Jesus is God.¹⁰

Church Father	AD	Statement
Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch	105	“God Himself was manifested in human form.”
Clement	150	“It is fitting that you should think of Jesus Christ as of God.”
Justin Martyr	160	“The Father of the universe has a Son. And He ... is even God.”
Iranaeus, Bishop of Lyon	180	“He is God, for the name Emmanuel indicates this.”
Tertullian	200	“... Christ our God.”
Origen	225	“No one should be offended that the Savior is also God...”
Novatian	235	“... He is not only man, but God also...”
Cyprian	250	“Jesus Christ, our Lord and God.”

Table 1: Church Fathers’ quotes regarding Jesus’ divinity.

⁹ Latourette, Kenneth Scott. *A History of Christianity*. Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1975, p. 141, and Hansen, Collin. “Christian History Corner: Breaking *The Da Vinci Code*.” *Christianity Today*, 07 Nov 2003. Accessed on 09 Jan 2006.

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/global/printer.html?ct/2003/144/52.0.html>.

¹⁰ Garlow, James L. and Peter Jones. *Cracking Da Vinci’s Code*. Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 2004, p. 94.

Biblical Canon

The same character in Brown's book states that more than 80 gospels were considered for inclusion in the Bible at the same Council of Nicea, but only four were chosen and that the Bible evolved through countless translations, additions & revisions.¹¹

Since Christianity is based upon our understanding of God as revealed to us in the Scriptures, knowing where those Scriptures came from is an important part of our assurance that we're trusting in the truth.

The list of books included in the Old Testament, or the Old Testament *canon*, was finalized or closed around 400 BC.¹² The fact that there was a list of accepted books was an example for the New Testament. The New Testament canon was determined by common usage and consent.¹³ The letters of Paul and four Gospels were universally accepted by the middle of the second century.¹⁴ Others were slower to be accepted: Revelation, Hebrews, James, II Peter, II John, and III John.¹⁵ Some were rejected: the Didache, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Apocalypse of Peter and the Epistle of Barnabus.¹⁶ A document called the Muratorian fragment (AD 175) lists 23 of the 27 books of the New Testament, with no extras.¹⁷ The first complete list of New Testament books is dated to AD 367. What really forced the church to create a list of acceptable books was a heretic named Marcion who created his own bogus list of canonical books around AD 135.

The truth is that the Council of Nicea did not choose any books for inclusion or exclusion in the New Testament.

To be accepted, a document had to be written by an apostle or have apostolic authority, its teachings had to conform to those of the other accepted documents, and it needed to have widespread and continuous acceptance.¹⁸ False writings were excluded – those that purported to be written by an apostle, but weren't.

Did the Bible “evolve through countless translations, additions & revisions?” Around 5,000 original (Greek) language manuscripts (whole and fragments) of New Testament texts have been discovered to date. The oldest is a Gospel of John fragment, dated around AD 120.¹⁹ Table 2 below lists some numbers of other very early New Testament manuscripts that have been discovered.²⁰

¹¹ Brown, p. 231.

¹² Lutzer, p. 65.

¹³ Latourette, p. 133.

¹⁴ Marty, Martin E. *A Short History of Christianity*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987, p. 52.

¹⁵ Latourette, p. 134.

¹⁶ Latourette, p. 134.

¹⁷ Lutzer, p. 70.

¹⁸ Lutzer, p. 72.

¹⁹ Witherington. “Why the ‘Lost Gospels’ Lost Out.” *Christianity Today*, June 2004.

²⁰ Aland, Kurt, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger and Allen Wikgren. *The Greek New Testament*. West Germany: United Bible Societies, 1983.

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	Number of Third Century Manuscripts
Gospels	11
Acts	3
Epistles of Paul	10
General Epistles	2
Revelation	2

Table 2: Third century manuscripts

Manuscripts are analyzed to determine the cause of any textual differences between them. External factors that are considered are the age of the manuscript and the geographical region in which a text is discovered. Internal factors include unintentional changes like wrong word division, misspelling of words, and errors of judgment, as well as intentional changes, such as elimination of discrepancy and doctrinal changes.

As a typical example:

John 11:31 The Jews then who were with her in the house, and consoling her, when they saw that Mary rose up quickly and went out, followed her, **supposing** that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

The word translated “supposing” actually had three different textual variants in different manuscripts. Their three translations are: A) *thinking*, B) *praising*, and C) *saying*. The Greek words for *thinking* and *praising* sound similar: *doxantes* (δόξαντες) & *doxazontes* (δοξάζοντες). It’s likely that variant A (*thinking*) is the original text, that variant B (*praising*) was a scribal error derived from it, and that variant C (*saying*) was a conscious change made to reduce confusion caused by the word used in variant A. An alternative to this textual analysis is to use the variant with the largest number of representative texts – this is called the “majority text”, and it’s what King James and New King James are based on.

Scholars who perform this type of analysis have found no evidence of a systematic conspiracy to change the Bible.²¹

Figure 1 below is a timeline depicting some of the important dates discussed above²².

²¹ Witherington.

²² Walvoord John F. and Roy B. Zuck, eds. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*. NP: Victor Books, 1983.

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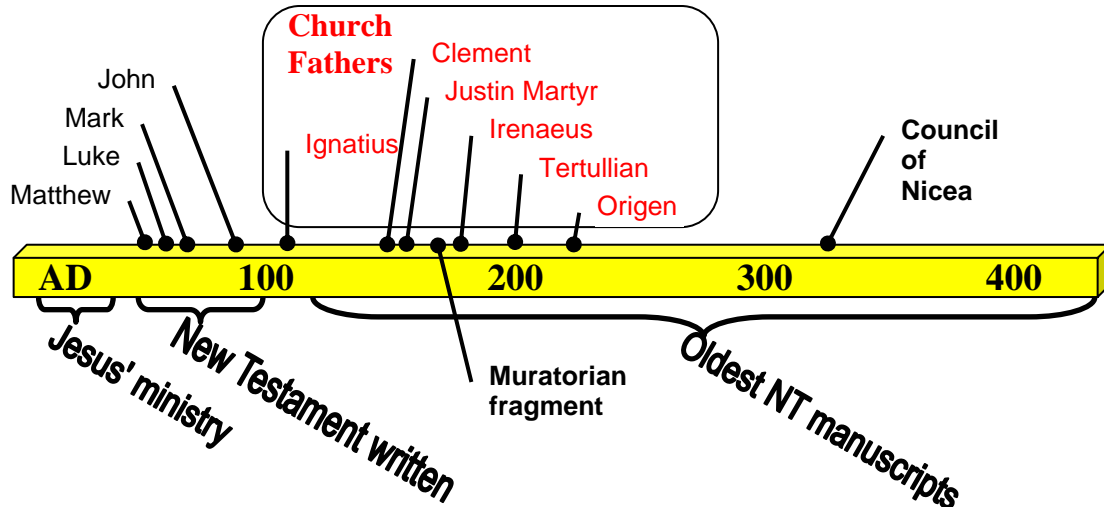


Figure 1: Ancient Church timeline to AD 400.

Constantine and the Council of Nicea

The Da Vinci Code states many “facts” about the Roman Emperor Constantine and the Council of Nicea that he convened. Among them: Constantine forced the Council of Nicea to accept the divinity of Christ, which they did, by a close vote; Constantine collated the Bible as we know it today; Constantine fused Christianity and paganism; and that Constantine moved Christian worship to Sunday.²³

In AD 312, Constantine, the Emperor of the Roman Empire, ostensibly became a Christian, and soon thereafter ended Roman persecution of Christians. He did not make Christianity the sole religion of the state – that came later.²⁴ He united the Empire politically under his rule.²⁵ Many historians do question whether Constantine truly believed in Christ, or whether he was just playing politics.

The truth is that Constantine convened the Council of Nicea (in modern day Turkey) in AD 325 to address the major divisive dispute in the church at the time: Arianism. Arius claimed that Jesus was not God, but was a god. His heretical views had become popular because of his catchy sayings. Over 300 bishops attended the Council from all over the Empire, as well as many lay people. The gist of the main question before the Council was, “in what sense is Jesus divine (*same as God or like God*)?” The council heard arguments from both sides and voted 316 to 2 (not a close vote) that Jesus is indeed God, of the same nature as the Father. Arius was declared a heretic. Constantine ordered his books be burned and that he be banished.²⁶ Constantine himself had no say in the

²³ Brown, p. 231.

²⁴ Latourette, p. 92.

²⁵ Latourette, p. 153.

²⁶ Latourette, p. 157.

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Council's deliberations: he did not mix paganism into Christianity. "The bishops of the church would never have compromised what had cost their fellow Christians so much."²⁷

As stated above, the Council of Nicea did not choose the biblical canon. It did generate the Nicene Creed, although it was later revised somewhat.

The truth is that Sunday, the first day of the week, the Lord's day, has been the day the church gathered since the mid-first century, in honor of the day Jesus rose from the dead.

Acts 20:7 And on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul *began* talking to them, intending to depart the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight.

1 Corinthians 16:2 On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come.

The Gnostic Gospels

Brown's book and its sources make the claim that manuscripts discovered at Nag Hammadi and the Dead Sea contain "the earliest Christian records,"²⁸ and that gnosticism is the original Christianity.

The truth is first of all that the Dead Sea Scrolls contain no Christian records at all. They're all Jewish.

But in 1945, forty-five scrolls were discovered near Nag Hammadi in Egypt. These Coptic manuscripts and fragments date to the fourth century, although some were believed to have been originally written as early as the middle of the second century.²⁹ They are also known as the Gnostic Bible. The individual books have names like "The Gospel of Thomas" and "The Gospel of Phillip". It is interesting to note that no New Testament manuscripts were found with them. The timeline in Figure 2 below compares the dates of original writing and discovered manuscripts between the books of the New Testament and the Gnostic Bible. As you can see, the Gnostic Gospels were not the "earliest Christian records," by a long shot.

²⁷ Garlow, p. 97.

²⁸ Brown, p. 245, and Picknett, Lynn and Clive Prince. *The Templar Revelation: Secret Guardians of the True Identity of Christ*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1997, p. 64.

²⁹ Bock, Darrell L. *Breaking the Da Vinci Code*. Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2004, p. 61.

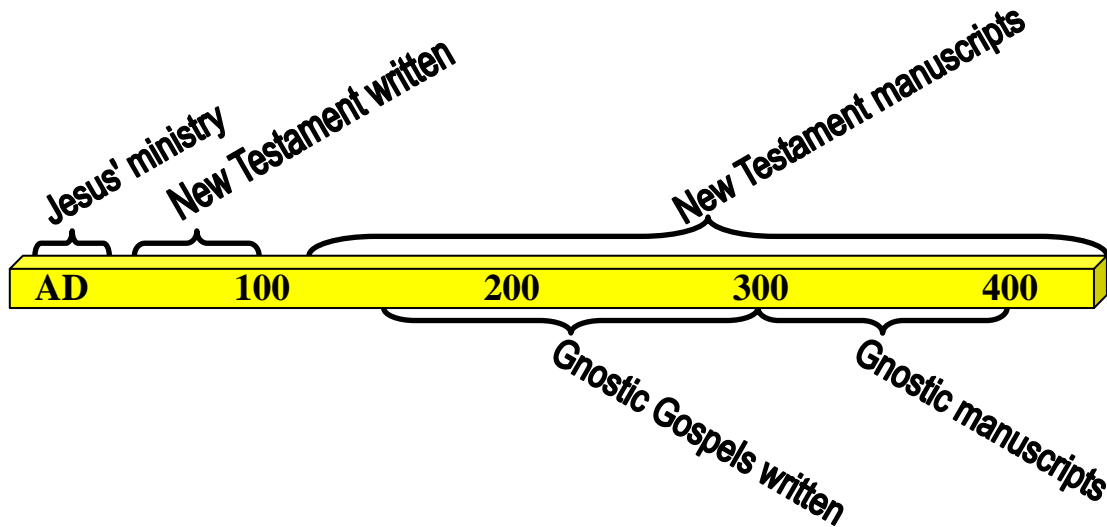


Figure 2: Timeline comparing New Testament with Gnostic Gospels

None of the Gnostic Gospels were written by the people they were named after. In most cases they were written hundreds of years later.³⁰

These Gnostic texts are non-historical – they contain very little narrative or context.³¹ For example:

Gospel of Thomas 114: Simon Peter said to them, “Let Mary leave us, because women are not worthy of the Life.” Jesus said, “Look, I shall guide her so that I will make her male, in order that she also may become a living spirit, being like you males. For every woman who makes herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”³²

Although there are many diverse “flavors” of gnosticism, it is fundamentally different than Christianity. Gnosticism is very syncretistic – its language and beliefs are usually “blended” together with other religions.

Gnosticism is highly platonic or dualistic: all physical matter is considered evil and only spirit is good. It is anti-Semitic and rejects the Old Testament. Gnostics believe that the Creator God (the God of the Old Testament), whom they call the Demiurge, is fallen, wicked and arrogant. He is distinct from the good “All-Father”.³³ Man’s problem, according to the gnostic worldview, is that he is ignorant, and needs to rise above the physical world and redeem himself (the god within himself) through special secret

³⁰ Lutzer, p. 25.

³¹ Lutzer, p. 28, and Latourette, p. 125.

³² Cartlidge, David R. and David L. Dungan. “The Coptic Gospel of Thomas.” *Documents for the Study of the Gospels*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1980.

³³ Bock, p. 68.

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knowledge or “gnosis”.³⁴ Because of their disdain for the physical, gnostics in the ancient world tended to be ascetic, living very simply.

Gnosticism is extremely dogmatic and exclusivistic – only those with the “gnosis” are redeemed, all others are doomed. Its secrets were only disclosed to the privileged few.³⁵ Gnostics believe that Christ’s life, death, and resurrection are irrelevant.³⁶ Most believe that Christ was not truly human or that Jesus and Christ are two separate entities.³⁷

Gnosticism is a later corruption of Christianity, not the original Christianity.³⁸ The Gnostic Gospels were not suppressed by Rome; they were recognized by Christians as heretical.³⁹ A number of Church Fathers wrote against gnosticism, for example Irenaeus and Clement in the second century.⁴⁰

Mary of Magdala

Mary Magdalene is a major historical character in *The Da Vinci Code*. Brown’s characters claim that she is the Holy Grail.⁴¹ More surprisingly, they say that, although the fact was suppressed by the church, Mary Magdalene was Jesus’ wife, and that her marriage to Jesus recurs in many “gospels”.⁴² They say Jesus’ marriage joined two royal bloodlines, that of David and Benjamin, making Him a legitimate heir to the throne.⁴³ They insist that if Jesus were married, He couldn’t have been divine. Moreover, they claim that Jesus and Mary Magdalene had a child, and their bloodline can be traced down through the Merovingian kings and continues to this day.⁴⁴ To cover up these “facts”, the church recast Mary as a prostitute. Her name was forbidden by the church.⁴⁵ What’s more, Mary Magdalene was a goddess.⁴⁶

The truth is that the only text that is used to support the marriage of Jesus to Mary Magdalene is from the Gnostic Gospel of Phillip:

“The companion is Mary of Magdala. Jesus loved her more than his students. He kissed her often on her _____, more than all his students...”⁴⁷

³⁴ Lutzer, p. 23, and Witherington, Ben, III. *The Gospel Code*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004, p. 75.

³⁵ Latourette, p. 124.

³⁶ Lutzer, p. 98.

³⁷ Marty, p. 57.

³⁸ Lutzer, p. 29.

³⁹ Witherington, p. 65.

⁴⁰ Marty, p. 62.

⁴¹ Brown, p. 249.

⁴² Brown, p. 244, and Baigent, Michael, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln. *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*. New York, NY: Dell Publishing, 1983, p. 382.

⁴³ Brown, p. 249.

⁴⁴ Brown, p. 249, and Starbird, Margaret. *The Woman with the Alabaster Jar: Mary Magdalen and the Holy Grail*. Rochester, VT: Bear & Company, 1993, p. 62.

⁴⁵ Brown, p. 254, and Picknett, p. 66.

⁴⁶ Brown, p. 255.

⁴⁷ Lutzer, p. 49.

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The underscore indicates that the original text is missing from the manuscript: Brown supplies “mouth” because it supports his argument better. Where refers to Mary Magdalene as Jesus’ “companion”, Brown’s argument that the word for “companion” means “wife”⁴⁸ doesn’t hold water. Even his source qualifies the statement with “according to one scholar”. The Greek loan word, *koinonos* (κοινωνος), most likely means “spiritual companion” in this context.⁴⁹ None of the gnostic documents state or imply that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene.⁵⁰ There is no evidence of Jesus’ marriage to anyone in the New Testament. And there is no evidence that Mary Magdalene is descended from the tribe of Benjamin.⁵¹

Mary Magdalene is mentioned several times in Scripture – her name was certainly not “forbidden” by the church. The most significant role Mary plays in the Gospels is that she was first to witness Jesus’ resurrection.

John 20:11-18 But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; and she beheld two angels in white sitting, one at the head, and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. And they said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.” When she had said this, she turned around, and beheld Jesus standing *there*, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, “Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away.” Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, “Rabboni!” (which means, Teacher). Jesus said to her, “Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren, and say to them, ‘I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.’” Mary Magdalene came, announcing to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord,” and *that* He had said these things to her.

Whether Jesus was married has little to do with whether He is God. Jesus is fully God and fully man. As a man, He chose to remain single. One day, though, His Bride will be the church. “The rationale for covering up a supposed relationship has no basis in theology.”⁵²

⁴⁸ Brown, p. 246, Baigent, p. 382.

⁴⁹ Bock, p. 24.

⁵⁰ Lutzer, p. 49, Witherington, p. 37, and Olson, Carl E. and Sandra Miesel. *The Da Vinci Hoax*. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2004, p. 93.

⁵¹ Olson, p. 104.

⁵² Bock, p. 33.

If Mary Magdalene has been misunderstood to have been a prostitute, the fallacy certainly doesn't find its basis in Scripture. It is Brown's sources that confuse her with Lazarus' and Martha's sister and the prostitute that anointed Jesus' feet.⁵³

I love this quote from the Archbishop of Chicago: "Jesus isn't God, but Mary Magdalene is a goddess? If He's not God, why is He married to a goddess?"⁵⁴

Other Errors and Misrepresentations

According to Brown, Constantine converted the world from matriarchal paganism to patriarchal Christianity.⁵⁵ The church made up the creation story in Genesis to make men superior to women and blame Original Sin on Eve, so that women could be subjugated by men.⁵⁶ This echoes the radical feminist view of many of Brown's sources, that men are the world's problem, and particularly having God represented as a man.⁵⁷

The truth is that historically, there have been *no* matriarchies.⁵⁸ Christianity has been a turning point for the freedom and dignity of women, throughout history and the world. China (foot binding) and India (sati) are two more recent examples.⁵⁹ "Anyone who claims the Bible is intended to repress women has not read the Bible very carefully."⁶⁰

The Priory of Sion, a goddess worship cult that is claimed to guard Mary Magdalene's "secret", is an elaborate hoax, created in the late 20th century by Pierre Plantard in France. In 1993, Plantard admitted that he had fabricated everything.⁶¹ This hoax is the basis for much of one of Brown's primary sources, *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln. Brown's other primary sources for many of the ideas in the book are *The Woman with the Alabaster Jar: Mary Magdalen and the Holy Grail*, by Margaret Starbird and *The Templar Revelation: Secret Guardians of the True Identity of Christ*, by Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince – he even mentions them.⁶² It's interesting to note that the authors of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* are suing Brown's publisher for breach of copyright.⁶³

⁵³ Starbird, p. 27.

⁵⁴ Olson, p. 102.

⁵⁵ Brown, p. 124.

⁵⁶ Brown, pp. 125, 238.

⁵⁷ Starbird, p. 178.

⁵⁸ Garlow, p. 61.

⁵⁹ Garlow, p. 63.

⁶⁰ Garlow, p. 72.

⁶¹ *Priory of Sion*. WorldHistory.com: Accessed on 23 Jan 2006.

<http://www.worldhistory.com/wiki/P/Priory-of-Sion.htm>, and Olson, p. 223.

⁶² Brown, p. 253.

⁶³ Associated Press, "'Da Vinci Code' borrows their work, authors say." *The Everett Herald*, February 28, 2006: A2.

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Opus Dei is an organization belonging to the Catholic Church. It has no monks and is not a monastic order. It is an institution for lay people. It has 83,000 lay members (3,000 in the US).⁶⁴

Brown claims that, “During three hundred years of witch hunts, the Church burned at the stake an astounding five *million* women.”⁶⁵ The truth is that between 40,000 and 50,000 people were executed for witchcraft between 1450 and 1750, 20% of which were men.⁶⁶ Even so, this is still a blot on Christianity.

Brown implicitly equates the Vatican, Catholicism, and Christianity (including Orthodoxy and Protestantism). Perhaps he doesn't realize that the Vatican wasn't around in the time of Constantine; in fact it became the headquarters for the Catholic Church over a thousand years later. There is a sense in which it is proper to group these branches of the church together, since they all share a common heritage. “What Brown fails to grasp is that early Christianity, like early Judaism, is not primarily about symbols and metaphors, but is deeply rooted in historical fact.”⁶⁷

Much is made of Leonardo Da Vinci's painting *The Last Supper*. Brown and his sources state that the person to the left of Jesus in the painting is Mary Magdalene,⁶⁸ who is being threatened by Peter. They say Leonardo purposely left the “Holy Grail” out of the picture as a clue that the “Holy Grail” is really Mary Magdalene.⁶⁹

The truth is that *The Last Supper* depicts Jesus' announcement of Judas' betrayal.⁷⁰ It is John who is sitting to the left of Jesus. He is depicted in typical early 15th century style.

John 13:21-24 When Jesus had said this, He became troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray Me.” The disciples began looking at one another, at a loss to know of which one He was speaking. There was reclining on Jesus' breast one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter therefore gestured to him, and said to him, “Tell us who it is of whom He is speaking.”

“It is ironic that Brown insists that we see what we are told to see – and then tells us what to see.”⁷¹

⁶⁴ Olson, p. 34, and *The Da Vinci Code, the Catholic Church and Opus Dei*. Opus Dei. Accessed on 23 Jan 2006. <http://www.opusdei.org/print.php?w=32&p=7017>.

⁶⁵ Brown, p. 125.

⁶⁶ Garlow, p. 66.

⁶⁷ Witherington, p 25.

⁶⁸ Brown, p. 244, and Picknett, p. 20.

⁶⁹ Brown, p. 244.

⁷⁰ Lutzer, p. 41, and Olson, p. 263.

⁷¹ Olson, p. 267.

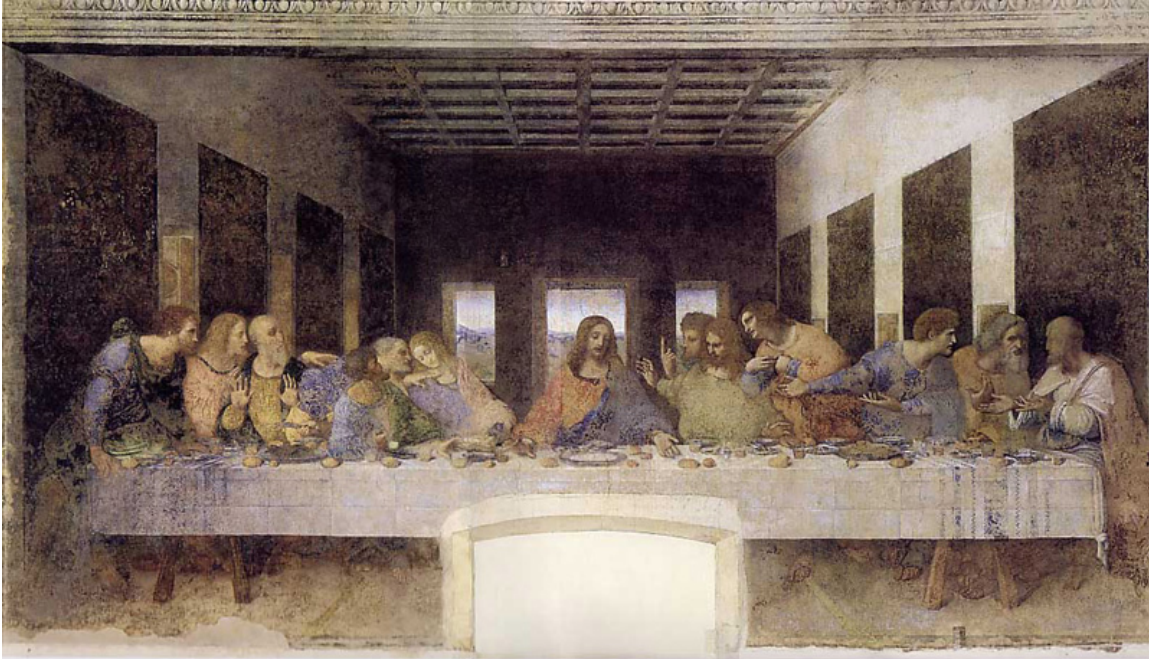


Figure 3: Leonardo Da Vinci's *The Last Supper*

Postmodernism

Brown's characters say that it's not about truth, it's all about power,⁷² and that, "History is written by the winners."⁷³ Brown himself makes this assertion in interviews and on his website.⁷⁴ The claim is made that the Bible is only metaphorical, like imaginary numbers.⁷⁵ These statements and the whole foundation of *The Da Vinci Code* reflect a profoundly *postmodernist* way of thinking.

What is postmodernism? Postmodernism is a worldview – a way to interpret and understand the world. It is also a reaction against modernism. Modernism has been the foundation of humanism: the trust in human reason and the rejection of the supernatural. Marxism is a prime example of the outcome of modernism.⁷⁶ Neither modernistic nor postmodernistic worldviews are entirely compatible with the Christian worldview. Both modernism and postmodernism have positive *and* negative aspects (with respect to a Biblical worldview). Figure 4 below is an attempt to show that, although modernism and postmodernism have nothing in common, Biblical Christianity shares some traits of both, but in large part is distinct from both.

⁷² Brown, p. 233.

⁷³ Brown, p. 256.

⁷⁴ Brown, Dan. *The Da Vinci Code: FAQs*. Accessed on 21 Jan 2006.
http://www.danbrown.com/novels/davinci_code/faqs.html.

⁷⁵ Brown, p. 342.

⁷⁶ Veith, p. 27.

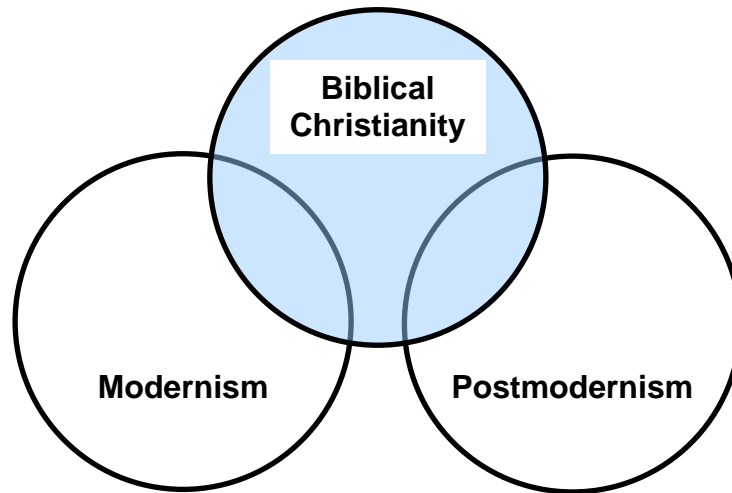


Figure 4: Modern, Postmodern, and Biblical Christian Worldviews

Postmodernism rejects absolute truth. Reason is replaced by emotion; morality is replaced by relativism. Reality or truth is viewed as a social construct.⁷⁷ The rational is replaced by the aesthetic.⁷⁸ All truth claims are suspect and are treated as a cover-up for power plays.⁷⁹ Truth is not the issue: power is. Moreover, postmodernism is anti-foundational and embraces chaos.⁸⁰

According to Gene Edward Veith, the postmodern worldview is intrinsically gnostic.⁸¹ The appeal of gnosticism or neo-gnosticism is found in its personal spiritual quest, diversity, individualism, egalitarianism, and sexual liberation.⁸² All these aspects are featured prominently in Brown's book.

Postmodernist writers are blatantly commercial, and make no pretense of truth.⁸³ They blur boundaries between truth and fiction. Their writing is audience-centered – the readers have their prejudices confirmed.⁸⁴

The *Da Vinci Code* is a “textbook” case of postmodernist literature. The entire book employs a “hermeneutic of suspicion”: the Bible, various works of art, and history itself are not evaluated for what they mean, but rather for what they *hide*.

Like it or not, today we live in a postmodern society. Religion is seen not as beliefs about what is true, but as a preference or a choice.⁸⁵ Postmodern religions do not require evidence or plausibility.⁸⁶

⁷⁷ Veith, p. 42.

⁷⁸ Veith, p. 176.

⁷⁹ Veith, p. 56.

⁸⁰ Veith, p. 226.

⁸¹ Veith, Gene Edward, Jr. “Know Nothings.” *World Magazine*, July 3, 2004.

⁸² Garlow, p. 168.

⁸³ Veith, p. 95.

⁸⁴ Veith, p. 135.

There is a good side to postmodernism: it rejects the parts of modernism that Biblical Christianity rejects. Human reason *is* inadequate: that's why God gave us His revealed Word. We *are* wholly dependent upon language: the words we as Christians depend upon are God's Word. Meaning *can only* be determined within an "interpretive community": our community is the church.⁸⁷ The postmodern mind is open to the past, rather than rejecting it in favor of the "modern".⁸⁸

If it's really true that only the winners write history as Brown believes, why would our history even include negative episodes such the witch hunts and the Inquisition? Early Christians *were't* the winners from the world's standpoint – they were mercilessly persecuted. But their faithfulness to Christ and to His teachings, to His actual presence in history, remains.

An Appropriate Christian Response

So why is *The Da Vinci Code* so popular? It's a mystery, a romance, a thriller, a conspiracy theory, and a spiritual manifesto, all in one.⁸⁹ It appeals to individualism, relativism, secret knowledge and the popular distrust of authority and of history.⁹⁰ It advocates free sex, separate from the parameters established by God.⁹¹ The whole book is about "gnosis": secret insider knowledge.

As Carl Olson and Sandra Miesel say in *The Da Vinci Hoax*, "*The Da Vinci Code* depicts Christianity as a deliberate sham, Christians as mindless followers of lies and superstition and church leaders as deceptive, power-hungry murderers. On the other hand, feminists, neo-gnostics, wiccans and revisionist Christians are peace-loving and open-minded. They 'know' better."⁹²

What should our response to this book be? Should we react like a certain "fundamental religious group" that's been burning embassies over ridicule of their Prophet in the "funny papers?" Should we have someone in authority issue Dan Brown's death warrant, like the same group did with Salman Rushdie a few years ago? Should we publish still more refutation books?

When you go to talk to your neighbors and co-workers about this book (and soon, the movie), being able to refute its "facts" and present the truth is only part of the struggle. If they've bought in to the postmodernist worldview they're bombarded with, they'll respond with something like, "That's your truth. My truth is different." The real key to witnessing to someone like this is through building a relationship, not through reciting facts, though the facts are still important. Share using stories and practical applications.

⁸⁵ Veith 193.

⁸⁶ Veith, p. 195.

⁸⁷ Veith, p. 221.

⁸⁸ Veith, p. 227.

⁸⁹ Olson, p. 38.

⁹⁰ Olson, p. 41.

⁹¹ Garlow, p. 35.

⁹² Olson, p. 72.

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Get involved. Be an example; be a mentor. Share your life so that Christ's light will shine brightly. Pray for them. Let them know you care.

More books and movies in this vein are certainly on their way. Rather than be dismayed at our culture and withdraw to safety behind the walls of the church building, let's grab these opportunities to talk about who Christ really is, and what He's done for us. Let's "engage the culture." Jesus told us to expect persecution as His children. Rather than going on the offensive (by getting offensive) or mocking the ludicrous ideas put forth by *The Da Vinci Code* and its ilk, let's sit down with those neighbors and co-workers and talk about Jesus – the real Jesus – constructively. And get educated. If you're one of the Christians who don't know the history of the Bible and of the church, read a book! It is amazing what God has been doing throughout history.

For more information about postmodernism and the postmodern culture that we live in, I highly recommend the book *Postmodern Times* by Gene Edward Veith. My two favorite Da Vinci Code rebuttal books are *The Da Vinci Deception*, by Erwin Lutzer (because it's short and succinct), and *The Da Vinci Hoax*, by Carl Olson and Sandra Miesel (because it is very rigorous, though presented from a Catholic viewpoint). An excellent history of Christianity can be found in *Eerdmans' Handbook to the History of Christianity*, edited by Tim Dowley.

2 Timothy 4:2-4 Be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths.

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