

THE DA VINCI CODE: Separating Fact From Fiction

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Released in March 2003, the book *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown quickly made *The New York Times* bestseller list. A year later, it was declared a bestseller in 100 countries, while Doubleday, its publisher, called it “the all-time bestselling adult novel.”

Why such interest? The author claims to have given the world a fictional, fact-based conspiracy theory alleging “scientific evidence that the New Testament is false testimony” (p.341).

Because a “good read” combined with bad history is not something to stake your life on, we have asked RBC research editor Dennis Fisher to help us sort out the facts from the fiction.

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“PLEASE, HELP ME!”

The e-mail reached our office with a sense of urgency.

This is what it said:

Dear RBC,
I don't know where else to turn. I pray to God that you can help me.

I began to read the book by Dan Brown called *The Da Vinci Code*. It was an interesting book until I got to the part where he's talking about how Christianity began, how it's all false, and that Christianity is basically a lie and stolen from pagan religions. The secret societies, the Holy Grail, the church changing facts, removing parts of the Bible. Is it all true?

So much of it makes sense. There were things that I had heard before and ignored. But now I have to know. Is the last

25+ years I've been a Christian all a lie? Was Jesus just a man? Did it all really happen? Was He married to Mary Magdalene? Is everything I was raised to believe just made up for the sake of money? I have to know.

I don't know where else to turn. Now I am doubting if there is a heaven, a God, and Jesus. Please, help me! Please, in God's name, help me. I'm brokenhearted, confused, and still crying.

This person's response is not surprising. *The Da Vinci Code* has a storyline that makes it difficult to know where the truth begins and ends. Although it's written as a novel, this conspiratorial murder mystery claims to be based on well-researched historical facts—facts that contradict historical Christianity.

WHAT IS THE TRUTH?

Dan Brown's novel *The Da Vinci Code* begins with the murder of Jacques Saunière, curator of the Louvre Museum in Paris. As he is dying, Jacques hears his murderer say, "When you are gone, I will be the only one who knows the truth."

The truth. In an instant, the curator grasped the true horror of the situation. *If I die, the truth will be lost forever* (p.4).

With a bullet lodged in his stomach, the curator is gripped by . . .

a fear far greater than that of his own death. *I must pass on the secret.* . . . He thought of the generations who had come before them . . . of the mission with which they had all been entrusted. *An unbroken*

chain of knowledge. Suddenly, now, despite all the precautions . . . despite all the failsafes . . . Jacques Saunière was the only remaining link, the sole guardian of one of the most powerful secrets ever kept. Shivering, he pulled himself to his feet. *I must find some way.* . . (p.5).

What is the plotline of *The Da Vinci Code*?

The complex story of *The Da Vinci Code* is one of intrigue and conspiracy.

While in Paris on business, a Harvard professor by the name of Robert Langdon receives an urgent call. The curator of the Louvre art museum has been found murdered. The police are baffled by an encoded message left by the dead man and written with his own blood. Langdon follows the trail of this mystery, which leads to

clues left in the works of Leonardo Da Vinci. He joins efforts with cryptologist Sophie Neveu, Saunière's granddaughter, and together they discover that the dead curator was part of a secret society, the Priory of Sion, whose members included Isaac Newton, Victor Hugo, and Leonardo Da Vinci.

Behind the scenes, Opus Dei, a Catholic lay organization, is plotting to prevent the discovery of an ancient secret, the Holy Grail, kept hidden by the Priory of Sion for centuries. If discovered, it would shake the foundations of the church and the faith it has proclaimed for millennia.

Dan Brown's plotline draws strength from public knowledge of past and present church scandals and has been recommended as a good and provocative read by prestigious critics. *The Library Journal* recommends *The Da Vinci Code* as "a

compelling blend of history and page-turning suspense."

Why are some readers shaken by this novel?

Central to the controversy is the book's alleged exposé of the historic church and its Bible. Since followers of Christ stake their lives on the biblical record, *The Da Vinci Code* touches a nerve when its alleged expert declares, "*The church has two thousand years of experience pressuring those who threaten to unveil its lies. Since the days of Constantine, the church has successfully hidden the truth about Mary Magdalene and Jesus. We should not be surprised that now, once again, they have found a way to keep the world in the dark*" (p.407).

Brown claims ancient evidence that Jesus was not a God-man as described by the church. Instead, the

novel's "experts" describe Jesus as a mere man who had a child with Mary Magdalene and gave her the responsibility of leading His disciples after He was gone.

The source of these allegations is a collection of ancient Gnostic gospels found at Nag Hammadi, Egypt, in 1945. *The Secret Books Of James* and *The Gospel Of Thomas* are just two of these documents that reflect the ancient philosophy of Gnosticism.

From the early days of the Christian church, Gnostics promoted a different view of Christ. They claimed to have a "secret knowledge" that was necessary to know the truth about God.

Regarding the second-century teaching of Gnosticism, one modern source says,

From the standpoint of traditional Christianity, Gnostic thinking is quite

alien. Its mythological setting of redemption leads to a depreciation of the historical events of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Its view of man's relationship to God leads to a denial of the importance of the person and work of Christ, while, in a Gnostic context, "salvation" is not understood in terms of deliverance from sin, but as a form of existential self-realization (*The New Bible Dictionary*).

Although the Gnostic gospels are second- and third-century writings, *The Da Vinci Code* regards them as the "lost books of the Bible" that represent the true picture of Jesus and His teachings. Secret knowledge, goddess worship, and self-deification emerge as an alternative theory to the historic record of the Bible.

Why were the Gnostic gospels excluded from the Bible?

There are many reasons the Gnostic gospels were not included in the Bible. Early church leaders found consensus in determining whether ancient Christian documents were sacred by asking some basic questions: Was it written by an apostle of Christ or by someone who had direct contact with the apostles? Did the writings in question receive wide acceptance as being consistent with the teaching of Christ and the apostles? Did they bear the mark and effect of spiritual power and truth?

None of the Gnostic gospels measure up to the New Testament standard of reliable documents. Instead of being consistent with the earliest and most reliable eyewitness

accounts, and instead of resting on the foundations of the Jewish Scriptures, the Gnostic gospels reflect a worldview that is foreign to both Old and New Testaments.

Why are so many taking *The Da Vinci Code* seriously?

On the title page of *The Da Vinci Code*, the author claims: “*All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate.*” In addition, Brown offers a lengthy list of acknowledgments that leave the impression that all of these prestigious sources and institutions collaborated with him in his research.

Since so much of the complex plot and theme development are dependent upon Dan Brown’s claim of legitimate research into real people, times, and places, it’s easy for the reader to

assume that the backbone of *The Da Vinci Code* is credible. Because the heroes of the novel are “seekers of truth,” they seem to be leading us to higher ground, as when a Harvard professor says, “*I’m a historian. I’m opposed to the destruction of documents, and I would love to see religious scholars have more information to ponder the exceptional life of Jesus Christ*” (p.342).

This is the apparent passion for truth expressed by another of the book’s heroes, a researcher by the name of Teabing, who makes statements like, “*It’s a matter of historical record, . . . and Da Vinci was certainly aware of that fact. The Last Supper practically shouts at the viewer that Jesus and Magdalene were a pair. . . . The marriage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene is part of the historical record*” (pp.244-245).

On closer look, however,

the book’s alleged factual basis does not stand up. Richard Abanes, in his book *The Truth Behind The Da Vinci Code*, writes:

Most critics would acknowledge that Brown has the right to say whatever he wants to say. What is problematic, however, is the way that he, his publisher, and the media have been presenting *The Da Vinci Code*: as a fact-based exposé wherein the characters reveal *truths* long hidden from, or at the very least ignored by, the general public (p.9).

This observation is important because Brown has repeatedly insisted that his novel is based on fact. During an interview he said:

One of the many qualities that makes *The Da Vinci Code* unique is the factual nature of the story. All the history, artwork,

ancient documents, and secret rituals in the novel are accurate—as are the hidden codes revealed in some of Da Vinci's most famous paintings (ibid, p.9).

This is what makes *The Da Vinci Code* so misleading. It claims to be an accurate portrayal of history. Yet the book is a seductively clever mix of fact and fiction.

Does *The Da Vinci Code* deserve to be thought of as historical fiction?

Historical fiction is a genre of literature in which imaginary characters live within the realistic boundaries of known facts.

In her class syllabus *Using Historical Fiction In The History Classroom*, Sarah K. Herz writes:

The author of historical fiction must blend historical facts with

imagination and creative style to master his art. He must be a master of the past so as to portray accurately ideas, attitudes, tendencies, and themes and weave his story—accurate in all its details—into the thematic materials. . . . Historians and novelists often differ in their points of view about the historical novel and its purpose. However, both agree that the writer of historical fiction must not distort past reality; the writer must not manipulate historical facts to make the novel more interesting or exciting (Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute).

By this definition, *The Da Vinci Code* would need to develop its plot with historical integrity. When challenged on his facts, the author cannot rightfully say,

“It’s only a novel.” Such positioning places the reader in a schizophrenic world of fact and fiction.

Dan Brown writes an “alternative history” without giving the reader the ability to see where his facts begin and end. Literary scholars see the difference; the average reader may not.

Let’s look at how the “what if” history of *The Da Vinci Code* plays out with elements that are alleged to be factual.

Are the book’s claims about the Holy Grail, the Priory of Sion, and the Knights Templar historical?

According to *The Da Vinci Code*, the legendary Holy Grail is not the chalice used at the Last Supper of Christ. Instead, Brown uses his “experts” to suggest that the real Holy Grail is a person, Mary Magdalene, who carried the bloodline of

Jesus Christ by having His child. The book also treats as fact the existence of a secret society called the Priory of Sion, which for centuries has kept the secret of Jesus’ relationship to Mary. Mary Magdalene, according to this bestselling novel, represents the feminine aspect of God (the “divine feminine”)—loved by Jesus but denied by the church for hundreds of years.

The Knights Templar are also included as protectors of the secret but were all but wiped out by the church.

The Holy Grail and the Priory of Sion are only two of the many “facts” that need to be subjected to a historical “reality check.”

The Holy Grail is a medieval legend about the cup of the Last Supper. The first appearance of the term “Holy Grail” was in 1170 in *Perceval*, a romantic writing about the legend of King

Arthur and his kingdom of Camelot. When Brown suggests that the Holy Grail is not a cup but actually Mary Magdalene who carried on Jesus' bloodline by having His child, he alters an existing legend about the historical "cup of Christ" and uses it to advance fictional claims about Jesus and Mary.

Brown alters an existing legend about the historical "cup of Christ" and uses it to advance fictional claims about Jesus and Mary.

The Priory of Sion also has a basis in fact, but not in the sense that Brown portrays it. The title has been used three different times. It was first a monastic

order founded in Jerusalem in 1100 that was absorbed into the Jesuits in 1617.

The second and third Priory of Sion were each under the leadership of Pierre Plantard (1920–2000), an anti-Semitic Frenchman who went to jail in 1953 for fraud. In 1954, Plantard formed a group called the Priory of Sion to help those in need of low-cost housing. The group dissolved in 1957. Then in the 1960s and 70s he created a series of forged documents to "prove" the existence of a bloodline descending from Jesus and Mary through the kings of France to himself (claiming to be the rightful heir to the throne). He and his associates called themselves the Priory of Sion and deposited these documents in libraries all over France, including the National Library.

In 1993, however, Plantard admitted under oath to a French judge that

he had fabricated all the documents relating to the Priory of Sion. The judge issued him a severe warning and dismissed him as a harmless crank (www.priory-of-sion.com).

The Knights Templar are based in history but, once again, not as portrayed in *The Da Vinci Code*. They were founded in 1118 as a military religious order, but they did not become wealthy, as alleged in the novel, by discovering the secret of the Holy Grail. And there is no evidence that they were annihilated for having knowledge of it.

Were Da Vinci and Isaac Newton members of the Priory of Sion?

The significance of the Priory of Sion is bolstered in the plotline of *The Da Vinci Code* by claiming a little-known connection with such geniuses as Leonardo

Da Vinci and Isaac Newton. Once again, however, Brown bases these assertions on one of Plantard's forged documents called *Les Dossiers Secrets d'Henri Lobineau* (The Secret Records Of Henri Lobineau). Even though a French judge got Plantard to admit his hoax, Dan Brown uses these "secret records" as if they were legitimate.

These facts are important to readers of *The Da Vinci Code*. If there is no credible evidence that Leonardo Da Vinci and Isaac Newton were secretly involved in the Priory of Sion, and if there is only fraudulent evidence that the Priory of Sion was formed to keep "the secret of Mary Magdalene," other factual claims of *The Da Vinci Code* also need to be carefully looked at.

Did Da Vinci leave clues to his beliefs hidden in his art?

Dan Brown's main characters—Robert Langdon, Sophie Neveu, and Leigh Teabing—are experts at deciphering codes and interpreting symbols. This is one of the most compelling aspects of the novel. The book accurately points out that Leonardo was known to have used reverse text (which could be read with a mirror) for some of his “*progressive theories on astronomy, geology, archaeology, and hydrology*” (p.300). Yet, his “secrets” were probably more scientific than religious. Leonardo was among the Renaissance scientists who had to be careful not to raise suspicion that their theories were challenging established church doctrine on creation.

Brown, however, used the fact of Da Vinci's reverse-style scientific essays to suggest that Leonardo also left clues in his artwork

about secret religious beliefs, which if known would have changed the public's acceptance of his work. In *The Da Vinci Code*, the great artist is portrayed as a goddess worshiper who left clues in his artwork to let us know that his views of Christ were not in line with the teachings of the church.

But how believable is this claim? Art critics who have no interest in defending the church have rejected the notion. Authorities in the art world believe that the “hidden clues” to Leonardo's secret faith exist only in the imagination of those looking to make a conspiracy theory plausible (see: Bruce Boucher, “Does *The Da Vinci Code* Crack Leonardo?” *The New York Times*, 8/3/03; Sian Gibby, “Mrs. God,” *Slate*, 11/3/03).

**Is the book's
portrayal of the
Catholic organization**

known as Opus Dei accurate?

Early in *The Da Vinci Code*, a “tortured soul” by the name of Silas is introduced as the faithful assassin doing “the work of the Lord.” Silas turns out to be a member of Opus Dei, complete with a spiked belt for self-mortification and a willingness to silence (murder) all enemies of the secret society.

Brown begins his book by stating as fact: *“The Vatican prelature known as Opus Dei is a deeply devout Catholic sect that has been the topic of recent controversy due to reports of brainwashing, coercion, and a dangerous practice known as ‘corporal mortification.’ Opus Dei has just completed construction of a \$47 million National Headquarters at 243 Lexington Avenue in New York City.”*

Again, *The Da Vinci Code*

alleges to have uncovered “secrets” about the church. The truth is that the real Opus Dei is a Roman Catholic lay organization that emphasizes piety and good works. Its founder Josemaria Escriva was born in Babastros, Spain, in 1902 and created the Work (or Opus Dei, “work of God,” as it would later be known) to empower lay people, instead of focusing on the spirituality of clergy.

The characteristics of Opus Dei are self-denial and sacrificial good works within the context of the Roman Catholic Church. Yet its portrayal in *The Da Vinci Code* as existing to suppress documents of the Priory of Sion is pure fabrication. As we have already noted (pp.9-11), the claim that the Priory of Sion exists to keep the secret of the relationship between Jesus and Mary is without merit or evidence.

To what extent has the church devalued women?

According to *The Da Vinci Code*, “Powerful men in the early Christian church ‘conned’ the world by propagating lies that devalued the female and tipped the scales in favor of the masculine. . . . Constantine and his male successors successfully converted the world from matriarchal paganism to patriarchal Christianity by waging a campaign of propaganda that demonized the sacred feminine” (p.124).

In addition, *The Da Vinci Code* refers to the Catholic Inquisition and to victims that “included all female scholars, priestesses, gypsies, mystics, nature lovers, herb gatherers, and any women ‘suspiciously attuned to the natural world.’ Midwives also were killed for their heretical

practice of using medical knowledge to ease the pain of childbirth” (p.125).

It is public knowledge that followers of Christ have not always treated women with the love and respect that Jesus Himself showed the women who followed Him. Yet the truth is that the persecuted groups listed by Brown were not specifically targeted because of their gender. The Inquisition targeted men *and* women—priests, nuns, artists, transients, and political enemies among others.

To the extent that *The Da Vinci Code* is right about the church’s devaluation of women, it is only because followers of Christ have missed the spirit of their own Scriptures and Leader. For 2,000 years, the Bible has urged its readers to break not only with the fertility cults and goddess worship of pagan religions, but also to reject the kind

of patriarchal culture that treats women as servile, sexual objects, or property. Even though the spirit of the culture has often crept into the church, Jesus' treatment of women and the apostle Paul's teaching that men should love their wives as Christ loved the church have changed the hearts of men who are open to the Spirit of Christ (Eph. 5:25).

Because of this influence, the church has, in many cultures, raised the status of women from legal property to a relationship of "being heirs together" (1 Pet. 3:7).

Was Mary Magdalene ever worshiped as a goddess?

According to *The Da Vinci Code*, Jesus wanted Mary Magdalene to restore to the church the concept of "the sacred feminine."

Robert Langdon, Brown's Harvard symbologist, explains:

"The Holy Grail represents the sacred feminine and the goddess, which of course has now been lost, virtually eliminated by the church. The power of the female and her ability to produce life was once very sacred, but it posed a threat to the rise of the predominantly male church, and so the sacred feminine was demonized and called unclean" (p.238).

By that rationale, and with second-century Gnostic documents, Brown builds his case that Jesus not only took Mary Magdalene as His wife but planned to make her the founder of His church (p.254).

All of this, however, is contrary to what many scholars regard as the oldest and most reliable accounts. The New Testament portrait of Mary Magdalene is in sharp contrast to Dan Brown's vision of her. According to the gospel

of Mark, Jesus delivered her from seven demons (16:9). Grateful for being set free, she became a follower who, along with many others, provided financial support to Jesus and His disciples (Lk. 8:1-3). She was a witness of the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Mt. 27:55-56; Mk. 15:40). John's gospel says Mary was the first to see Jesus after His resurrection (Jn. 20:11-18).

In short, the New Testament paints a picture of Jesus and Mary that is honorable and above reproach. Their relationship is consistent with that of a woman who, along with the other disciples, followed a man who could heal withered legs, walk on water, and turn water into wine. The Gospel accounts of their friendship are marked by a reserve and spiritual connection that does not even hint at romantic involvement.

Yet despite the historical evidence that Mary Magdalene was one of many followers who witnessed the miracles and unparalleled life of Christ, *The Da Vinci Code* portrays a romantic relationship that leads to marriage and a child.

Did Jesus and Mary Magdalene marry and have a child?

Although the New Testament never explicitly says that Jesus remained single, it gives indirect evidence that He did not get married like His apostles and brothers. The apostle Paul later wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians, "Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?" (1 Cor. 9:5). If Jesus had married, Paul would have included Him in the list.

The combined evidence

that Jesus lived a single life of devotion to His mission, however, does not show up in *The Da Vinci Code*. In fact, one of its main characters claims, “*Almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false*” (p.235).

In the context of a novel, such a statement reflects “freedom of speech.” But fiction is not something on which to stake our lives.

Darrell Bock, who is a research professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, says this about Jesus being married:

Most scholars have long believed that Jesus was single No early Christian text we possess, either biblical or extrabiblical, indicates the presence of a wife during His ministry, His crucifixion, or after His resurrection. Whenever texts mention Jesus’

family, they refer to His mother, brothers, and sisters but never to a wife. Furthermore, there is no hint that He was widowed (*Breaking The Da Vinci Code*, p.41).

Bock goes on to give three arguments against the claim that Jesus and Mary were married:

1. Mary is never tied to any male when she was named (Mt. 27:55-56; Mk. 15:40-41; Lk. 8:2; Jn. 19:25).

2. A minister’s right to marry was cited without reference to Jesus (1 Cor. 9:4-6).

3. Jesus showed no special concern for Mary Magdalene at the cross (Jn. 19:25-27).

Even though the Bible gives us compelling reason to conclude that Jesus and Mary were not married, why should we trust its claims over the claims of the Gnostic gospels and *The Da Vinci Code*?

Why should we trust the biblical accounts of Jesus and Mary?

The trustworthiness of any ancient document depends on its ability to stand up under time-tested criteria. Let's see what that measure of authenticity is and how the New Testament and the Gnostic gospels stand up to it.

In the ancient Greek world, Aristotle cast a giant shadow of scholarly and scientific insight that touches us today. Long before the invention of the printing press, Aristotle used well-reasoned criteria for recognizing the trustworthiness of an ancient document. He listed three guidelines that have stood the test of time:

(1) Was the person an eyewitness to the event he recorded? (2) How many copies of the record do we have and how close are they to the event they describe?

(3) Are there other sources outside the document that corroborate the document's claims? Even today, historians follow these guidelines. They remain foundational to the science of textual criticism.

Such guidelines help us to see some of the many reasons that the credibility of the New Testament has stood the test of time. The Nag Hammadi documents (Gnostic gospels), by comparison, were written about 100 to 200 years after the life of Jesus. Being later in time and lacking connection to those who knew Christ, they reflect Gnostic doctrines of the second and third centuries rather than a first-century record of witnesses.

By contrast, the New Testament gives us eyewitness accounts, with more copies, closer to the event than any other document from the first

century. Even though the oldest manuscripts are not complete, textual critics are able to piece together the evidence. Small portions like the Chester Beatty and John Ryland papyri fragments bring scholars back to within 40 years of the writing of the gospel of John (F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents—Are They Reliable?* pp.17-18). Likewise, F. F. Bruce in his book *Jesus And Christian Origins Outside The New Testament* shows how historians have used other early documents to confirm the reliability of New Testament accounts.

Even in the face of such evidence, *The Da Vinci Code* can still cause confusion. By developing a cleverly written plot that commingles “a good read” with a mixture of historical fact and fiction, the casual reader is unable to tell where the truth starts and stops. A good example

of this distortion of history is *The Da Vinci Code*’s view of Emperor Constantine.

Was Constantine a lifelong pagan?

According to *The Da Vinci Code*, Constantine “*was a lifelong pagan who was baptized on his deathbed, too weak to protest. . . . Rome’s official religion was sun worship—the cult of Sol Invictus, or the Invisible Sun—and Constantine was its head priest*” (p.232).

Once again, the record of history is significantly different than what Dan Brown states. According to church historian Kenneth Scott Latourette, Constantine was a fourth-century Roman Emperor who confessed a life-changing experience that caused him to reverse a longstanding persecution policy against Christians. By his Edict of Milan (AD 313), he extended to Christianity

the toleration granted other religions of the day.

It's true that Constantine's alleged conversion to Christ is complicated by the fact that Roman emperors were regarded as both political and religious heads of state. In the Roman senate, Constantine was considered head priest of the cult of *Sol Invictus* and also "pontifex maximus" (commander and chief) of the priests of the faith.

Despite this mix of political and pagan religious power, history bears record that Constantine's interests were not merely political. Until his Edict of Milan, Christians had been regarded as enemies of the state because of their confession that Christ, rather than Caesar, is King of kings and Lord of lords.

Constantine's baptism just prior to his death may reflect a misguided belief in

his day that water baptism washes away sin. There is reason to believe that he delayed his baptism until the last moment to try to assure that all the sins of his life would be cleansed.

Was Constantine responsible for the view that Jesus is God?

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

Without question, Constantine was a pivotal figure in church history who did more than grant followers of Christ protection under the law. He was also responsible for convening the Council of Nicaea (AD 325) to help church leaders

develop consensus about the doctrine of Christ.

The council was convened because an aged presbyter named Arius denied the full deity of Christ by proclaiming, “There was [a time] when [Jesus] was not.” Arius reasoned that because Jesus came into this world in physical form, He must be changeable—unlike God, His Father.

The views of Arius stirred great controversy among other church leaders who were convinced that the writings of both Old and New Testament Scriptures showed that the Messiah who came into the world was fully divine. The idea that Jesus was a God-man did not begin with Constantine. Hundreds of years before Jesus came into the world, Old Testament prophets anticipated a coming Messiah as “Mighty God” (Isa. 9:6), “Immanuel” (Isa.

7:14) meaning “God with us” (Mt. 1:23), and “the Lord” (Ps. 110:1).

This view of Jesus as God in the flesh was later taught by the apostles who were eyewitnesses to all that Jesus said and did.

According to the New Testament, these witnesses did not always form their opinions easily. One of them, named Thomas, is still known as “the doubter.” Yet upon encountering the risen Christ, Thomas confessed, “My Lord and my God!” (Jn. 20:28).

In our day, Thomas’ words might sound like a profane exclamation. But his confession reflects the reasoned conclusion of other apostles who recorded what they had seen and heard. Peter addressed Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Jn. 6:69). And the apostle Paul, after his conversion, ascribed to Jesus the essential attributes of

God and full deity in human form (Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 2:9).

Additional evidence shows that belief in the deity of Christ preceded the days of Constantine. In the generations that followed

There is a wealth of evidence showing that the belief in the deity of Christ did not originate with Constantine.

the Apostolic Age, the full divinity of Christ was widely accepted by the church fathers. Justin Martyr in AD 150 wrote, “[Jesus is] the first-begotten Word of God, is even God.” In AD 185, Irenaeus proclaimed that Jesus of Nazareth is “our Lord and God and Savior and King.” Clement of Alexandria (c. AD 200) said

that Jesus was “truly most manifest Deity, He that is made equal to the Lord of the universe.”

When Constantine convened the Council of Nicaea, the Council’s conclusion that Jesus Christ was “God of very God” had deep historical and scriptural roots. It’s also important that he did not lead the Council but served as an advocate for reconciliation and agreement among the members (*The Truth Behind The Da Vinci Code*, Abanes, p.37; *Breaking The Da Vinci Code*, Bock, pp.101-102; *Christendom Volume 1*, Bainton, pp.97-98).

Even if Constantine did not project deity upon the man Jesus but cooperated with a growing consensus about His divine nature, was he responsible for destroying legitimate documents that should have been included in our Bible?

Did Constantine tamper with the contents of the Bible?

“The Bible, as we know it today, was collated by the pagan Roman emperor Constantine,” says Dan Brown’s “expert” (p.231). He continues: *“Because Constantine upgraded Jesus’ status almost four centuries after Jesus’ death, thousands of documents already existed chronicling His life as a mortal man. To rewrite the history books, Constantine knew he would need a bold stroke. From this sprang the most profound moment in Christian history. . . . Constantine commissioned and financed a new Bible, which omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ’s human traits and embellished those gospels that made Him godlike. The earlier [Gnostic] gospels were outlawed, gathered up, and burned”* (p.234).

Once again, however, the record of history is different. There is no evidence that Constantine ordered the burning of any Gnostic gospels. What were burned were Arian papers found by the Council of Nicaea to be heretical. This destruction of documents says more about the church’s defense of the doctrine of Christ than it does about the origin of the New Testament.

The informal recognition of New Testament Scriptures was well under way long before Constantine. And the formal affirmation of the New Testament as we know it today occurred 72 years later at the Synod of Carthage (AD 397). It was then, decades after Constantine, that the official books of the Bible were ratified (*A Timeline Of Church History*, Conciliar Press).

Does *The Da Vinci Code* or the New Testament give us a better “unbroken chain of knowledge”?

The Da Vinci Code claims an “unbroken chain of knowledge” (p.5) that can be traced back to the Old Testament. The New Testament also claims to be rooted in the Jewish Scriptures. But which of the two fits like a hand in glove with Moses and the Prophets?

Dan Brown attempts to tie his “secret knowledge” to early Judaism with this shocking statement: *“Admittedly, the concept of sex as a pathway to God was mind-boggling at first. Langdon’s Jewish students always looked flabbergasted when he first told them that the early Jewish tradition involved ritualistic sex. In the Temple, no less. Early Jews believed that the Holy of*

Holies in Solomon’s Temple housed not only God but also His powerful female equal, Shekinah. . . . The Jewish tetragrammaton YHWH—the sacred name of God—is in fact derived from Jehovah, an androgynous physical union between the masculine Jah and the pre-Hebraic name for Eve, Havah (p.309).

Such concepts sound scholarly when spoken by a fictional Harvard professor of symbology. They can also be misleading when they come from the pen of someone who is trying to rewrite history to claim that God is pleased by the pagan practices of ancient fertility cults. This is another instance, however, where the facts are different.

Researchers Carl Olson and Sandra Miesel note: The name “Jehovah” didn’t even exist until the thirteenth century at the earliest (and

wasn't common until the sixteenth century), and is an English word. It was created by artificially combining the consonants of YHWH (or JHVH) and the vowels of Adonai (which means "Lord"), the name substituted for YHWH in the Old Testament by Jews. The Hebrew—not "pre-Hebraic"—word for Eve is hawwâ, (pronounced "havah"), which means "mother of all living" (www.davincihoax.com).

By contrast, Brown uses his own assumptions to make unjustified claims about Hebrew word meanings and origins. The reader is asked to accept the words of Robert Langdon, a fictitious authority in the field, who tries to tie the worship of Israel to the ancient fertility cults characteristic of Israel's neighbors. Notice the

difference of definition given by Hebrew scholars in the *Theological Wordbook Of The Old Testament*.

Most likely the name [YHWH] should be translated something like "I am He who is," or "I am He who exists" More than anything perhaps, the "is-ness" of God is expressive both of His presence and His existence (p.214).

The self-description of God in the Old Testament is that He is personal and eternally existent. But why is this important? The ancient Hebrews were surrounded by pagan people who worshiped many gods and goddesses, offered their children as sacrifices, and engaged in ritual sex and other forms of moral depravity. These forms of worship were condemned by the prophets. In fact, a ruler of Israel or Judah was often approved or

condemned on the basis of whether he accepted or rejected such pagan cults (1 Ki. 15–16).

Yet *The Da Vinci Code* claims that the original form of Judaism was polytheistic with goddess worship and ritual sex (p.309). To place such pagan practices within the Holy of Holies would have been a blasphemous violation of Mosaic law.

The Da Vinci Code contradicts the combined witness of the Hebrew Scriptures. What about the New Testament? Does it give a picture of continuity with the Old Testament? Together, the writings of Paul, Peter, James, John, and Jude combine with the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John to cite multiple sources from the Old Testament to support their view of Christ. They build on the testimony of Jewish prophets who anticipated a coming Deliverer who would be

born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14; Mt. 1:18,24-25). This Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2; Lk. 2:4-7). Although a king, He would enter Jerusalem humbly on a donkey (Zech. 9:9; Mt. 21:6-11). Even the piercing and death of Messiah were foretold centuries before the

***The Old and New
Testaments fit
together like a
hand in glove.***

invention of crucifixion as a form of execution (Isa. 53; Zech. 12:10; Mt. 27). And the Messiah triumphing over death in resurrection was foretold (Ps. 16:10; Isa. 53:10; Acts 2:31). These fulfillments of messianic predictions are only part of a much wider range of other elements of continuity

also fulfilled by the unique person of Jesus of Nazareth.

Many have noted down through the centuries that “the New Testament is in the Old Testament contained and the Old Testament is in the New Testament explained.” They do fit together like a hand in glove—a fit that would have been impossible to contrive.

Do “the winners” rewrite history to suit their desires?

Dan Brown’s expert “Grail hunter” tells Sophie: *“History is always written by the winners. When two cultures clash, the loser is obliterated, and the winner writes the history books—books which glorify their own cause and disparage the conquered foe. As Napoleon once said, ‘What is history, but a fable agreed upon?’”* (p.256).

One problem with the book’s observation that

the emperor Constantine rewrote history is that Constantine could not have collected and altered the combined evidence of history that preceded him.

Ancient documents including but not restricted to the New Testament accounts tell the story of witnesses who saw the Old Testament Scriptures fulfilled in Christ and who were willing to suffer and die for what they saw in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. These witnesses lived and died in spite of the power of Rome, not because of it. For most of the years preceding Constantine they were a hated and persecuted people (1 Cor. 1:26-31). Followers of Christ were the outcasts of society. They were the poor and powerless witnesses of the history of Christ, not “the winners,” as alleged by Brown.

SEPARATING FACT FROM FICTION

CUNNINGLY DEvised FABLES

The first apostles of Christ knew the difference between fact and fiction. The New Testament writer we know as the apostle Peter wrote:

We did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty (2 Pet. 1:16).

Peter affirmed that the historic Christian faith does not rest on cleverly invented stories that have no basis in fact. “Cunningly devised” could literally be translated “artfully framed by human cleverness.”

The Theological Dictionary Of The New Testament makes the following observation:

Certain unspecified

Gnostic teachings are in view in 2 Peter 1:16, but the warning is a general one to shun contact with all false doctrines, which can pass on only myths and not the realities of revelation.

“We did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Peter (2 Pet. 1:16)

Notice that this biblical dictionary identifies Gnostic teaching and myths that are not consistent with events recorded in Scripture as “cunningly devised fables.”

The word *fables* is literally *mythos*, from which we get the word

myth. Other commentators see a connection with Gnostic teachings as well. For example:

The reference here may be . . . to Gnostic speculations about aeons or emanations which rose from the eternal abyss (Vincent and Wuest).

This is not to say that all fiction or myth is wrong. Some ancient myths, such as Aesop's fables or Zen parables, have stood the test of time as fictional morality lessons. They are not written to make claims about history but to illustrate principles that speak to the human heart. Likewise, well-written novels can use imagination combined with a historical backdrop to tell a gripping and insightful story. *The Da Vinci Code*, however, alters the facts of history to promote a Gnostic and fanciful portrait of Jesus. The result is a bestselling "cunningly devised fable."

TRUTH TWISTING

The New Testament warns:

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons (1 Tim. 4:1).

Down through the centuries, what Paul called "doctrines of demons" have been competing with the truth for the minds and hearts of each generation.

In 1942, an Oxford scholar and Christian apologist named C. S. Lewis tried to imagine the mindset and strategies of such demons in a book called *Screwtape Letters*. It's a collection of fictional letters from a senior demon named Screwtape to a novice demon named Wormwood, his nephew and protégé. Screwtape gives his nephew advice about how to use lies and deception to keep the young man he was assigned

to from seeing the truth about “the enemy.”

In one exchange, Screwtape encourages Wormwood to try to distract his “patient” from the real Jesus by using the idea of “a historical Jesus.” Screwtape says:

In the last generation we promoted the construction of such a “historical Jesus” on liberal and humanitarian lines; we are now putting forward a new “historical Jesus” on Marxian, catastrophic, and revolutionary lines. The advantages of these constructions, which we intend to change every thirty years or so, are manifold. In the first place they all tend to direct men’s devotion to something which does not exist, for each “historical Jesus” is unhistorical. The documents [the New

Testament Gospels] say what they say and cannot be added to; each new “historical Jesus” therefore has to be got out of [the Scriptures] by suppression at one point and exaggeration at another (pp.123-124).

The Jesus of *The Da Vinci Code* is an alleged “historical Jesus.” The book calls Christ a wonderful man while denying that He was anything more. Brown’s fictional Grail hunter for instance, says, *“Nobody is saying Christ was a fraud, or denying that He walked the earth and inspired millions to better lives. All we are saying is that Constantine took advantage of Christ’s substantial influence and importance. And in doing so, he shaped the face of Christianity as we know it today”* (p.234).

As we have seen, there is no evidence that

Constantine tried to alter the record of the Old or New Testament Scriptures. And because of the way the Scriptures had been copied, distributed, and written about, Constantine could not have altered the existing biblical record even if he had wanted to.

Anyone who calls Jesus a good teacher, but not God and Savior, can do so only by ignoring or dismissing the combined evidence. The Jewish prophets, apostolic eyewitnesses, church fathers, and hundreds of millions of people over the last 2,000 years have followed Christ long enough to find the truth in Him.

By contrast, *The Da Vinci Code* combines fiction with distortion of fact, referencing second- and third-century writings of known enemies of the church, a conspiracy theory, and unproven claims of “genealogical documents” that have never been found.

The truth about Christ is more amazing than fiction—and far more believable.

TEST THE SPIRITS

The disciple who sat closest to Jesus at the Last Supper left us a gospel of His life and three short letters of spiritual instruction. Many New Testament scholars believe that the letter of 1 John had an ancient form of Gnosticism in view when the apostle wrote:

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is

not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world (1 Jn. 4:1-4).

John's confidence in Christ is as compelling today as it was in the ancient world. He had

***"I am the way,
the truth, and
the life. No one
comes to the
Father except
through Me."***
Jesus (Jn. 14:6)

come to know Jesus not only as a wonderful friend (Jn. 21:20-24), but as the Creator of the world (Jn. 1:1-

3), who said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (Jn. 14:6).

SUGGESTED READING

The Truth Behind The Da Vinci Code by Richard Abanes (Eugene: Harvest House, 2004).

Breaking The Da Vinci Code by Darrell Bock (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004).

Cracking Da Vinci's Code by James Garlow and Peter Jones (Colorado Springs: Victor, 2004).

The Da Vinci Deception by Erwin W. Lutzer (Wheaton: Tyndale, 2004).

Jesus & Christian Origins Outside The New Testament by F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974).

The New Testament Documents—Are They Reliable? by F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973).

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