



Charles R. Williams

“A lie will go around the world once while truth is still putting on her boots.”

“It is twice as hard to crush a half-truth as a whole lie.”

“If you believe in the Gospel what you like, and reject what you don't like, it is not the Gospel you believe, but yourself.”

Note: See full list of resources and asterisk notes at the end of this paper

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IMPORTANT INTRODUCTION: READ THIS BEFORE YOU READ THE PAPER.

Dan Brown begins his novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, with the word “**FACT**” in bold letters, following which he claims that a secret society by the name of the Priory of Sion was begun in A.D. 1099. He claims in the book that ancient papers were found in the French National Library and other French libraries, which prove that this secret society existed for many centuries. They were referred to as the “Secret Documents,” which contain a directory of Leaders; a list of Grand Masters, who were to preserve the secret of Jesus’ marriage, his children, and his descendents. Leonardo da Vinci is listed in the papers as one of those masters who kept the secret; however, Da Vinci placed certain clues in some of his paintings, when if understood, would reveal the true secret about the “Priory of Sion” and the truth about Jesus.

WHAT ARE THE REAL FACTS? The “Priory of Sion” was actually founded in 1956 in the city of Paris by an anti-Semitic crook by the name of **Pierre Plantard**, a son of a butler and cook. Plantard was a low level office clerk who was arrested for embezzlement and spent some time in prison. **He cooked up a scheme** in which he claimed to be a member of the “Priory of Sion” and a descendent of Jesus and Mary Magdalene, which he claimed made him the rightful heir as king of France. To enforce the hoax, Plantard and two friends spent much of the 1960’s **forging and then planting these documents** in French libraries. Bit by bit, like pieces of cheese in front of a mouse, he sent questions about the mysterious ‘Priory of Sion’ to Henry Lincoln, a British Broadcasting Company documentary maker who took the bait along with two friends, Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh.

Eventually, Plantard’s co-conspirators began to divulge the hoax. Even Plantard began telling his friends how **he faked the documents**. As it turns out, the documents are not ancient at all. Dr. Bill Putnum, an archeologist, and others who examined the documents tell us that the documents are made up. To quote Dr. Putnum, “The papers are probably one of the greatest hoaxes in history.” Plantard confessed his scam in open court in 1993, but the momentum of the hoax had become unstoppable. Books have been published as if these papers were real (*Holy Blood, Holy Grail*). Besides, why tell the public the truth and sidetrack this gravy train? Plantard died in 2000. The French court verdict was that the “**Priory Sion**” **papers were a total fabrication**.

The true facts, however, did not stop Dan Brown from writing his novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, which is based upon the discredited “Priory of Sion” myth. **Money was to be made** and many people enjoy and even want to believe conspiracy theories. At the bottom of the first page of his novel, he claims, “All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate.” If he believes this, then he has become another mouse in Pierre Plantard’s trap.

His book is like a house of cards. Pull one or more cards down from the foundation and it all falls. The card that makes it all fall is that the “Secret Papers” upon which the book is based are totally false. The rest of this paper examines Brown’s historical inaccuracies.

The Da Vinci Code Versus the Gospel Truth

It was obvious that **Dr. Paul Maier** was troubled in a recent interview when he said, “There is not one ranking scholar in the entire world who supports what Dan Brown has done with history.”

Who is Dr. Paul Maier? Dr. Maier is a Harvard graduate, Fulbright scholar, author of 15 books, and professor of ancient history at Western Michigan University. He is incensed at the faulty history in Dan Brown’s bestselling novel, *The Da Vinci Code*. “As a professor of ancient history, I can’t stand known, accepted facts from the past lied about,” he said. “If my students did something like that, I’d flunk them.”

NOTE: You may hear the entire interview with Dr. Paul Maier by contacting *Out Reach* at www.outreach.com. Click on “Da Vinci Code Outreach Tools.” The DVD and the book that comes with it are entitled *Discussing the Da Vinci Code*.

Publishing History:

Still, Dan Brown has his fans. Some 40 million copies of his potboiler murder mystery have been sold worldwide, and a movie version starring Tom Hanks debuted to a global audience on May 19. Brown’s website prominently features this glowing endorsement from the *New York Daily News*: “His research is impeccable.”

That view can be found among the popular media but very much a minority position among historians. Sandra Miesel, coauthor of *The Da Vinci Hoax*, one of about 15 books published to answer Dan Brown’s mega bestseller, said, “Everything in *The Da Vinci Code* is wrong, except Paris is in France; London is in England and Leonardo da Vinci painted pictures. All else is fabrication.”

Dr. James Kennedy wrote, “Although *The Da Vinci Code* is a murder mystery novel, it claims to be based on facts and those so-called facts attack the very heart of Christianity. The truth is, it is an extraordinarily deceitful weaving together of fact and fiction that takes advantage of the historical and biblical illiteracy of most readers. With the average American abysmally ignorant of history and, unfortunately, also ignorant of theology, and knowing very little about the Bible, the vast majority of Americans would not have the faintest idea what part of this book is fact and what part of it is fiction. And that makes it particularly dangerous.”

Da Vinci Code Delusion:

What are some of the fraudulent historical claims in Dan Brown’s book that scholars refute?

1. Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene, and had a daughter with her.
2. It was the “pagan” Roman emperor Constantine who “upgraded Jesus’ status to deity almost four centuries after Jesus’ death.
3. The Bible is not the Word of God, but “a product of man.”

4. There were more than 80 gospels considered for the New Testament, but Constantine, around A.D. 350, for his own political purposes, deleted these other accounts and chose Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. He then edited and added to the four gospels words and phrases to upgrade Jesus to deity.
5. The details of this alternative history have supposedly been suppressed over the past 2,000 years by the Roman Catholic Church and only a select few know the real story. Among them, Leonardo da Vinci, who encoded this hidden history into his Mona Lisa and Last Supper paintings.

Does Anyone Believe It?

1. A 2005 *National Geographic* poll found that one-third of Canadians who have read the book believe Dan Brown's theories and think that descendants of Jesus are alive today.
2. College students have latched onto Da Vinci Code theories as well. Point of View host Kerby Anderson began to see this when more and more college students started asking him, "Do you think Jesus was married? Are we really sure that the Bible includes all the Gospels?" *The Da Vinci Code* is "an interesting story, but it's a false story," said Anderson, "and it plants seeds of doubt."

Those seeds of doubt can be planted only in the hearts of those who have little or no knowledge of Christian and church history and how the New Testament came to be.

Decoding The Da Vinci Code

Brown's story begins with the murder of the Louvre's (major art Museum in Paris) curator. But this curator isn't just interested in art; he's also the Grand Master of a secret society known as the **Priory of Sion**. The Priory guards an ancient secret that, if revealed, would undermine the authority of the church and completely discredit biblical Christianity. Before dying, the curator attempts to pass on the secret to his granddaughter Sophie, a cryptographer, and Harvard professor Robert Langdon, by leaving a number of clues that he hopes will guide them to the truth.

So what's the secret, you ask? **The secret is the location, and true identity, of the much-sought-after Holy Grail.** In mythical stories of the past, the "Holy Grail" was the cup Jesus used when He instituted the Last Supper. However, in Brown's novel, the Grail is not the cup allegedly used by Christ at the Last Supper; rather, it's the person of Mary Magdalene, the wife of Jesus, who carried on the royal bloodline of Christ by giving birth to His child! The Priory of Sion carefully guards the secret location of Mary's tomb and serves to protect the bloodline of Jesus that has continued to this day!

[Comment: Some of you might have seen the India Jones movie *The Last Crusade*. It was a fictitious story about searching for the cup Jesus used when He instituted the Lord's Supper,

believing it had magical powers. Everyone who saw the Indiana Jones movies knows they were fiction. The first Indiana Jones movie was *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. It is a fictional story that took place during the time of World War II. As the story goes, the Germans were trying to find the Old Testament's Ark of the Covenant, hoping they could use its powers to win the War. **How much of that is true?** Well, Germany was at war in World War II and there was an Ark of the Covenant in the Old Testament that went before the winning battles of the Israelites. Since those facts are true, the Germans really were in search of the Ark of the Covenant, and as the story goes, they found it, opened it, and suffered the consequences. Therefore, the Ark is now stored somewhere on a secret American or British military base. You know that mixing in historical truth does not make fiction true. So it is in Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code*.]

But does anyone really take these ideas seriously?

Yes. As a matter of fact, they do. This is partly due to the way Brown has written his story. If one sets out to read *The Da Vinci Code*, the first word he will encounter, in bold uppercase letters, is the word "FACT." Shortly thereafter Brown writes, "All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate."^{2} The average reader, with no special knowledge or training in these areas, will assume the statement is true.

The fact is, most of what the book says about Christ, Mary, church history, Bible history, etc. is false. Many articles have been written specifically documenting some of Brown's inaccuracies in these areas.^{3} However, Brown also has a way of making the novel's theories about Jesus and the early history of Christianity appear credible. The theories are espoused by the novel's most educated characters, which are of course fictitious: a British royal historian, Leigh Teabing, and a Harvard professor of Religious Symbolology, Robert Langdon. When put in the mouths of these characters, the unsuspecting reader comes away with the impression that the theories are actually true. But are they?

In the remainder of this article, I'll argue that most of what Brown tells us about Jesus, the Bible, and the history of the early church is simply false.

Did Constantine Embellish Our Four Gospels?

Were the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, which were later to be officially recognized as part of the New Testament Canon (or "rule of faith"), intentionally altered and embellished in the fourth century at the command of Emperor Constantine? This is what Leigh Teabing, the fictional royal historian in *The Da Vinci Code*, suggests. At one point he states, "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" (p. 234). But is this really true?

In a letter to the early church historian Eusebius, Constantine did indeed order the preparation of "fifty copies of the sacred Scriptures."^{4} But nowhere in the letter does he command that any of the gospels be embellished in order to make Jesus appear more godlike. Even if he had, it would have been virtually impossible to get faithful Christians to accept such accounts. Why?

Before the reign of Constantine, the church had faced widespread persecution under Emperor Diocletian. Thousands of Christians were killed by the Romans because they refused to deny that Jesus is divine and therefore deity. It's difficult to believe that the same church that had withstood this persecution would suddenly jettison their cherished gospels and embrace embellished accounts of Jesus' life! Furthermore, it's quite certain that had Constantine tried such a thing, we would have plenty of evidence for it in the writings of the church historians. However, such evidence is completely lacking. Not one of them mentions an attempt by Constantine to alter any of our gospels. Finally, to claim that the leaders of the fourth century church, many of whom had suffered persecution for their faith in Christ, would agree to join Constantine in a grand conspiracy of this kind is completely unrealistic. There's simply no evidence that it ever happened. Not only that, but it would have been impossible, because by the time Constantine was born, there were thousands of New Testament manuscripts that already existed in a number of languages throughout the Roman Empire. Not only that but the church historians that lived from the second century to the time Constantine was born in the fourth century quoted verses from the already existing four gospels. We have a total of 36,289 New Testament quotes from A.D. 125 to A.D. 350. **An amazing fact** a lot of people don't know is that except for a few verses, we could reproduce the entire New Testament just from the quoted verses of these early historians (Irenaeus, Clement, Origen, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Eusebias, and others who lived before Constantine was born). I know history, and Dan Brown is no historian.

Brown also claims through the words of the fictitious character Sir Leigh Teabing that Constantine called for a secret meeting of church leaders in A.D. 325, known as the Council of Nicaea, to select the books that would be included in the Bible, most notably, the four gospels, and that he rewrote the gospels to create the divinity of Jesus. Did "Teabing" get anything right? There was a Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325. There did exist other writings known as the Gnostic gospels, which gave alternative accounts of Jesus. There have been discoveries of ancient scrolls (Nag Hammadi and the Dead Sea Scrolls, which Brown mentions). However, that is the extent of his accuracy. **The rest is fiction!** The selection of what books would go into what we call the New Testament actually began 200 years before Constantine was born. The meeting in Nicaea was not called to determine what books would go into the New Testament, because that had already been established. However, there had arisen within the church a sect known as the Gnostics who wrote their own versions about the life of Christ, which reflected their Greek philosophy but not the truth. They believed Jesus had a body but His divine self lived separately from His body. They believed this way because they would not reject their inherited Greek philosophy that all material things, including flesh, are evil; therefore, God would not and could not live in a fleshly body. This movement actually began in the first century, but the Gnostic gospels were not written until a century later. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were written in the first century long before the Gnostic gospels were written. The rising of false teachings, which would later be called "Gnosticism," was one of the reasons John wrote his gospel, and his letters. That is why John's gospel begins by declaring that Jesus is God and He became flesh (John 1:1-5, 14). You will recall that in Acts 18 the Greek philosophers were willing to listen to Paul until he linked Jesus with the "unknown God" and began teaching that Jesus' body was resurrected from the dead. This was unacceptable to those who accepted Greek philosophy. You will also recall that Paul then went to Corinth and later had to write a letter to the church he established there to correct those who would not accept the bodily resurrection of Jesus and the bodily resurrection of man (1 Cor. 15). The Gnostics never denied the divinity of Jesus, but they

separated Jesus body from His spirit and stated that they acted apart. John wrote his gospel and letters to refute this teaching. John referred to them as the “antichrists,” who were present his day and who started out as Christians, but who left (1 John 2:18-19, 22; 2 John 1:7). An antichrist was one who denied that Jesus was the Christ, the Holy One, and the Son of God. John says that anyone who denies that He came in the flesh is of the spirit of antichrist (1 John 4:2-3; 2 John 1:7).

Brown also claims that the Nicaea Council was called in order to decide on whether Jesus was divine. It is important to know that we have copies of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John that are significantly earlier than Constantine and the Council of Nicaea. Although none of the copies are complete, we do have nearly complete copies of both Luke and John in a codex dated between 175 and 225 A.D. -- at least one hundred years before Nicaea. Another manuscript, dating from about 200 A.D. or earlier, contains most of John's Gospel.{5}. Nearly every book in our New Testament was agreed to be scripture by A.D. 195. That's 135 years before Constantine! All of these books proclaimed the divinity of Jesus.

NOTE: Brown's book states that the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1954 and contained information, which demonstrates that the New Testament is inaccurate. First of all, the Dead Scrolls were first discovered in 1947 and they were all written before the birth of Christ. How can anyone be any more inaccurate than this?

Brown also claims that the leaders at the Nicaea Council took a vote on whether Jesus was divine. He then says that by a narrow margin, they voted that Jesus was divine. As with many other statements by Brown, **this is absolutely not true.** The fact is, every person present believed in the divinity of Jesus. The question was not whether Jesus was divine but **how** He was divine. There had spread throughout the church the notion that Jesus was divine when separated from His body (Gnosticism). Constantine was concerned that it would cause a division in the church; therefore, he called for the meeting to settle the matter. After searching the New Testament scriptures already in existence, they concluded that Jesus was indeed divine, God in the flesh. Brown says that this won out by a narrow margin. The fact is, they did not vote at all. They came up with a statement and each was asked to sign it. Only two of over two hundred present refused to sign what was to be called the Nicean Creed. The false doctrines about Jesus eventually died out. Brown is wrong again in his history.

But why is this important?

First, we can compare these pre-Nicene manuscripts with those that followed Nicaea to see if any embellishment occurred. None did. Second, the pre-Nicene versions of John's Gospel include some of the strongest declarations of Jesus' deity on record (e.g. 1:1-3; 8:58; 10:30-33; etc.). That is, the most explicit declarations of Jesus' deity in any of our gospels, are already found in manuscripts that pre-date Constantine by more than a hundred years! So much for the theory that they were embellished. But can these gospels be trusted?

Can We Trust the Gospels?

Although there is no historical basis for the claim that Constantine embellished the New Testament gospels to make Jesus appear more godlike, we must still ask whether the gospels are trustworthy and reliable sources of information about Jesus. According to Teabing, the fictional historian we encountered previously, "Almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false" (235). Is this correct? The answer largely depends on the reliability of our earliest biographies of Jesus -- the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Each of these gospels was written in the first century A.D. Although they are technically anonymous, we have fairly strong evidence from second century writers such as Papias (c. 125 A.D.) and Irenaeus (c. 180 A.D.) for ascribing each gospel to its traditional author. If their testimony is true (and we have little reason to doubt it), then Mark, the companion of the disciple Peter, wrote down the substance of Peter's preaching. Luke, the companion of the apostle Paul, carefully researched and wrote the biography that bears his name. Finally, Matthew and John, two of Jesus' twelve apostles, wrote the books ascribed to them. If all of this is correct, then the events recorded in these gospels "are based on either direct or indirect eyewitness testimony." {6}

But did the gospel writers intend to reliably record the life and ministry of Jesus? Were they even interested in history, or did their theological agendas overshadow any desire they may have had to tell us what really happened? Craig Blomberg, a New Testament scholar at Denver Seminary, observes that the prologue to Luke's gospel "reads very much like prefaces to other generally trusted historical and biographical works of antiquity." He further notes that since Matthew and Mark are very similar to Luke in terms of genre, "it seems reasonable that Luke's historical intent would closely mirror theirs." {7} Finally, John tells us that he wrote his gospel so that people might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing they might have life in His name (20:31). While this statement admittedly reveals a clear theological agenda, Blomberg points out that "if you're going to be convinced enough to believe, the theology has to flow from accurate history." {8}

Interestingly, the disciplines of history and archaeology are a great help in corroborating the general reliability of the gospel writers. Where these authors mention people, places and events that can be checked against other ancient sources, they are consistently shown to be reliable. Thus, we have good grounds for trusting the New Testament gospels.

What about those gospels that didn't make it into the New Testament? Specifically, what about the Nag Hammadi documents that Brown mentions in his book?

The Nag Hammadi Gospels

Since their discovery in 1945, there has been much interest in the Nag Hammadi texts, but what are these documents? When were they written, and by whom, and for what purpose? According to Teabing, the fictional historian in *The Da Vinci Code*, the Nag Hammadi texts represent "the earliest Christian records" (p. 245). These "unaltered gospels," he claims, tell the real story about Jesus and early Christianity (p. 248). The New Testament gospels are allegedly a later, corrupted version of these events.

The only difficulty with **Teabing's theory** is that it's **wrong**. The Nag Hammadi documents are not "the earliest Christian records." Every book in the New Testament is earlier. The New Testament documents, including the four gospels, were all written in the first century A.D. In contrast to these documents, the dates for the Nag Hammadi texts range from the second to the third century A.D. As Dr. Darrell Bock observes in his book, *Breaking the Da Vinci Code*, "The bulk of this material is a few generations removed from the foundations of the Christian faith, a vital point to remember when assessing the contents." {9}

What *do* we know about the contents of these books? It is generally agreed that the Nag Hammadi texts are Gnostic documents. The key tenet of Gnosticism is that salvation comes through secret, esoteric knowledge. As a result, the Gnostic gospels, in striking contrast to their New Testament counterparts, place almost no value on the death and resurrection of Jesus. Indeed, Gnostic Christology had a tendency to separate the human Jesus from the Divine Christ, seeing them as two distinct beings. It was not the Divine Christ who suffered and died; it was merely the human Jesus -- or perhaps even Simon of Cyrene. {10} It didn't really matter much to the Gnostics because in their view the death of Jesus was irrelevant for attaining salvation. What was truly important was not the death of the man Jesus, but the secret knowledge brought by the Divine Christ. According to the Gnostics, salvation came through a correct understanding of this secret knowledge. {11}. One side point: no Christian needs to be a part of any organization religious or otherwise that claims to have secret information, which they say gives light and truth to the meaning of life, salvation, happiness, etc. There is only one book that gives such answers and it is no secret. That book is the Bible (2 Peter 1:2-3).

Needless to say, the Gnostic doctrines are incompatible with the New Testament teaching about Christ and salvation (e.g. Rom. 3:21-26; 5:1-11; 1 Cor. 15:3-11; Tit. 2:11-14). Ironically, they're also incompatible with Teabing's view that the Nag Hammadi texts "speak of Christ's ministry in very human terms" (234). The Nag Hammadi texts actually present Christ as a divine being, though quite differently from the New Testament perspective. {12}

Thus, the Nag Hammadi texts are both later than the New Testament writings and characterized by a worldview that is entirely alien to their theology. The early church historian and writers were wise to reject them from the New Testament Canon. But how did they decide what books *to* include?

The Formation of the New Testament Canon ("canon" means "rule of faith")

In the early centuries of Christianity, **many different books** were written about the teachings of Jesus and His apostles. **Most of these books never made it into the New Testament**. These include such titles as *The Gospel of Philip*, *The Acts of John*, *Third Corinthians*, and *The Apocalypse of Peter*. How did the early church decide what books to include in the New Testament and what to reject? When were these decisions made, and by whom? According to the fictional historian Teabing, "The Bible, as we know it today, was collated by . . . Constantine the Great" (p. 231). Again we must ask, is this true?

Criteria for New Testament Books:

The early church had very **definite criteria** that had to be met for a book to be included in the New Testament. Dr. Bart Ehrman observes:

1. A book had to be ancient, written close to the time when Jesus lived.
2. It had to be written either by an apostle or a companion of an apostle (See Eph. 3:3-5).
3. It had to be consistent with the orthodox understanding of the faith.
4. And it had to be widely recognized and accepted by the early church.{13}

Books that didn't meet these criteria were not included in the New Testament.

When were these decisions made? And who made them?

There was never an ecumenical council in the early church that officially decreed that the twenty-seven books now in our New Testament were the right ones.{14} Rather, the acceptable books and letters gradually took shape as the church recognized and embraced those books that were inspired by God.

The earliest collections of books "to circulate among the churches in the first half of the second century" were our four gospels and the letters of Paul.{15} By 144 A.D. church leaders sought to define the acceptable books and letters more specifically.{16}

Toward the end of the second century (A. D. 195), there was a growing consensus among the church that the acceptable books and letters should include the four gospels, Acts, the thirteen Pauline epistles, "epistles by other 'apostolic men' and the Revelation of John." {17} For example, the Muratorian Canon, which dates toward the end of the second century, recognized every New Testament book except Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, and 3 John. Similar, though not identical, books were recognized by Irenaeus in the late second century and Origen in the early third century. Thus, while the earliest listing of all the books in our New Testament comes from Athanasius in 367 A.D., there was widespread agreement on most of these books (including the four gospels) by the end of the second century. **The New Testament was not the product of a decision by Constantine.**

Who Was Mary Magdalene? (Part 1)

Another accusation made in *The Da Vinci Code* is the unfortunate misconception that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute. Where did this notion come from? And why do so many people believe it?

According to Leigh Teabing, *The Da Vinci Code's* fictional historian, the popular understanding of Mary Magdalene as a prostitute "is the legacy of a smear campaign . . . by the early Church." In Teabing's view, "The Church needed to defame Mary . . . in order to cover up her dangerous secret -- her role as the Holy Grail" (p. 244). Remember, in the world of this novel the Holy Grail is not the cup used by Jesus at the Last Supper. Instead, it is Mary Magdalene, who is alleged to be both Jesus' wife, and the one who carried His royal bloodline in

her womb. Brown says that Jesus intended for Mary Magdalene to be to a goddess figure reflecting the feminine side of God in the church. The Greeks and Romans worshiped similar female fertility goddesses, which when worshiped precipitated sexual orgies in their worship services. By the way, many of the leaders in the feminist movement just love Dan Brown's novel. I wonder why?

What are we to say to these things? Did the early church really seek to slander Mary as a prostitute in order to cover up her intimate relationship with Jesus? The first recorded instance of Mary Magdalene being misidentified as a prostitute occurred in a sermon by Pope Gregory the Great in A.D. 591.^{18} Most likely, this wasn't a deliberate attempt to slander Mary's character. Rather, Gregory probably misinterpreted some passages in the gospels, resulting in his incorrectly identifying Mary as a prostitute.

For instance, he may have identified the unnamed sinful woman in Luke 7, who anointed Jesus' feet, with Mary of Bethany in John 12, who also anointed Jesus' feet shortly before His death and burial. This would have been easy to do because, although there are important differences, there are also many similarities between the two separate incidents. If Gregory thought the sinful woman of Luke 7 was the Mary of John 12, he may then have mistakenly linked this woman with Mary Magdalene. As it turns out, Luke mentions Mary Magdalene for the first time at the beginning of chapter 8, right after the story of Jesus' anointing in Luke 7. Since the unnamed woman in Luke 7 was probably guilty of some kind of sexual sin, if Gregory came to believe that this woman was Mary Magdalene, then it wouldn't be too great a leap to infer that she was a prostitute.

Thus, while there's no actual evidence that Mary was a prostitute, it's not hard to see how Gregory might have mistakenly identified her as one. It's unfortunate that he did, and it needs to be corrected, but it's hardly necessary to believe it was a deliberate part of a smear campaign by the early church. Notice also when Gregory ruled as pope (A.D. 591). This was 250 years after Constantine.

Who Was Mary Magdalene? (Part 2)

What do our earliest written sources reveal about the real Mary Magdalene? According to Teabing, Mary was the wife of Jesus, the mother of his child, and the one whom he intended to establish the church after his death (p. 244-248). In support of these theories, the fictional character Teabing appeals to two of the Gnostic gospels: *The Gospel of Philip* and *The Gospel of Mary* [Magdalene]. We will consider *The Gospel of Philip* later. For now, let's take a closer look at *The Gospel of Mary*.

The section of this gospel quoted in Brown's novel pictures an incredulous apostle Peter, who simply can't believe that the risen Christ has secretly revealed information to Mary that He did not reveal to His male disciples. Levi, however, rebukes Peter: "If the Savior made her worthy, who are you . . . to reject her? Surely the Savior knows her very well. That is why he loved her more than us" (p. 247).

What can we say about this passage? First, it's important to observe that nowhere in this gospel are we told that Mary was Jesus' wife or the mother of His child. Second, many scholars think this text should probably be read symbolically, with Peter representing early Christian orthodoxy and Mary representing a form of Gnosticism. Thus, this gospel is probably claiming that "Mary" (that is, the Gnostics) has received Divine revelation, even if "Peter" (that is, the orthodox) can't believe it.{19} Finally, even if this text should be read literally, we have little reason to believe it is historically reliable. It was likely composed sometime in the **late second century**, about a hundred years after the four gospels in our New Testament.{20} Thus, contrary to what's implied in the novel, it certainly wasn't written by Mary Magdalene --- or any of Jesus' other original followers.{21}

If we want reliable information about Mary, we must turn to our earliest sources -- the New Testament gospels. These sources tell us that Mary was a follower of Jesus from the town of Magdala. After Jesus cast seven demons out of her, she (along with other women) helped support His ministry (Luke 8:1-3). She was a witness to Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, and the first to see the risen Christ (Matt. 27:55-61; John 20:11-18). Jesus even entrusted her with proclaiming His resurrection to His male disciples (John 20:17-18).{22} This is all the gospels tell us about Mary.{23} She was clearly an important woman, but there's nothing to suggest that she was Jesus' wife, or that Jesus intended her to lead the church.

But doesn't *The Gospel of Philip* indicate that Mary and Jesus were married? Let's have a look.

Was Jesus Married? (Part 1)

The strongest textual evidence we have that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married comes from *The Gospel of Philip*. It is therefore not surprising that Leigh Teabing, the fictional historian in *The Da Vinci Code*, should appeal to this text. The section of this gospel quoted in the novel reads as follows:

And the companion of the Savior is Mary Magdalene. Christ loved her more than all the disciples and used to kiss her often on her mouth. The rest of the disciples were offended by it and expressed disapproval. They said to him, "Why do you love her more than all of us?" (p. 246).

Notice that the first line refers to Mary as the *companion* of the Savior. In the novel, Teabing clinches his argument that Jesus and Mary were married by stating, "As any Aramaic scholar will tell you, the word *companion*, in those days, literally meant *spouse*" (246). This sounds like pretty strong evidence. Might Jesus have been married after all?

It's important to note that this gospel was originally written in Greek.{24} Therefore, what the term "companion" meant in Aramaic is irrelevant. Even in the Coptic translation found at Nag Hammadi, a Greek loan word (i.e. *koinonos*) lies behind the term translated "companion". Darrell Bock observes that this term *can* mean "wife" or "sister" in a spiritual sense, but it's "not the typical or common term for a physical 'wife'" in Greek.{25} Indeed, *koinonos* is most often used in the New Testament to refer to a "partner" or "sharer." Luke uses this term to describe James and John as Peter's business "partners" (Luke 5:10). Thus, contrary to the claim of

Teabing, the statement that Mary was Jesus' "companion" does not at all prove that she was His wife. But what about the following statement: "Christ loved her . . . and used to kiss her often on the mouth"?

First, this portion of the manuscript is damaged. We don't actually know *where* Christ kissed Mary. Indeed, some believe that "she was kissed on her cheek or forehead since either term fits in the break (of the manuscript)."{26} Second, even if the text said that Christ kissed Mary on the mouth, it wouldn't necessarily mean that something sexual is in view. Most scholars agree that Gnostic texts contain a great deal of symbolism. It was the Gnostic's way of claiming a so-called body of secret knowledge that only they could reveal. To read such texts literally, therefore, is to *misread* them. Finally, regardless of the author's intention, **this gospel was not written until the second half of the third century (A.D. 250 to 300), more than two hundred years after the time of Jesus.**{27} Thus, the reference to Jesus' kissing Mary is almost certainly not historically reliable, besides, even if it were true, it could have been what Paul called a "holy kiss" (Rom. 16:16). Nothing sexual is implied or indicated, even in the so-called *Gospel of Philip*, which was, I remind you, written more than two hundred years after the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

The Gospel of Philip offers insufficient evidence that Jesus was married. Some people, however, think that it would have been odd for Jesus to be single. The fact is, Jesus was not single. The church is the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:23-30).

Was Jesus Married? (Part 2)

The two most educated characters in *The Da Vinci Code* claim that an unmarried Jesus is quite improbable. Leigh Teabing, the fictional historian, says, "Jesus as a married man makes infinitely more sense than our standard biblical view of Jesus as a bachelor" (p. 245). Robert Langdon, the fictional Harvard professor of Religious Symbology in Brown's novel, concurs:

Jesus was a Jew, and the social decorum during that time virtually forbid a Jewish man to be unmarried. According to Jewish custom, celibacy was condemned . . . If Jesus were not married, at least one of the Bible's gospels would have mentioned it and offered some explanation for His unnatural state of bachelorhood (p. 245).

Is this true? What can be said in response to such claims?

First of all, it seems to me, that if Jesus were married, at least one of the New Testament writers would have mentioned it. In his book, *Breaking the Da Vinci Code*, Darrell Bock persuasively argues that an unmarried Jesus is not at all improbable.{28} Of course, it is certainly true that most Jewish men of Jesus' day *did* marry. It is also true that marriage was often viewed as a fundamental human obligation, especially in light of God's command for man to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Gen. 1:28). Nevertheless, by the first century there were recognized, and even lauded, exceptions to this general rule.

The first century Jewish writer, Philo of Alexandria, described the Essenes as those who "repudiate marriage . . . for no one of the Essenes ever marries a wife." {29} Interestingly, the Essenes not only escaped condemnation for their celibacy; they were often admired. Philo also wrote, "This now is the enviable system of life of these Essenes, so that not only private individuals but even mighty kings, admiring the men, venerate their sect, and increase . . . the honors which they confer on them." {30} Such citations clearly reveal that not all Jews of Jesus' day considered marriage obligatory. In fact, those who sought to avoid marriage for religious reasons were often admired rather than condemned.

It's important to remember that the Bible nowhere condemns singleness. Indeed, it praises those who choose to remain single to fully devote themselves to the work of the Lord (e.g. 1 Cor. 7:25-38). Paul was an apostle who made the choice to be single and devote himself to the cause of Christ. The apostle Peter, who was married, made positive comments about the apostle Paul. In Matthew 19:12 Jesus explains that some people "have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven". He concludes, "The one who can accept this should accept it." It is virtually certain that Jesus had accepted this. He had renounced marriage to fully devote Himself to the work of His Heavenly Father. What's more, since there was precedent in the first century for Jewish men to remain single for religious reasons, Jesus' singleness would not have been condemned. Contrary to the claims of *The Da Vinci Code*, it would have been completely acceptable for Jesus to be unmarried, even admired.

Did Jesus' Earliest Followers Proclaim His Deity?

We've considered *The Da Vinci Code's* claim that Jesus was married and found it wanting. But why have we spent so much time on this issue? Mark Roberts observes "that most proponents of the marriage of Jesus thesis have an agenda. They are trying to strip Jesus of his uniqueness, and especially his deity." {31} This is certainly true of *The Da Vinci Code, A Novel*. Not only does this novel call into question Jesus' deity by alleging that He was married, it also maintains that His earliest followers never even believed He was divine! According to the novel's fictional character Teabing, the doctrine of Christ's deity originally resulted from a vote at the Council of Nicaea. He further asserts, "until *that* moment in history, Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet . . . a great and powerful man, but a *man* nonetheless" (233). True or false? Did Jesus' earliest followers really believe that He was just a man?

The Council of Nicaea met in A.D. 325. By that time, Jesus' followers had already been proclaiming His deity for nearly three centuries. Our earliest written sources about the life and teachings of Jesus are found in the New Testament. These first century documents repeatedly affirm the deity of Christ. For instance, in his letter to the Colossians, the apostle Paul declared, "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (2:9; see also Rom. 9:5; Phil. 2:5-11; Tit. 2:13). The Gospel of John says of Jesus: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us" (1:1, 14).

In addition to the New Testament, there are also affirmations of Jesus' deity in the writings of the pre-Nicene church historians and leaders. For example, in the early second century Ignatius of Antioch wrote of "our God, Jesus the Christ." {32} Similar affirmations can

be found throughout these writings. There is also non-Christian testimony from the second century that Christians believed in Christ's divinity. In a letter from Pliny the Younger to Emperor Trajan, dated around 112 A.D., Pliny said the early Christians "were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day . . . when they sang . . . a hymn to Christ, as to a god." {33}

It's clear that Christians believed in the deity of Christ prior to the Council of Nicaea. It's also clear that most of The Da Vinci Code's theories about Jesus and the early church are false. If you'd like to explore these issues further, I highly recommend Darrell Bock's book, *Breaking the Da Vinci Code*.

Other resources used for this paper and highly recommended are listed at the end. (C.R.W.)**

Closing: Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-20; John 1:1-5, 14; 1 John 2:18-26; 4:1-6; 2 John 7

Notes

1. Read more about it at http://www.filmrot.com/articles/filmrot_news/004089.php (January 15, 2004).
2. Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 1.
3. For example, see Sandra Miesel, "Dismantling the Da Vinci Code," at <http://www.crisismagazine.com/september2003/feature1.htm> and James Patrick Holding, "Not InDavincible: A Review and Critique of The Da Vinci Code," at <http://www.answers.org/issues/davincicode.html>.
4. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Reprint. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1952), 1:549, cited in Norman Geisler and William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible: Revised and Expanded* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 282.
5. For more information see Geisler and Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, 390.
6. Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1998), 25.
7. *Ibid.*, 39-40.
8. *Ibid.*, 40.
9. Darrell Bock, *Breaking the Da Vinci Code* (n.p.: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004), 52 (pre-publication manuscript copy).
10. *Ibid.*, 62-63. See also *The Coptic Apocalypse of Peter and The Second Treatise of the Great Seth* in Bart Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not Make It Into The New Testament*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 78-86.
11. For example, *The Coptic Gospel of Thomas* (saying 1), in Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*, 20.
12. Bock, *Breaking the Da Vinci Code*, 63.
13. Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: Christian Scriptures and the Battles Over Authentication* (Chantilly, Virginia: The Teaching Company: Course Guidebook, part 2, 2002), 37.
14. Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*, 341.
15. F.F. Bruce, "Canon," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, eds. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 95.
16. *Ibid.*, 95-96.
17. *Ibid.*, 96.

18. Darrell Bock, *Breaking the Da Vinci Code* (n.p. Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004), 25-26 (pre-publication manuscript copy). I have relied heavily on Dr. Bock's analysis in this section.
 19. *Ibid.*, 116-17.
 20. Bart Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not Make It Into The New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 35.
 21. Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Doubleday, 2003). On page 247 we read, "Sophie had not known a gospel existed in Magdalene's words."
 22. An "apostle" can simply refer to "one sent" as an envoy or messenger. Mary was an "apostle" in this sense, since she was sent by Jesus to tell the disciples of His resurrection.
 23. For more information see Bock, *Breaking the Da Vinci Code*, 16-18.
 24. Ehrman, *Lost Scriptures*, 19.
 25. Bock, *Breaking the Da Vinci Code*, 22.
 26. *Ibid.*, 21.
 27. *Ibid.*, 20.
 28. In this section I have relied heavily on chapter 3 of Dr. Bock's book, *Breaking the Da Vinci Code*, pp. 40-49 (pre-publication copy).
 29. Philo, *Hypothetica*, 11.14-17, cited in Bock, *Breaking the Da Vinci Code*, 43.
 30. *Ibid.*, 44.
 31. Mark D. Roberts, "Was Jesus Married? A Careful Look at the Real Evidence," at <http://www.markdroberts.com/htmlfiles/resources/jesusmarried.htm>, January, 2004.
 32. Ignatius of Antioch, "Ephesians," 18:2, cited in Jack N. Sparks, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. Robert M. Grant (New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1978), 83.
 33. Pliny, *Letters*, transl. by William Melmoth, rev. by W.M.L. Hutchinson (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1935), vol. II, X:96, cited in Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, 199.
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*1. Much of the material above and all of the footnotes are from a work by **Michael Gleghorn**, *Decoding the Da Vinci Code*. He is research associate with Probe Ministries and is a graduate of Baylor University and Dallas Theological Seminary. His website is <http://www.michaelgleghorn.com/> NOTE: For brevity, not all quotes were included in this material; however, I left in the footnotes so that you can see the historical authorities upon which this material is based, and which demonstrate the fiction in Dan Brown's novel. Other materials from other sources are woven into the basic outline. See ** below:

2. **Additional material in this paper is from *Cracking Da Vinci's Code* by James Garlow and Peter Jones, graduates of Harvard University and Princeton University; *Exploring The Da Vinci Code* by Lee Strobel, a graduate of Yale Law School and Garry Poole, noted author. *The DaVinci Hoax* by Olaf H. Hage; *Da Vinci Decoded* by Josh Hardin who has degrees from Freed-Hardeman University and who taught Christian Evidences at the International University in Vienna, Austria, and *Breaking the Da Vinci Code* by Darrell Bock, research professor of New Testament Studies, Dallas Theological Seminary and Bishop, Paul. *The Council of Nicaea*. Columbia University: New York: Archives; 12-29-1997.