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DON'T LET THE  
FACTS  
GET IN THE WAY  
OF A GOOD STORY

A response to Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*

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## ◆ Why bother?

Many would say why bother to write a critique about a fictional book. "Lighten up, Ian. It's a good read." Granted, it is a good read. I enjoyed the book myself, but then I can laugh at the outrageous things Brown writes in the guise of fact. What is dangerous about the book is his FACT page.

*Fact:*

*All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents and secret rituals in this novel are accurate. P 15*

It is this claim that leads people to believe that all comments made out of the mouths of characters Langdon and Teabing are fact when they are far from the truth. When reviewers write such comments as – "Brown's extensive research ... adds intellectual depth" – (Bookreporter.com); "prepare to be educated." (Reviews of Books.com) it leads to a misapprehension that this book is based on accurate, bonafide research. That is not the case.

Oh yes the book is well researched but in all the wrong places. To rely on the support of suspect 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century Gnostic literature to discredit the New Testament is fringe, pseudo-scholarship at best. Many of the theories and suppositions in the book come from the band of neo-Gnostics writing today. Thierry, Baigent, Pagels et al.

I am well aware there are a myriad of responses to Brown's book out there on the Internet but I would like to focus on some different elements. These are only a handful of the elements one could address. It would be easy to take issue with almost everything Brown uses to "educate"; all comments put in the mouth of Langdon and Teabing, the most learned of Brown's troop. But to do that

would be to become pedantic and lose the reader. So here I take issue with those that cry out for comment.

## ◆ **Some outrageously false claims which are merely laughable if one can laugh at such nonsense**

### **Unbiased science could not possibly be performed by a man who possessed faith in God. (207)**

What a lot of codswallop. Many of the most brilliant and innovative scientists in history have been men and women of faith. Perhaps they get their innovation and their gems of discovery from the God who made it all.

### **History has never had a definitive version of the book. (313)**

Oh really, how is it that the 13,000 plus documents of the Greek New Testament, the 19,000 copies in other ancient languages and the 100,000 letters of the early church fathers all bear testimony to the same New Testament text? The one we recognise today as the Bible.

### **Constantine . . . held a famous ecumenical gathering known as the Council of Nicaea . . . many aspects of Christianity were debated and voted upon . . . and of course the divinity of Jesus. Jesus establishment as "the Son of God" was officially proposed and voted on by the Council of Nicaea. (315)**

It would be helpful to have the name correctly spelled but I assume Brown is referring the Council of Nicea, which was held in 325 AD. The heresies of Marcion (140 AD) and Montanism (190 AD) had been and gone by then. The major debates concerning the deity and humanity of Christ were a thing of past. The church had realised the need to address the issues these heresies raised with the passing of those who had been with Jesus and the need to make written records of events and acceptable doctrine.

**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 gospels were outlawed, gathered up, and burned. (317)**

Constantine in a letter to Eusebius ordered 50 copies of Scripture to be prepared. But there is no hint of a concerted effort to omit the gospels (Gnostic) in question. They were never considered part of Holy Scriptures by the church. Brown frequently confuses the *church* and the *Church*. The Roman Catholic Church is not in existence at this time.

The Muratorian Canon (190 AD), produced in refutation of the Montanist heresy, is the earliest definitive list of approved New Testament books. These are essentially the NT books we know today with two additional books which were later excluded by the whole church, east to west. This was not a decision made by Constantine or the *Church* (Catholic as Brown likes to infer).

The earliest copies we have of the four gospels predate Constantine's time and Council of Nicea. It is not a mute point up for debate. Brown is just plain wrong on his assertions related to manuscripts.

**. . . history is always written by the winners. When two cultures clash, the loser is obliterated, and the winner writes the history books. (343)**

Why then did Brown study history at all, or is this revelation the result of his study? Dan Brown appears to strip true history of its factuality and then refill it with his own imagination, all in the guise of fact. How does one counter such an approach when critiquing fiction? It is the danger of fiction disguised as fact, which makes Brown's book so insidious.

**Walt Disney made it his quiet life's work to pass on the Grail story to future generations. . . . Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty and Snow White – all of which dealt with the incarceration of the sacred feminine. . . . Snow White . . . was a clear allusion to the downfall**

**of Eve in the Garden of Eden. . . . Sleeping Beauty's Princess Aurora – code named Rose . . . was the Grail story for children. (349)**

Oh please! Is this another of those reinterpretations of another's artistic work? Like our modern approach to Noddy and Big Ears and the nuances some like to read into it.

**Unlike French, Spanish and Italian, which were rooted in Latin – the tongue of the Vatican – English was linguistically removed from Rome's propaganda machine, and therefore became a sacred, secret tongue for those brotherhoods educated enough to learn it. (403)**

So are we to conclude from this that English is not related to Latin? There would be no linguist in the world who would agree with Brown on this point.

**Early Jews believed that the Holy of Holies in Soloman's Temple housed not only God but also His powerful female equal, Shekinah. The Jewish tetragrammaton YHWH – the sacred name of God – in fact derived from Jehovah, an androgynous physical union between the masculine Jah and the pre-Hebraic name for Eve, Havah. (411)**

Now Brown makes up a false goddess from the Hebrew verb "to dwell" and plays with sound similarities across languages in the hope of duping people. No sorry, JHWH was not derived from Jehovah! Rather Jehovah is a misinterpretation of YHWH. The vowels of Adonai placed on the radicals of YHWH thereby yielding an unpronounceable name in Hebrew. And what is this nonsense of Havah being a Pre-Hebraic name for Eve when this is the Hebrew word used in Gen 3:20? Etymologically it has nothing to do with YHWH, just fanciful thinking on Brown's part.

## ◆ Some blatantly false claims to factuality

**Egyptian god named Amon . . . a guy with a rams head on the front and says he's the Egyptian god of fertility. The Egyptian goddess of fertility Isis . . . whose ancient pictogram was once called L'isa. Amon L'isa – Mona Lisa looks androgynous but her name is an anagram of the divine union of male and female. And that my friends is Da Vinci's little secret and the reason for Mona Lisa's knowing smile. (167-8)**

This is rubbish, no basis of truth whatsoever but with the statement – *whose ancient pictogram was once called L'isa. Amon L'isa* – Brown can make his claim. **Who** once called it so? One of Brown's sources? - which then allows Brown to make the claim "it was claimed", "it has been said". The sky is the limit to claim what you like. How appropriate in this day and age when truth is relative and my truth is good for me just as your truth is good for you. No, truth is Truth, Mr Brown.

**The Sangreal documents simply tell the other side of the Christ story. In the end, which side of the story you believe becomes a matter of faith and personal exploration. (343)**

Firstly there are no such documents as the Sangreal Documents. Dan Brown assembles a disparate series of documents (and some that don't exist) and concocts a plot that brings them all together in a collection. That was never the case. Now suddenly it is a matter of which body of material you believe. I prefer to believe that which is properly attested and factual. You believe the concocted series from Brown's imagination if you wish. In terms of personal exploration I would strongly suggest you research the background to the Biblical documents; don't just dismiss them without checking the facts. That is what

Brown has done in writing his book. All the documented history of Christian Scripture has been superseded by what Brown and his cronies have "deduced". Dangerous to stand before God claiming the reason you didn't accept Christ was because of Dan Brown's facts. Check the facts out for yourself.

**Also rumoured to be a part of the treasure is the legendary "Q" document – a manuscript that even the Vatican admit they believe exists. Allegedly it is a book of Jesus teachings, possibly written in His own hand." (343)**

The "Q" document is a theoretical document that supposedly precedes the Synoptic Gospels – Matthew, Mark and Luke. It is clear that these three gospels hang together in numbers of ways. Many portions are word for word the same in each writer's account. Thus "Q" (Quelle-meaning "source") has been posed as the forerunner to the Synoptic Gospels. Yet there is no **evidence** that "Q" ever existed. It is only a theory to explain the transmission of the NT text. I prefer to think of it in terms of the end result of the oral tradition which indisputably began the process. There is no need to concoct another theory and the oral tradition certainly accounts for all the facts. The ability of the ancient world to remember a body of text verbatim was astounding.

The claim that this theoretical "Q" is allegedly a book of Jesus's teachings written in His own hand is nonsense. Yes, some Vatican scholars do believe that "Q" existed, but they would never take the next step and agree with Brown's comment at face value. Dan Brown has cleverly taken a partial truth and moulded it into a bold lie, which he then claims "**the Vatican**" admits. Watch out for Brown's heresy. He frequently makes these leaps of logic or claims by association when there is no linkage. It's a dangerous assertion; it's the stuff on which cults and totalitarian regimes are built.

## ◆ Some insidious comments and suppositions posing as fact

**I thought the Templars were created to protect the Holy Land.**

**A common misconception. (218)**

Oh who says it is a misconception - Dan Brown or one of his favourite sources? Indeed the Knights Templar **were** established to protect the Holy land. Brown uses half truth, innuendo, partial quotes, allusions and just plain fiction to mask the truth in order to concoct his plot. Yet all in the name of "fact". Convenient really; when one writes fiction, there is no comeback.

**But with all these books written about it, why isn't this theory more widely known?' These books can't possibly compete with centuries of established history, especially when that history is endorsed by the ultimate bestseller of all time.**

**"Don't tell me *Harry Potter* is actually about the Holy Grail.'**

**"I was referring to the Bible." (225-6)**

Nice move Dan Brown, to assert the Bible is *supposedly* main stream, but allude to all these books that have been written about *the theory*. The books written about the supposed Magdalene bloodline are limited to Pagel and cohorts, coming up with wild 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century theories by misapplying the historical documents or by basing their claims on the deviant writings of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century. Stacked up against all the documentary evidence available for the New Testament text, those which Brown's alludes to as being another text strain are infinitesimally small and all considered a part of the false

writings (**see the comment on the note associated with Page 331**).

### **The vast majority of educated Christians know the history of their faith. (316)**

The sad fact is that the vast majority of Christians do not know the facts of their faith. And even the educated ones can be duped by Brown's claims.

### **almost everything our fathers taught us about the Christ is false. (318)**

What a sweeping, all-encompassing statement! Given the facts of the New Testament documents I would place far more in store by the New Testament Church Fathers, and our Christian heritage at this point in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century than I would be willing to depend on the facts according Dan Brown.

### **. . the marriage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene is part of the historical record. (330).**

The historical record that Brown so conveniently chooses. You can find the proof for any heresy at all if you chose to look in the wrong places. All these people who write these deviant books claiming them to be buried Christian truth, seek the proof from the collection of Gnostic Writings, the other apocryphal works and the books of the Pseudepigrapha from the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Century AD.

### **The earliest Christian records don't match up with the gospels of the Bible. (331)**

Mr Brown, on the contrary, the earliest Christian records match the Biblical account well. The books which don't match the biblical account are those listed in my point above. The Pseudepigrapha are literally "the false writings". Those books regarded by the early New Testament church (note the small 'c') as heretical; claiming authorship by a New Testament dignitary but rejected by those who could spot the fake.

The best way to get your wacky writing approved in the public eye was to write in the name of one who had contact with Jesus. Hence the name the Pseudepigrapha.

**. . . quote from The Gospel of Philip . . .**

**As any Aramaic scholar will tell you, the word companion, in those days, literally meant spouse. (331)**

Why are we appealing to Aramaic scholarship Mr Brown, when the Gospel in question was written in Greek? *Koinonos* is the term used and its primary meaning in NT times was a "partner of sharer". Luke uses the term in 5:10 when talking of the relationship between Peter and the brothers, James and John. Are you telling us they are married too Dan Brown? The term was to be equated with *business partner* in the commercial world.

**According to these unaltered gospels it was not Peter, to whom Christ gave directions with which to establish the Christian church. It was Mary Magdalene. (334)**

The unaltered gospels Brown refers to here are the discredited Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphal Writings. By inference he is saying if these writing be "unaltered", then those of the New Testament have been altered. A totally fraudulent claim!

**Mary Magdalene . . . was of the house of Benjamin. She was of royal descent." (335)**

**The Holy Grail is Mary Magdalene . . . the mother of the royal bloodline of Jesus Christ. (339)**

The source for such claims appear to be *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* - Michael Baigent, *The Gnostic Gospels* - Elaine Pagels and their followers and of course portions from the Gnostic writings and other false writings. When the New York Daily News bookreviewer called Brown's book "impeccably researched" I guess they were claiming that he wrote the quotes down accurately. *Impeccably researched* in my opinion means to survey the whole range of writing on a subject and present a well balanced account of the truth. In Brown's case it means to selectively choose the materials that present the weird and wacky and claim these represent Christian truth.

**Holy Blood, Holy Grail. . . the authors made some dubious leaps of faith in their analysis, but their fundamental premise is sound and to their credit they finally brought the idea of Christ's bloodline into the mainstream. (340)**

Their fundamental premise is actually shot full of holes by dubious leaps of faith. Yet in making this comment it lends credibility to a naïve reader. Oh yes it is true, Dan Brown is attempting to bring this junk into the main stream.

**The Church in order to defend itself against the Magdalene's power perpetuated her image as a whore and buried evidence of Christ's marriage to her. (340)**

The fact is that Pope Gregory the Great mistakenly identified Mary Magdalene as a prostitute in a sermon in 591 AD. There is no biblical evidence for such a reference. It seems Pope Gregory merely mixed up the Marys of Scripture. But Brown makes mileage out of the slip and attributes it to a Church-wide plot. Like Pope Gregory's claim, totally foundationless.

**The millennium has recently passed, and with it has ended the two-thousand-year-long astrological Age of Pisces- the fish, which is also the sign of Jesus. . .**

**We are entering the Age of Aquarius – the water bearer- whose ideals claim that man will learn the truth and be able to think for himself. The ideological shift is enormous and it is occurring right now. (357)**

The fact is that the sign of Jesus is not Pisces at all but rather Virgo and the associated decan, Coma – the Chosen Son. Pisces is the sign relating to the fish. Fish in Scripture and in Christendom are associated with the people of God – the believers. Note that there are two banded fish in the sign of Pisces – one heavenly oriented and one along the axis of the Zodiac; just as there are two sorts of people, those following Christ and those claiming to follow.

In fact there is ample evidence to show the Signs of the Zodiac in fact tell the Gospel story from start to finish. Reference: e.g. E W Bullinger – Witness of the Stars. Or attend a full God’s Awesome Book seminar presented by Wycliffe Bible Translators (NZ).

**There is an enormous difference between hypothetically discussing an alternative history of Christ and . . . presenting to the world thousands of ancient documents as scientific evidence that the New Testament is false testimony.**

**But you told me the New Testament is based on fabrications.**

**Langdon smiled. Sophie, every faith in the world is based on fabrication. That is the definition of faith – acceptance of that which we imagine to be true, that which we cannot prove. (451)**

Yes Dan Brown there is an enormous difference between discussing the alternative history and presenting ancient documents (I won’t say there are thousands - you claim that. But in reality you don’t claim it, you wrote that in your fictional book which masquerades as fact. There is a difference!) With this comment do I detect a retraction or confession? A disclaimer maybe?

Every faith is based on fabrication? Come on now Dan Brown. Faith is not only found underlying religious thought; faith is found to be the basis of relationships, family, trust and much more. Is it all fabricated Mr Brown? Besides I wouldn’t imagine the followers of Jesus in New Testament times would have given their lives willingly for a fabrication.

## ◆ Concluding Challenge

There are two reasons I am bothering to write this critique.

Firstly I was asked to give my response as the one who created the Wycliffe seminar, God's Awesome Book. Go to the seminar to find more support to counter the claims of Brown. Not that I created it for that reason. I created it because someone or some organisation needed to challenge the arguments of modern critics on the basis of whether the Bible is indeed the Word of God or not.

The second reason, and I confess one that concerns me greatly, relates to Brown's claim on page 361 that "The vast majority of educated Christians know the history of their faith." It is my experience around the world that the majority of Christians do not know the facts of their fact. They have never bothered to find out. They rely on hearsay and snippets caught not taught.

My challenge is this: Brown's book 'The Da Vinci Code' is to be made into a movie by Ron Howard. It is due for release late 2005 or early 2006. Why don't we in the body of Christ get proactive and prepare our churches and our people to answer the claims of Brown's book at the time of the release of the movie. I have heard anecdotal stories of the success pastors have had in holding question and answer evenings on "The Da Vinci Code" with great results.

Get ready and prepare, you have another opportunity when the movie is released.

[Or call Wycliffe and ask for a full God's Awesome Book seminar in your area. [www.wycliffe.org.nz](http://www.wycliffe.org.nz)]