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Rethinking the
Da Vinci Code

**Examining the evidence for the theories
presented in *The Da Vinci Code***

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INTRODUCTION

Three years on and the madness surrounding Dan Brown's mega blockbuster shows no sign of abating. Published in 2003, it hit the *New York Times* Bestsellers list at #1 and by the end of 2004 had sold 12 million copies.¹ As of March 2006, it had sold over 40 million copies and been translated into 44 languages. With the release of the film in May 2006, bookshops were inundated with mass marketing editions retailing at only \$14.95, ready for a new wave of interest. Brown's thesis is set to receive a new boost of exposure and credibility, with reputable actors such as Tom Hanks, Ian McKellan and Paul Bettany onboard, and oscar winning director Ron Howard at the helm. Throw in a high profile plagiarism case (of which Brown was cleared), an ABC special, and dozens and dozens of books both supporting its claims and debunking it as a fraud (A search of "Da Vinci Code" on Fishpond.com returns 123 items), and the new wave of literary suspense thriller seeking to ride Brown's coattails², and the influence and impact of *The Da Vinci Code* on modern culture is huge.

Now, just because I teach theology and biblical studies doesn't mean I don't enjoy picking up an action/adventure or thriller novel and losing myself for a couple of hours. The Dirk Pitt novels of Clive Cussler, the classic adventure of Alistair Maclean, the bestsellers of Nelson DeMille, the

¹ Helen Tunnah, "NZ author suing over Da Vinci bestseller" *NZ Herald*, 18 Dec 2004.

² Brown's novel has also spawned a new wave of literary suspense thrillers, some good, most woeful: Steve Berry's *The Third Secret* (2005) & *The Templar Legacy* (2006), Raymond Khoury's *The Last Templar* (2006) – to name a few. In 2006, Javier Sierra's novel *The Secret Supper* - a monumental bestseller in the Spanish speaking world – was published in English, chronicling a Dominican Inquisitor's investigation into rumour that Da Vinci was a Cathar heretic who 'coded' (get it—Da Vinci? Code?) his heretical gospel into *the Cenacolo*, or *The Last Supper*, in the refectory of Santa Maria delle Grazie. A veritable deluge of wannabes seeking to cash in on the success of their more prestigious predecessor.

techno-thrillers of Michael Crichton, the legal wranglings of John Grisham – I love them all. I've also read all four of Dan Brown's novels – *Deception Point*, *Digital Fortress*, *Angels and Demons* and the blockbuster *The Da Vinci Code* (I actually preferred the first Robert Langdon novel).

Brown has really tapped into something of the modern psyche with this novel. " We all love a conspiracy, and the astonishing international success of Dan Brown's novel *The Da Vinci Code* proves it," says Peter Conrad.³ Brown has also struck a chord with the disillusionment felt by many towards the Roman Catholic Church in the wake of so many sex scandals, the Church's unwillingness to take action against abusive clergy and the disregard shown for victims.⁴ Throw in the general post-modern traits of society such as distrust of anything institutional (which has led many to reject organised religion in the form of the church), love of mystery and hunger for genuine spirituality, and it's easy to see why the Gnostic flavour of Dan Brown's novel has struck a chord with so many.

I enjoyed *The Da Vinci Code* as fiction, a roller-coaster mystery with the standard guy-girl protagonists being pursued by paper-thin bad guys as they seek to unravel a riddle wrapped in mystery inside an enigma. It's a detective/mystery novel, set in the classy world of high art and the corridors of religious power, taking us to exotic locales.

Now, if Brown had left it that – "Hey, it's a novel, a work of fiction; that's it" – then OK; but he doesn't stop there. When Brown was asked in an NBC interview how much of *Da Vinci*

³ Peter Conrad, "Why the world is chasing its Grail" *The Observer*, Sunday May 7, 2006; Internet; accessed May 12 2006; <http://books.guardian.co.uk/danbrown/story/0,,1769216.00.html?gusrc=rss>

⁴ or example, in July 2003, the attorney general in Massachusetts released a 76 page document based on church records that unveiled the number of sexual abuse victims in the Boston archdiocese over the past sixty years as likely to exceed 1000, and involved more than 250 clergy and other church workers. "Boston Atty General Report Reveals "Massive, inexcusable failure of leadership in the Archdiocese of Boston"" by Elizabeth Mehren - www.chicagotribune.com; cited in <http://www.catholiccitizens.org/platform/platformview.asp?c=7231>

Code is based on fact, he answered, “Absolutely all of it.”⁵ In the course of his research, he declares that he “became a believer” in the theories he presents. The book opens with the claim by Dan Brown that “all descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents [...] and secret rituals in this novel are accurate”...

Oh - my - goodness... Is he for real? When I heard of critics heralding this work as “impeccably researched” and clearly based on truth, I just couldn’t believe it. I’ve even heard people in Whitcoulls speaking of the supposed “truth” of Brown’s novel, and how it’s all “based on fact.” I stood there in the middle of the shop like a stunned mullet.

The Da Vinci Code is *still* causing a huge stir. Conversations around the water cooler say that the whole of Christianity is a fraud; discussion in the coffee room says Jesus was just a guy, and the church is guilty of creating a cover up to protect its own power base.

Now granted, the church through the ages has often acted in a less than Christ like manner – anyone who disagrees remember the crusades, or the inquisitions, etc). However, there’s also a lot of good about the church, and a whole lot more good about Jesus. When something’s wrong, it’s just plain wrong. And such talk about Jesus is just plain wrong; the ramifications are huge on our thinking on who Jesus is.

“My hope for *The Da Vinci Code*,” writes Brown on his website, “was that in addition to entertaining people that [sic] it might serve as an open door for readers to begin their own explorations and rekindle their interests in topics of faith.” Well, Brown has certainly done that on a grand scale: only, the faith to which he calls people is, as Michael Green observes,

⁵ Interview with Matt Lauer, June 9, 2003 Monday. NBC News Transcripts; <http://www.danbrown.com/media/todayshow.htm>

“a pick’n’mix of mysticism, with no transcendent deity, but with ancient goddess worship, gnosticism and sexual permissiveness.”⁶

I’m no art expert or historian, but there are a few issues raised with regards to theology and Christian belief that I reckon are worth having a chat about...

⁶ Dr Michael Green, *The Books the Church Suppressed: Fiction and Truth in the Da Vinci Code* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2005), p. 181.

1 What about the Bible?

". . . everything you need to know about the Bible can be summed up by the great canon doctor Martyn Percy."

Teabing cleared his throat and declared, "The Bible did not arrive by fax from heaven."

"I beg your pardon?"

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

"Okay."

"Jesus Christ was a historical figure of staggering influence, perhaps the most enigmatic and inspirational leader the world has ever seen. As the prophesied Messiah, Jesus toppled kings, inspired millions, and founded new philosophies. As a descendant of the lines of King Solomon and King David, Jesus possessed a rightful claim to the throne of the King of the Jews. Understandably, His life was recorded by thousands of followers across the land." Teabing paused to sip his tea and then placed the cup back on the mantel. "More than eighty gospels were considered for the New Testament, and yet only a relative few were chosen for inclusion - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John among them."

"Who chose which gospels to include?" Sophie asked.

"Aha!" Teabing burst in with enthusiasm. "The fundamental irony of Christianity! The Bible, as we know it today, was collated by the pagan Roman emperor Constantine the Great."⁷

Teabing later adds,

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... 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.⁸

So, in a nutshell – Christianity as we know it was created in the fourth century, not the first; and the Bible we have today was contrived by Constantine in order to support his scheme of deifying Jesus, which required him to destroy the “true” gospels that spoke of his actual human nature...

Again, there's so much that's just outright wrong here... for instance, Christians don't believe that the Bible arrived as a completed work on the clouds accompanied by angels, as “a fax from heaven.” On the contrary, Christians believe the Bible to be inspired by God. Erickson explains inspiration in the following way:

By inspiration we mean that supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit upon the Scripture writers which rendered their writings an accurate record of the revelation or which resulted in what they wrote actually being the Word of God.⁹

⁷ Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (London: Corgi, 2004), pp. 312-313.

⁸ Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (London: Corgi, 2004), pp. 316-317.

⁹ Millard J. Erickson *Christian Theology* (Baker: 1984), p.199.

The human writers weren't merely stenographers typing out what the boss said; their full personalities entered into their writing. This is why individual writing styles are so evident. However, although their full human abilities were utilised, God oversaw and guided the work so that the final product was what He wanted.

Regarding the claim that “more than eighty gospels were considered,” that's a bit over the top [Kiwi understatement]. Blomberg notes, “Add up everything that was ever called a gospel in the first half-millennium of Christianity (most of which are small compilations of esoteric sayings ascribed to Jesus and not narratives of any portion of his life) and you come up with about two dozen documents.”

Constantine didn't compose the Bible either. Constantine died A.D. 337; the first complete list of New Testament books – Matthew through Revelation - is found in Athanasius' Easter letter from A.D. 367. This list was affirmed as final and authoritative by two councils – Hippo in A.D. 393 and Carthage in A.D. 397 – Constantine had no control over that.

Also, as Ian Vail points out in his article, the Muratorian Canon is the earliest definitive list of approved New Testament books, and that dates to AD 190 – a long time before Constantine! The Muratorian Canon included two other books – the Revelation of Peter and Wisdom of Solomon - that were subsequently rejected by the whole church, east and west.

No – the documents of the New Testament all date to the first century. There were, however, other reasons that drove Christians to identify the central books of their faith.

There were other reasons that drove Christians to identify the central books of their faith. The apostles were dying – how could their witness and teaching be maintained? The desire for writings by recognised apostles, or by those associated with such people, was great.

Also, strange teachings started to arise. In the middle of the second century, a man called Marcion put forward his own version of the Bible. He wanted to strip away all vestiges of Judaism, including the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament) and its God, Yahweh whom Marcion saw as a tribal and bloodthirsty demigod, unworthy of Christian worship. His “Revised” Bible included an edited version of Luke’s gospel and ten of Paul’s letters – edited of Jewish elements, of course. The church disagreed and responded to this challenge: what books do we see as authoritative and from God?

Another reason was persecution. Emperor Diocletian decreed that the sacred books of the Christians should be destroyed. Christian authorities were questioned and had to be able to name them – those who defied such orders had to know which books were worth dying for.

All of these reasons for identifying the central books to the Christian faith pre-date Constantine, in many cases by centuries; the four gospels were ancient documents by his time.

And as to omitting Christ’s human traits... the Bible tells us Jesus was hungry (Matt 4:2; 21:18), that he got tired (Jn 4:6), so tired that he slept through a storm (Matt 8:24), that he was thirsty (Jn 19:28) and that he suffered and was tempted (Heb 2:18; 4:15). He also exhibited normal human emotions – he wept (Jn 11:35) got angry (Mk 3:5) experienced joy (Jn 15:11), showed compassion (Matt 9:36), suffered in anguish (Luk 22:44) and could be surprised (Mk 6:6). The Jesus presented

in Scripture is no holy figure removed from the pain and suffering of the world, hovering six inches above the ground, halo shining; the Bible presents Christ's humanity in startling terms.

So, in the end, the claim that Constantine was responsible for the canon is a ridiculous distortion of history.

But what of this idea that followers of Jesus before Nicea saw him as only a man?

2 Jesus: the God-man

The historian Teabing continues to enlighten the woefully ignorant Sophie on the true nature of Jesus Christ, explaining that in A.D. 325, the Emperor Constantine called the Ecumenical Council of Nicea in order to discuss his divinity:

[Sophie said] “I don't follow. His divinity?”

“My dear,” Teabing declared, “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.”

“Not the Son of God?”

“Right,” Teabing said. “Jesus' establishment as 'the Son of God' was officially proposed and voted on by the Council of Nicea.”

“Hold on. You're saying Jesus' divinity was the result of a vote?”

“A relatively close vote at that,” Teabing added.¹⁰

Again, Jesus' followers saw him as merely a man until Nicea? Pu-leeese...

New Testament scholar Craig Blomberg describes such a claim as “patently false—the claims emerge already in the first-century canonical gospels, as again every biblical scholar of every stripe recognizes.”¹¹ The New Testament documents — all of which date back to the first century — affirm the lordship of Christ.

¹⁰ Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (London: Corgi, 2004), p. 315.

¹¹ Craig Blomberg, “Denver Journal: An Online Review of Current Biblical and Theological Studies”. Available at: <http://www.denverseminary.edu/dj/articles2004/0200/0202.php>

In truth, early Christians worshiped Jesus (that’s right – long before Constantine’s time). The early disciples had no doubt as to the humanity of Jesus. As one author informs us, they had eaten and joked with him, smelled his sweat and seen his blood, felt the warmth of his embrace and the lash of his tongue. However, it took some time to come to grips with the fact of Jesus’ deity – that is, that somehow this carpenter’s son was also God. Millard Erickson writes, “One of the most controversial and yet crucial topics of Christian theology is the deity of Christ. It lies at the heart of our faith. For our faith rests on Jesus’ actually being God in human flesh, and not simply an extraordinary human, even the most unusual person who ever lived.”¹²

“Jesus is Lord” (Rom 10:9) is perhaps the earliest Christian confession. The Greek word for ‘lord’ is *kyrios*. While it could be used as a polite form of address similar to ‘sir’¹³, in the overwhelming majority of examples in the Septuagint¹⁴ *kyrios* replaces the Hebrew proper name for God¹⁵ - on some 5000 occasions. The Jewish historian Josephus – a contemporary of Jesus’ - tells us that the Jews refused to use the title of the Roman Emperor (an allusion to his divinity) for one simple reason: only God himself was *kyrios*.

In the New Testament, Christ as exalted *kyrios* rules over mankind (Rom 14:9). Christ is referred to as Lord of lords and King of kings (Rev 1:5; 17:14; 19:15f.). “In this way,” writes Bietenhard, “Jesus Christ receives the same titles of honor as God himself.”¹⁶

¹² Millard J. Erickson *Christian Theology* 2nd ed. (Baker, 1998) p. 700.

¹³ e.g. Matt 21:30

¹⁴ The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Old Testament that was used by early Christians. Most scholars believe it was completed in the 2nd century B.C., although some argue for a later date.

¹⁵ the Tetragrammaton YHWH

¹⁶ cf. 1 Tim 6:15. H. Bietenhard, “Lord”, in Colin Brown (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol 2 [English language edition], Exeter, U.K.: The Paternoster Press, 1976, p. 514.

The apostle Paul's writings date from A.D. 50-68 – around 250-300 years before Nicea. He speaks of Jesus as “Lord” (Rom 10:9), as “being in very nature God” (Php 2:6) and as the image of the invisible God, by whom all things were created and in whom God's fullness dwells (Col 1:15-20, 2:9).

From the time of the Resurrection, Christians have worshiped Jesus. Thomas fell at his feet and said to him, “My Lord and my God!” (Jn 20:28); Jesus did not correct him. When Jesus revealed himself to the man born blind, the healed man said, “Lord, I believe,” and worshiped him (9:38). God calls for all of the angels to worship Christ and says of the Son,

*“Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever,
and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom.”*
(Heb 1:6, 8)

Paul frequently makes reference to Christ's deity. In Romans 9:5 he writes about Christ “who is God over all, forever praised”. He encourages Titus to live a life of godliness and waiting for “the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (Tit 2:13). In Php 2:5-11 we read of Jesus, “who, being in very nature God...”

Also, Christians after Bible times but before Nicea acknowledged Christ's deity. For example, *the Didache* (or “The teachings of the Lord to the Gentiles through the Twelve Apostles”), a second century Christian document, shows us that the earliest Aramaic-speaking Christians refer to Jesus as ‘Lord’. Justin Martyr baptised in the name of the triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – acknowledging the equality of the One God's three distinct persons.

“Those who have seen me have seen the Father,” said Jesus (Jn 14:9). Jesus was human, but no mere man. Christians pray to Jesus and worship him – the second Person of the Trinity

who took to himself a human nature and humbled himself to born at Bethlehem, and then to die upon a cross, in order to redeem a people lost in sin.

3 Mary Magdalene, Goddess Worship & the Sacred Feminine

In Brown's understanding, Mary was Christ's royal spouse and the intended head of the Church, but she was usurped by Peter and slandered by church leaders.¹⁷ She fled to Provence with her children where medieval Cathars¹⁸ kept Jesus' original teachings safe.

The Church is also viewed as a woman-hating institution that suppressed the goddess worship and eradicated the divine feminine. Goddess worship universally dominated pre-Christian religion, with the *hieros gamos* – a spiritual act of sexual union - as its principal rite.

Brown puts forward Mary Magdalene as the Holy Grail – the female womb that carried Jesus' royal bloodline. Teabing declares,

The quest for the Holy Grail is literally the quest to kneel before the bones of Mary Magdalene. A journey to pray at the feet of the outcast one, the lost sacred feminine.¹⁹

This certainly would have come as news to Galahad and the other Grail knights, who thought they were looking for the cup that Jesus drank from at the Last Supper. Anyway... Brown puts forward the idea that the figure to Jesus's right in Da Vinci's 'The Last Supper' isn't John, but Mary Magdalene;

¹⁷ The theory goes that they spread rumours of her being a prostitute, [a mistaken assuming that the "Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out" of Luk 8:2 is the sinful woman who anointed Jesus' feet in Luk 7].

¹⁸ The Cathari ("pure ones") rejected basic Christianity in the early Middle Ages. They believed that Spirit was pure and matter (therefore, the body) was evil – to escape this evil of the 'flesh' the Cathari avoided marriage, sex, eating meat and material possessions. This was not based on Jesus' example, but on their Gnostic beliefs.

¹⁹ Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (London: Corgi, 2004), p. 344.

Brown points out the effeminate nature of this figure as proof. The two figures of Christ and Mary form an ‘M’; as there is no cup/chalice/grail in the picture, the actual holy grail is the sacred feminine of Mary, who bears the holy blood and seed of Christ within her.

However, this ‘feminizing’ of John was common in European art.²⁰ After 1300, John was understood as Christ’s “mystical spouse”, resting against the Lord’s heart in a “mystical marriage” (Jn 13:23). The interest in feminized ideals of masculine beauty can be seen in the work of a wide range of Italian Renaissance artists at the time: Perugino, Verrochio, Giambologna, Michelangelo, Bronzino. Others – such as Tintoretto, Titian, Botticelli, Corregio and Veronese – were exploring the same theme for Vatican patrons. Robert Baddwin, Associate Professor of Art History at Connecticut College, points out that although such thinking was rooted in Renaissance humanism and the revival of ancient pagan ideals, these cultural changes “were part of a larger feminization of Christianity (and secular culture) between 1150 and 1700 seen most notably in the rise of the cult of the Virgin, the new stress on religious emotion, and the rise of nuptial piety making Christ the bridegroom of the loving, bridal soul.”²¹ Another point is that the work is drawn from John’s Gospel, which does not discuss the institution of the Lord’s Supper. Rather, Da Vinci’s emphasis is on betrayal.

Anyway... about this “Jesus married Mary” thing. In the novel, Leigh Teabing selects a book for Sophie to lay the foundation for this royal matrimony:

Flipping to the middle of the book, Teabing pointed to a passage. “The Gospel of Philip is always a good place to start.”

²⁰ For example, see Pietro Vanucci’s “St John the Evangelist & St Augustine” [1500-25]; Leuven Sint-Pieterskerk’s “The Last Supper” [1464-67]; Jan van Eyck’s “The Ghent Altarpiece: St John the Evangelist” [1432].

²¹ Robert Baldwin, “Debunking The Da Vinci Code” (revised January 2005); Internet; <http://oak.conncoll.edu/rwbal/UnpublishedTalks/DaVinciCodeCritiqued13Page.doc> ; [accessed 13 May 2006].

Sophie read the passage:

And the companion of the Saviour 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.”

The words surprised Sophie, and yet they hardly seemed conclusive. “It says nothing of marriage.”

“Au contraire.” Teabing smiled, pointing to the first line. “As any Aramaic scholar will tell you, the word companion, in those days, literally meant spouse.” Landon concurred with a nod.

So – the intimacy of husband and wife has been hidden in some Gnostic gospels, away from the prying and puritanical eyes of church authorities? Hmmmm...

Firstly, it's strange that Brown goes to the Gnostic gospels to support his view here- he doesn't seem to realise that the Gnostics weren't actually that keen on the feminine. Gnostic belief was even opposed to childbirth, because that meant yet another divine spark trapped within a hopelessly corrupt human body. The ideal in Gnosticism was either a male or an androgynous figure; women never had leadership roles in Gnostic circles.²² Note the words of dedicated feminist Karen King:

It seems to me that even when the feminine is highly valued, it is often done so at the expense of real sexuality. It also seems as

²² Dr Michael Green, *The Books the Church Suppressed: Fiction and Truth in the Da Vinci Code* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2005), p. 166.

though gnostic mythology and gender imagery often affirm patriarchy and patriarchal social gender roles.²³

Okay – so the Gnostics weren't that flesh on anything feminine... Now, let's take a closer look at the passage quoted by Teabing from the Gnostic *Gospel of Philip*. Interestingly, the key part of the text from the Gospel of Philip is broken; the following brackets indicate portions where the manuscript cannot be read because it was damaged: “And the companion of the [...] Mary Magdalene. [...] loved] her more than [all] the disciples [and used to] kiss her [often] on her [...].”

As you may have noticed, just *where* Mary was kissed isn't mentioned! In her work *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala*, Harvard Professor Karen King prefers the choice of a kiss on the mouth because of a parallel reading from early in the apocryphal Gospel of Philip.²⁴ King maintains that the earlier passage refers to the kiss of fellowship between believers – nothing sexual at all. Gnostic writings are heavily symbolic, and usually a spiritual interpretation is intended over a literal one. In this case, the passage probably refers to a spiritual relationship, and the intimate reception of a spiritual teaching and wisdom.

Strange also that Brown makes no reference to the infamous final verse of *the Gospel of Thomas*:

[Peter said] "Make Mary leave us, for females don't deserve life."

Jesus said, "Look, I will guide her to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every

²³ Karen King (ed) *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*; cited in “Troubling the Church: Gnosticism - Ancient and New” by Viola Larson; Internet;

<http://listserv.episcopal.org/scripts/wa.exe?A2=ind0205c&L=virtuosity&H=1&P=3569>

²⁴ “For it is by a kiss that the perfect conceive and give birth. For this reason we all kiss one another. We receive conception from the grace which is in one another.” Philip 58:34-59:4.

female who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of Heaven."²⁵

As Miesel notes, this is a strange way to honour one's spouse or exalt the status of women.²⁶ Also, goddesses did not dominate the pre-Christian world – not in the religions of Rome, or Greece, or Egypt.

Barbara Thiering also hit the news when she theorised that Jesus had children by Mary Magdalene (through deciphering the code in which the Gospels were written) in her “controversial bestseller” *Jesus the Man*. Her evidence that Jesus had two sons? The phrase “the word of God increased” appears twice in the book of Acts (6:7; 12:24). Jesus is the Word of God (Jn 1:1-14) and so the phrase means that Jesus’ family grew larger.

Are you convinced? No... oh well... N.T. Wright rightly describes such interpretation as “an exegetical circus stunt.”²⁷

So, what about Teabing’s proposal that “any Aramaic scholar” could tell us that, “the word companion, in those days, literally meant spouse”?

First, I don’t know what Aramaic has to do with it, because the original work would have been written in Greek. Second, the only surviving copy is Coptic – although the word in question is a loan word from Greek. The word is *koinonos* – it can mean “wife” or basically “sister” in a spiritual sense. However, this is not the typical term for wife, which in Greek

²⁵ Scholars Version translation of the Gospel of Thomas taken from *The Complete Gospels: Annotated Scholars Version*. Copyright 1992, 1994 by Polebridge Press. Available at <http://www.misericordia.edu/users/davies/thomas/Trans.htm>

²⁶ Sandra Miesel “Dismantling The Da Vinci Code”, *Crisis Magazine: Politics, Culture and the Church*; <http://www.crisismagazine.com/september2003/feature1.htm>

²⁷ N.T. Wright, *Who Was Jesus?* (London: SPCK, 1992), p. 31.

would tend to be some form of *gyne*.²⁸ So I'm not really sure why Teabing is so pleased with himself.

NT scholar Craig Blomberg also raises a good point concerning the theory of a marriage between Jesus and Mary:

I would add also that with the very early veneration of Mary, the mother of Jesus, in Roman Catholicism, largely out of a desire to have a quasi-divine female figure along with God the Father, had Jesus ever been married, such a woman could scarcely have disappeared without a historical trace. She would have been celebrated and venerated instead, especially in the very strands of Catholicism that *The Da Vinci Code* pit against the revelation of "the truth" of Jesus' marriage.²⁹

Surely if Jesus had been married, many early Christians would not have seen the need to venerate his mother?³⁰

Another remarkable claim Brown makes is that Jews worshiped God (Yahweh) and his feminist counterpart the Shekinah through the use of sacred prostitutes. Robert Langdon explains to Sophie,

The Jewish Tetragrammaton YHWH – the sacred name of God – in fact derived from Jehovah, an androgynous physical union between the masculine *Jab* and the pre-Hebraic name for Eve, *Havah*.³¹

Really? In actual fact, the name *Jehovah* was a medieval invention that came about from inserting the vowels of *adonai*³² into the consonants YHWH³³ (Germans would read

²⁸ Darrell L. Bock, *Breaking the Da Vinci Code* (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2004), p. 23.

²⁹ Craig Blomberg, "Denver Journal: An Online Review of Current Biblical and Theological Studies". Available at: <http://www.denverseminary.edu/dj/articles2004/0200/0202.php>

³⁰ Which actually raises the point: if the Roman Catholic Church suppressed the Sacred Feminine, why is there such a great veneration of Mary as *Theotokos*, or 'Mother of God'? However, it must be granted that women do not receive much of a voice in the Catholic Church.

³¹ Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (London: Corgi, 2004), p. 411.

³² 'Adonai' means 'lord', and was read instead of the tetragrammaton because of the Jewish respect for the divine name.

³³ The Tetragrammaton YHWH is the divine name of God and comprises four Hebrew consonants. The Old Testament Scriptures were written in Hebrew, which used no vowels, so the pronunciation of the name is not certain.

them as JHVH), therefore producing a new and never before seen name! Again, Brown forces an interpretation when a simpler one suffices.

Then there's the "revelation" of a book that first appeared in the early eighties – *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*:

"Here is perhaps the best-known tome," Teabing said, pulling a tattered hardcover from the stack and handing it to her. The cover read:

HOLY BLOOD, HOLY GRAIL
The Acclaimed International Bestseller

Sophie glanced up. "An international bestseller? I've never heard of it."

... The threat Mary Magdalene posed to the men of the early Church was potentially ruinous. Not only was she the woman to whom Jesus had assigned the task of founding the Church, but she also had physical proof that the Church's newly proclaimed deity had spawned a mortal bloodline. 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, thereby defusing any potential claims that Christ had a surviving bloodline and was a mortal prophet

Sophie glanced at Langdon, who nodded. "Sophie, the historical evidence supporting this is substantial."³⁴

The authors of *Holy Blood* allege that Jesus was a well-to-do Jewish opportunist who had a legitimate claim to the Jewish throne. Supposedly arranging His life to correspond to Old Testament messianic prophecies [faking them], He married Mary Magdalene, had a child (or children) by her, and staged his own crucifixion. They go on to insist that after an uproar

The name was considered so sacred that when Jews read the Scriptures, they substituted the noun *adonai*, meaning 'lord.'

³⁴ Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (London: Corgi, 2004), pp. 339-340.

in Israel, Mary, with Jesus' offspring, escaped to the south of France where their descendants became the early French kings, the Merovingians, who ruled from 500 until 750 A.D. Although the Merovingians were finally deposed, their various royal claims (to the French and other European thrones) have been kept alive by a secret society that has preserved the "true" history of Jesus. However, after all of this groundbreaking revelation, the writers have this to say:

We could not – and still cannot – prove the accuracy of our conclusion. It remains, to some extent at least, an hypothesis.³⁵

Now come on... you want to point out a cover up, but have absolutely no evidence on which to base it?

When the liberal Jesus scholar John Dominic Crossan was asked on Beliefnet.com whether Jesus was married or not, his reply (dripping with sarcasm) began:

There is an ancient and venerable principle of biblical exegesis which states that if it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, it must be a camel in disguise. So let's apply that to whether or not Jesus was married. There is no evidence that Jesus was married (looks like a duck), multiple indications that he was not (walks like a duck), and no early texts suggesting wife or children (quacks like a duck)...so he must be an incognito bridegroom (camel in disguise).³⁶

It looks like Jesus wasn't married; there's no evidence to say he was – no evidence for children, so... if it looks like a duck...

³⁵ Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln, *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* (New York: Dell Publishing Co. 1983), p. 422.

³⁶ "John Dominic Crossan, "Why Jesus didn't Marry" Beliefnet.com; http://www.beliefnet.com/story/135/story_13529_1.html

Well – we’ve seen that the support for marriage is thin and the proof for the existence of children is weak, and now “the best-known tome” is cited, even though it was savaged by critics and admits the tenuous nature of its own assertions - Hmmm... that historical evidence ain’t looking so substantial now, Sophie...

Brown desires a return to a pre-Christian form of paganism. In a talk show on ABC 20/20, Brown stated that the church had “demonised the sacred feminine, obliterating the goddess from modern religion forever.” The Goddess is representative of the age old worship of “Mother” Nature – Ishtar of the Babylonians, Asherah of the Canaanites, Aphrodite of the Greeks, Isis of the Egyptians, Cybele of the Anatolians and Phrygians – all different names in different cultures in different times for worship of the sacred feminine principle which offered life to all.³⁷ While right at home amidst the spiritual pot-pourri of the New Age, this is not in keeping with the Christian worldview; while Brown & the New Age would advocate the inherent divinity of nature and a seeking for the divine within (e.g. in the sex act), Christianity teaches us to seek the Creator of creation and to worship Him.

Sadly, the church has been guilty of misogyny throughout its long history; however, this has not stopped a large number of women from impacting the world mightily for the Kingdom of God. Pepretua, Hildegarde of Bingen, Catherine of Siena, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Elizabeth Fry, Catherine Booth, Dorothy Sayers, Aimee Semple McPherson, Phoebe Palmer, Joyce Meyers – authors and activists, abolitionists and apologists, hymn writers and martyrs, movers and shakers all.

³⁷ An interesting note: male devotees were often required to show their devotion by castration. The initiation rites for Cybele’s priests required them to castrate themselves. Self emasculated priests also served the Indian goddess under her name of Hudigamma, dressing in feminine attire. Eunuch priests tended Middle-Eastern temples e.g. Dea Syria at Hierapolis, Artemis-Diana in Anatolia, and the Magna Mater in Phrygia and Rome...but I don’t think Brown would have us go *that* far...

It is also true to note the church has not always reflected the heart of God in its view of women. Graham Johnstone tells of how he was preaching one Mother's day on Proverbs 31 – the wife of Noble Character – and a young woman majoring in women's studies asked him to pray for her. She felt compelled to trust in Jesus. The message hadn't been particularly evangelical, so Johnstone asked her, "What made the difference today?" She looked up and said, "I realized today that God values women in a far greater way than our society ever will."³⁸

God values women; society often hasn't. A close reading of Scripture is revealing. Miriam is said to have lead Israel with her brothers Aaron and Moses; Huldah spoke the word of God to King Josiah when he found the Book of the Law; Esther's courage saved her people from destruction; the sinful Samaritan woman shared the gospel with her village, and they came to believe in Jesus (evangelism); Priscilla, with her husband Aquila, corrected the wonky doctrine of the learned Apollos (teaching); Luke tells us that Philip had seven daughters who were prophetesses (speaking god's word for the present to the community of faith); Phoebe was a 'deaconess' charged with bringing Paul's letter to the church in Rome (some form of leadership); of the twenty-some names in Romans 16, fully one third of them are women , honoured for their role in the work of the gospel.

The blessings of the new covenant age are for men and women of faith. In Acts 2:17-18, Peter recalls God's word through the prophet Joel:

I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy...

³⁸ Graham Johnstone, *Preaching to a Postmodern World: A Guide to Reaching Twenty-First Century Listeners* (Baker: 2001), p. 144.

Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.

Paul's beautiful statement of equality in liberty in Gal 3:28 sums it up well: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Verse 29 continues, "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" – be you male or female. Correctly realised, the gospel is a message of liberation and fullness for both the masculine and feminine in humanity.

4 Then there's the little matter of why we meet on Sundays...

Our professorial, tweed-wearing hero Robert Langdon explains the obvious falsity of the Christian faith, on this particular occasion attacking Christ's deity and Christian practice:

'Originally,' Langdon said, 'Christianity honoured the Jewish Sabbath of Saturday, but Constantine shifted it to coincide with the pagan's veneration day of the sun.' He paused, grinning. 'To this day, most churchgoers attend services on Sunday morning with no idea that they are there on account of the pagan sun god's weekly tribute – *Sunday*.'³⁹

OK... true, the early Christians did worship on the Jewish Sabbath, the Saturday; after all, they were Jews. However, loooooong before Constantine's time in the fourth century, the Bible records Christians worshiping on the first day of the week, the day after the Sabbath – the Sunday. Acts 20:7 tells us that, "on the first day of the week" Paul and the believers at Troas "came together to break bread" (Acts 20:7). Paul encouraged the Corinthians to put aside some money "on the first day of every week" (1 Cor 16:2). Nowhere does Paul mention the seventh day as a day of worship, evidence that it had been supplanted by the Christian Sabbath – the Lord's Day.

John was in the Spirit "on the Lord's Day" (Rev 1:10). The Christian apologist Justin Martyr wrote of the Lord's Day services in the second century. *The Didache* instructs believers to come together on the Lord's day. By A.D. 150 the

³⁹ Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (London: Corgi, 2004), pp. 314-315.

designation “the Lord’s Day” had been accepted throughout the Christian world. As the influence of the Hebrew churches declined, the observation of the Hebrew Sabbath slowly vanished.

Sunday is the day of Christian worship because of the Resurrection, not the capricious decision of a Roman emperor. Moreland sees this change as evidence for the Resurrection: for Jews to change key social structures such as the sacrifices and Sabbath, something monumental must have happened:

Jews scrupulously kept the Sabbath by not doing anything except religious devotion every Saturday. This is how they would earn right standing with God, guarantee the salvation of their family and be in right standing with the nation. These Christians worship on Sunday--why? Because that's when Jesus rose from the dead.⁴⁰

Why the move from Saturday to Sunday? Simple really – that’s the day when Jesus rose from the dead. “When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene...” (Mk 16:9; cf. Matt 28:1).

So – the idea that a Roman Emperor forced Sunday worship on all Christians in order to coincide with the veneration of *Sol Invictus*, the unconquerable sun, is just flat-out untrue.

⁴⁰ Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), p. 339.

CONCLUSION

Hopefully this article helps to clear the muddy waters stirred up by *The Da Vinci Code*. As I stated at the beginning, I enjoyed the novel – a reasonable read – but it must stay within the realm of fiction, and to distinguish between fact and fiction is important in this virtual reality world we live in today.

Here are some resources you may find helpful

Darrell L. Bock, *Breaking the Da Vinci Code* (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2004)

Online >>

Craig Blomberg, “The da Vinci Code: A Novel”; *Denver Journal: An Online Review of Current Biblical and Theological Studies*; available at:

<http://www.denverseminary.edu/dj/articles2004/0200/0202.php>

Sandra Miesel “Dismantling The Da Vinci Code”, *Crisis Magazine: Politics, Culture and the Church*;

<http://www.crisismagazine.com/september2003/feature1.htm>

Maurice Timothy Reidy, “Breaking the Code” *Commonweal magazine-a Review of Religion, Politics and Culture*: September 12, 2003 / Volume CXXX, Number 15;

http://www.commonwealmagazine.org/article.php?id_article=773

Collin Hansen, “Christian History Corner: Breaking The Da Vinci Code”; *Christianity Today*, Week of November 3

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

S. Gregory Jones “Cracking the Code: Online Edition”; pdf;
<http://www.doers.org/ctc.pdf>

Albert Mohler. “Deciphering 'The Da Vinci Code'”; Tuesday,
July 29, 2003; Crosswalk.com;
<http://www.crosswalk.com/news/weblogs/mohler/?adate=7/29/2003#1212006>

Chris Armstrong, “Thanks Da Vinci Code”; *Christianity Today*,
Christian History Corner, Nov. 14, 2003
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/145/52.0.html>

J. P. Holding, “Not InDavincible: A Review and Critique of
The DaVinci Code”;
<http://www.tektonics.org/davincicrude.htm>

APPENDIX 1: A.D. 325: the Council of Nicea - a political forum for consolidating power? Whatever...

[Sophie said] “I don't follow. His divinity?”

“My dear,” Teabing declared, “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.”

“Not the Son of God?”

“Right,” Teabing said. “Jesus' establishment as 'the Son of God' was officially proposed and voted on by the Council of Nicaea.”

“Hold on. You're saying Jesus' divinity was the result of a vote?”

“A relatively close vote at that,” Teabing added.⁴¹

Hmmm... a gentle Jewish rabbi was known to be a mere human until pronounced as Divine Deity due to some Roman power-play? Riiiiiiiiiiight...

Let's take a brief look back in history at the circumstances surrounding the Council held at Nicea.

Why the Council came about

The issue arose when a popular preacher named Arius taught that Jesus was divine, but not God. Only God the Father could be immortal, so the Son had to be a created being (“There was when he was not” was a famous Arian catchphrase of the time). So, in Arius' understanding, Jesus was like God, but not truly God. Many former pagans felt comfortable with this view: God remained unique and unknowable, while Jesus was seen as a divine super-hero, not dissimilar to the demi-gods found in Greek mythology.

⁴¹ Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (London: Corgi, 2004), p. 315.

Alexander, Arius' bishop, disagreed, saying Jesus had to be God in order to save sinful humanity. Riots broke out in Alexandria over this theological debate, and Constantine (by then Emperor of Rome) had to step in, as the issue looked to threaten the security of his Empire. To deal with the problem, Constantine called for a council in the city of Nicea in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey).

It was a new thing for such an issue to be solved by free discussion and debate. Now, rather than setting off on foot and in secret, they travelled in comfort at the state's expense, guests of the Emperor. They were told by Constantine to resolve the issue; division was worse than war, he said, because eternal souls were involved.

We must not think of these early councils as meetings in which philosophical and speculative, yet ultimately irrelevant and meaningless, discussions took place. Most of the 300 or so bishops would have had vivid and fresh memories of persecution. Many bore the scars of their suffering and imprisonment on their bodies. One was missing an eye. Another, also with an eye gouged out, dragged hamstrung legs. Still another's hands had been scorched. Others wore the scars of scourging beneath their shirts. These victims of torture took their places among hundreds of other bishops. This was no mere academic exercise; for those involved, the gospel was at stake. Was Jesus simply a man, a created divine being, or truly God?

Such questions may seem ludicrous today, but the issue was a hot topic on the streets and in the marketplace in those days. One theologian - who was involved in the issue at a later time - wrote,

If in this city [Constantinople] you ask anyone for change, he will discuss with you whether the Son is begotten or unbegotten. If you ask about the quality of bread, you will receive the answer that “the Father is greater, the Son is less.” If you suggest that a bath is desirable, you will be told that, “there was nothing before the Son was created.”

At one stage it seemed as though Arianism might become the official position of the church. It gained support and popularity and won the approval of the Imperial Roman court with its enormous sway. One man stood in the way – Athanasius. The Emperor threatened his life and he was exiled five times – yet Athanasius refused to bow to what he perceived as a threat to the gospel.

For Athanasius, there were two major consequences associated with Arius’ Christology, and both held negative implications for the faith. First, Athanasius pointed out that only God can save, can liberate us from the bondage of sin and bring us to eternal life. A creature requires redemption; only the Creator can redeem. He then pointed out that both the New Testament and Christian liturgical tradition regard Christ as Saviour. But how can this be, if Christ is only a creature and only God can save? Athanasius concluded that the only possible solution is that Jesus is God incarnate – ‘in-the-flesh’. God entered our human situation to save us through His Son. Second, Christians worship and pray to Christ. Arius had argued that Christ was the ultimate of God’s creatures. Athanasius responded that this view of Christ denied the way in which Christians worshiped. Athanasius reinforced the theological importance of the practice of praying to Christ and worshiping him. If Arius was correct, then Christians were guilty of idolatry because they adored and prayed to a creature.

The council denounced Arius' views and sought to formulate their own beliefs, about God the Father and God the Son. They used phrases to describe Jesus like, "true God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father."

Although denounced as a heretic and temporarily out of the picture, the theological debate remained for decades, with Athanasius rising to oppose the charismatic Arius. The battle raged until another council was held in Constantinople in AD 381.

So, merely a vote in order to consolidate political power? No – for many involved the gospel was at stake. They wished to organise their thinking on the nature of Christ as he had been revealed through the teaching of the apostles, not to manufacture a religion to act as a political glue for the Empire.