

Debunking The Da Vinci Code

Lecture Notes by Gary C. Burger M.Div.
Talk given at Grace Community Church
May 7, 2006

Introduction

I would like to express my sincere thanks to Will Dungee and the rest of the pastors and elders for inviting me to speak to you this week and next, as well as to Bill Bishop, Carolyn Chester and whoever else worked so hard to rearrange things so we could use the Eagles Nest this morning and next Sunday for these presentations. It took a lot of creativity and planning. In addition, I appreciate the work it took Bill Goans and others to get the word out to you through postcards, emails, phonetree or through whatever other means you might have gotten it. Finally, I want to thank everyone who normally comes to the Eagles Nest to worship at this time for being flexible (of course, I guess you don't have a choice!)

Bill Goans and I share similar thinking about the controversy surrounding TDVC. We see it as a gift and want to treat it like one. There are two ways of thinking about it. One is pessimistic doubt and discouragement; the other is optimistic faith in God.

Just as the pessimist sees a cup as half empty and an optimist sees the same cup as half full I am noticing the same thing in Christians' reactions to TDVC. Some are only looking at the negatives. On the negative pessimistic side, TDVC is an insult to God, biblical Christianity and to history.

I have even heard of people who no longer want to follow Christ as a result of reading the book. To be sure, the book is having a negative impact on our culture and many people's faith. The situation is indeed serious, seriously negative.

Despite this tragic situation, I would rather be an optimist. I would rather exercise my faith in a very powerful and savvy God. Human history has shown repeatedly that no matter how great the problem, God, through us, can bring about an even greater good. So, what can be the greater good that God is working out through TDVC controversy? I believe that the controversy contains both a tremendous gift and a tremendous challenge.

I think the controversy is a gift in that it is opening many doors for discussing biblical Christianity with non-Christians who have never been interested in talking about it before. Chances are that someone will initiate a conversation with us rather than the usual other way around. Whether they begin the discussion or we begin the discussion, "What do you think of The Da Vinci Code?" is an easy conversation starter.

The pessimist who is not looking at it from this perspective might answer, "It is a terrible book. It's straight from the pit of Hell and that's where Dan Brown is headed." An answer like that will definitely kill any chances for a conversation. If the book persuaded them to believe its claims then that answer will most definitely finish the job it started.

As optimistic Christians, however, who look at every conflict as an opportunity for God to use us, we will see their question as a gift from God, an opportunity to help the other person begin to question and doubt the false assertions in the book and on down the road become interested in the truth of biblical Christianity. Perhaps eventually the person will surrender their life to Jesus Christ. One of my goals for this morning is to help you acquire the information that you'll need to begin to have intelligent and productive conversations with other people. We will talk about both content and strategies that will attract people to Jesus Christ, not repel them from Him.

I also see the controversy as God setting a challenge before us. For a long time many Christians have not seen much need to learn about their heritage. TDVC controversy challenges us to learn how to answer difficult questions like "Is the Bible the most reliable record of Jesus' life and teachings?" and "Just when did Jesus' followers come to believe He is God?" The more I study and learn the answers to questions like these the more I come to appreciate how trustworthy God and His Word really are. As a result, stronger faith and less doubt increasingly characterise my relationship with God.

I am not here to muster up a crowd to picket movie theatres and burn books. I am not here to appeal to your emotions and get you all angry and riled up about this. I believe the best way to deal with falsehood is to educate people with the truth and then let the Holy Spirit work on their minds and hearts. I hope to make the truths of history clear and understandable so you can pass them on to help others in a gentle, thoughtful and loving manner. Peter was an impatient and hot-tempered man in his younger years, but in his later years wrote, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience...." 1 Peter 3:15, 16) Our knowledge and logical arguments will be much more effective when they are administered with a spoonfull of Christlike character displayed in the power of the Holy Spirit.

We have the hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ. Anyone who is putting their hope in themselves or another religion without Christ has only a false hope. We have the truth, and I think most people are willing to listen to that truth if we are gentle and respectful. If we tell people right away that TDVC is just lies from Satan and Dan Brown is the devil's tool we would certainly be correct, but that won't win them over to Christ. By and large, I think the kind of people who enjoy TDVC are people that are persuaded by historical information and logical reasoning rather than a bumper sticker that says, "The Bible says it, believe it!"

When someone tells me they liked TDVC I know I could machine gun them down with historical facts and arguments, but that would probably solidify their faith in Dan Brown even more. I'd rather ask them questions like: "What did you like about it?" "What convinced you Dan Brown is right?" "What don't you like about Christianity as it is now?" I listen carefully to their answers and try hard to understand where they are coming from. When they feel understood, they become more open to what I think.

I have a few other goals in mind for our times together. One of my main goals is to help you understand better what happened in the first three centuries of the Church. How did our Bible come to exist in the form it does? What were some of the alternative Christianities that people

came up with and where did they go wrong? What really happened at the Council of Nicea? and so on. The reason I'd like to help you understand even the most basic broadstrokes of what happened is so you can refute the many other books, magazine articles, movies and TV shows that will come out with counterfeit views.

I will divide my presentation into two parts. Today will be Part One; next Sunday will be Part Two. Today, we will become clear about what exactly was Dan Brown's purpose and what his logical argument is in the book. We will also see that the New Testament is our most reliable record of Jesus' life and the life of Mary Magdalene. We will learn why other gospels were not included in the New Testament. Finally, we will see how Jesus' first followers believed He was divine from the very beginning. We will even tackle that all important question, "Were Jesus and Magdalene married?"

Next week we will examine Dan Brown's views of sex and religion, the sacred feminine, and goddess worship.

That was a rather long introduction and now that I've done that and now that everyone is here who is probably going to come I'd like to pause to pray for our time together.

Lord Jesus Christ, we want to know the truth about you, the Bible and the early Church. We also want to help others know that truth. Will you use the controversies over TDVC in positive ways to motivate people all over the world to become interested in knowing the truth. Will you use the challenges that people like Dan Brown lay at the Church's feet to motivate Christians to learn and share the truth with a world full of people who are looking for the hope that we have already found? Will you please guard us this morning from any distractions that would keep us from learning? Finally, will you glorify Yourself in this gathering today. That is why we pray in your name. Amen.

The author's purpose for TDVC

Some of you may not have read the book and are here to find out what it is all about. That is great and I hope you'll be able to understand what the book is about without having to read it. After all, there are better books to read, like, say, the Bible. Regardless of whether you have read the book or not I think it would be helpful for us to nail down what Dan Brown's goal was for writing the book and the logical argument that he constructs to accomplish it. After that, we'll be in a better position to find out how he actually fails to accomplish it.

Dan Brown has stated that his goal in writing the book was to promote the theory that Mary Magdalene and Jesus were married and had a child. He told Charlie Gibson on the Good Morning America show, "The people who ask me how much of this is true need to realize this theory about Mary Magdalene has been around for centuries. Its not my theory, and it has been presented, really, over the past 2000 years, and it has persisted."¹

The logical framework of the book:

In laying down the logical framework of the book, I am not going to cover the plot details and the actions of the characters. That is not important to us now.

The most essential logical framework for the book is this:

Premise 1: The Gnostic Gospels are the earliest and most reliable records of Jesus' and Mary Magdalene's lives. They tell the truth that Jesus was merely a man and not divine, and that he and Mary Magdalene were married.

Premise 2: Power hungry church leaders stole this human Jesus away from true Christianity and replaced him with a divine Christ in 325 A.D. This purely political move then associated their power with heavenly power to give the Church absolute power over people's lives.

Premise 3: To help them accomplish this they replaced the Gnostic Gospels, which affirmed Jesus' humanness, with Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, who teach that Jesus is divine but not human.

Premise 4: After Jesus died, Mary Magdalene fled with her child Sophia to France where Sophia married into the French royal family. The Roman Catholic Church has known about this and will do anything to keep the truth from leaking out.

Premise 5: There are other documents written by Jesus and Mary Magdalene which when discovered will prove that Jesus was not divine and bring the Church's power to an end.

With the remainder of our time this morning we will look at each of these carefully to see how they are wrong and don't support Dan Brown's assertion that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married and had a child.

Premise 1: The Gnostic Gospels are the earliest and therefore the most reliable records of Jesus' and Mary Magdalene's lives. They tell the truth that Jesus was merely a man and not divine, and that he and Mary Magdalene were married.

As you can tell several assertions go into this premise and we must look at them one at a time. The first assertion is that:

The Gnostic Gospels are the earliest Christian records.

The character that is the historian in the novel is Sir Leigh Teabing. He says: "These are photocopies of the Nag Hammadi and Dead Sea Scrolls, which I mentioned earlier," Teabing said. "The earliest Christian records." (TDVC, chapter 58, p. 245)

The first problem with this statement is the Dead Sea Scrolls are not Christian records at all. They are a collection of copies of Old Testament books and other Jewish literature that a Jewish sect collected about the time of Christ. They do not mention Jesus, Christians or any Christian themes. Dan Brown did not do his homework. The Nag Hammadi Library is a collection of mostly Gnostic books. We will look more closely at Gnosticism in a few minutes. The important thing to know right now is that the Gnostics wrote these books in the second and third centuries, whereas the New Testament authors wrote their books all in the first century. Therefore, the New

Testament books were the earliest Christian records, not the Gnostic books. Dan Brown admitted in an interview he is not a historian and this certainly proves it.

The second assertion of the premise is:

The Gnostic Gospels are therefore the most reliable records of Jesus' and Mary Magdalene.

Implicit in Teabing's statement that they are the earliest records would be the assertion that they are the most reliable records. The reason is that historians generally assume that the historical documents written the closest in time to an event are the most reliable. The New Testament authors wrote their books all within 40 – 50 years of Jesus' life and death. That is not a very long time. Since the Gnostic authors wrote their Gospels from 100 to 200 years or more after Jesus' death, they cannot be as historically reliable.

The second reason why the Gnostic Gospels are not the most reliable records of Jesus' and Mary Magdalene will take a little more explanation. Basically it is because their authors never intended to record actual, reliable historical records. Instead, they wrote in allegories that cleverly hid their secret messages. Let's see why.

In the second and third centuries A.D. (that is, from about 100 to 300 A.D.) a variety of what some call alternative Christianities grew, flourished and died. Some people could believe that Jesus was divine but could not believe he was human. Others could believe that Jesus was human but not divine. Still others thought that there were two Christs. One was a physical man, Jesus of Nazareth, while the other was a spirit who came to dwell inside the man Jesus at His baptism but left while Jesus was dying on the cross. Most of these groups and their heretical theologies are not important to our discussion of TDVC because Dan Brown does not mention them. He mentions only one group, the Gnostics, and builds the current major premise of his argument on a faulty understanding of this group.

Gnosticism is an umbrella term that scholars use to include a variety of groups that all had a few things in common. Their central theology went loosely like this. The world was not created by a good and perfect God, but rather by a lesser god, an evil god. The god of the Jews, Yahweh, is this evil god. Therefore, the world and humanity (including our bodies) is inherently evil. There is absolutely nothing good about it. A goddess, usually named Sophia, did something terrible in heaven (of which we are not usually told) and was thrown out. Her divine substance fell to earth in the form of divine sparks that fell into certain human beings. These human beings could not be saved by either works or by Jesus' death on the cross. They could be saved only by coming to the knowledge that they have this divinity within them. This knowledge would help them begin their journey back to heaven. One of the Greek words for knowledge is gnosis. That is the word behind our English word knowledge. This is why they are called Gnostics. They need this special, secret knowledge in order to be saved from their entrapment in their evil human bodies. To them it wasn't their sins that kept them from going to Heaven; it was their lack of the knowledge of the divinity within them.

They saw Jesus as a man who attained this knowledge and set an example for other gnostics for how to use this knowledge to get back to heaven. At his baptism the divine Christ came into him

and then left him during the crucifixion. So in a greater sense they were only interested in the divine Christ, the one who escaped from an evil human body and got back to heaven. They rejected the Apostles' message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus' death on the cross. They thought that was ludicrous and only people who were still ignorant of the gnosis could believe. The Gnostics were an elitist, snobby, arrogant bunch that invented a very complicated and esoteric religion. Theirs was a syncretistic religion that combined ideas from pagan Greek mythology and philosophy and ideas from Eastern mystical religions and wrapped them in Christian jargon. Even though historians commonly categorize them as Christian there was nothing Christian about their theology.

There is one more important piece of information about Gnosticism I want to point out, and this is very important to how Dan Brown talks about the sacred feminine. If he had done his homework, he would have discovered that Gnosticism was misogynistic at its core. They thought that the feminine and women were worthless. If you understand Gnosticism correctly, you cannot use Gnosticism or the Gnostic Gospels to support feminism as Dan Brown and others are trying to do. We'll come back to this in a few moments and more next week.

Dan Brown obviously didn't do his homework and I really don't know where he came up with the the third part of the premise:

The Gnostic Gospels tell the truth that Jesus was merely a man and not divine

Teabing, the historian in TDVC tells Sophie, "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."

Dan Brown tries to convince us there was unanimous agreement in the early church that Jesus was only a man. We'll see later that this is just the opposite of what history tells us. We'll come back to Constantine and the Gospels later. I just wanted to show you one of the places in the book that Dan Brown claims the Gnostic Gospels taught that Jesus was merely human. So the evidence points to just the opposite of Dan Brown's premise.

Now it is time to learn more about the Gnostic Gospels

The Gnostics wrote several books that they called "Gospels." These Gnostic Gospels had names like Gospel of Mary Magdalene, Gospel of Peter, Gospel of Thomas and Gospel of Philip even though their anonymous authors wrote them long after Mary, Peter and Philip died. Recently the Gnostic Gospel of Judas was in the limelight. When I read about it, the news article said that it was a Gnostic Gospel, so before reading any further I knew some things were probably true about its theology. I knew the author was not Judas and he didn't write it in the first century. I also knew he would be using allegory to communicate Gnostic ideas about the spark of divinity in Christ and others. As it turns out Judas is actually the hero in this Gospel because Jesus asked Judas to kill him in order to release that divine spark back to Heaven. Judas wasn't a traitor but a loyal friend. So goes a typical Gnostic Gospel. Let's look at what Dan Brown has to say about these Gnostic Gospels.

His fictional historian Leigh Teabing tells the naïve Sophie Neveu that,

“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.” (TDVC, chapter 55, p. 231)

The problem with this assertion is there were nowhere near eighty gospels ever written. We can count them on both hands and that's it. The Nag Hammadi Library contains five, so if we add in Gospel of Judas there were 6 Gnostic Gospels that we know of. These Gnostic alternatives to the New Testament Gospels were very different.

Because the Gnostics were elitists who thought only they had the secret knowledge that would lead them to Heaven, they wrote their gospels in the style of fictional allegories in order to keep their ideas from being known by outsiders. The most important point I want to impress upon you today is that the Bible is the most reliable record of Jesus' life we have. The second most important point is that the Gnostic Gospels are the least reliable record of Jesus' life. The ironic thing about Dan Brown is that the Gnostic Gospels actually say the opposite of what he makes them say in his novel.

There are several features of the Gnostic Gospels I want you to know about.

First, I just want to repeat that the authors wrote these gospels anywhere from the middle of the second century all the way to the latter half of the third century. In other words, they were written long after Jesus and the Apostles died. The reason this is important is that common sense and history tells us that the records that are closest to the event are the most reliable records. Dan Brown's fictional historian, Teabing tells Sophie that the Gnostic Gospels are “the earliest Christian records.” As I pointed out earlier, the authors of the New Testament books all wrote their books in the first century. This is a fact. The Gnostic Gospels were written at least one hundred to two hundred years later. This is a fact.

The second feature about the Gnostic Gospels I want to point out is that they were not anything like Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They only have the name Gospel in common. The authors of the New Testament Gospels wrote biographies of Jesus' life. They wanted us to understand that the people in their stories were actual people. Their conversations with Jesus actually took place. Jesus' sermons were actual sermons that he gave. In stark contrast, this is not how the authors of the Gnostic Gospels intended their readers to take what they wrote. They used Jesus and the Apostles and Mary Magdalene simply as fictitious characters to speak Gnostic concepts through fictitious conversations. To the Gnostics, the man Jesus, Mary Magdalene and Apostles didn't matter. They were dead and gone. Their aim was to use fictional conversations between them to instruct their readers in the ways of Gnosticism. This is so important to understanding how Dan Brown and others misuse the Gnostic Gospels. Let's look at some examples from TDVC. The first one is a passage from the Gospel of Mary Magdalene.

And Peter said, "Did the Saviour really speak with a woman without our knowledge? Are we to turn about and all listen to her? Did he prefer her to us?" And Levi answered, "Peter, you have always been hot-tempered. Now I see you contending against the woman like an adversary. If the

Saviour made her worthy, who are you indeed to reject her? Surely the Saviour knows her very well. That is why he loved her more than us."

Now if you have the Gnostic secret decoder ring on you can interpret this passage the way the Gnostic author would want. If you don't have the ring, you need a little more background information before you can get the right interpretation. Apparently, Dan Brown didn't bother to acquire either the decoder ring or the background since he uses the Gnostic Gospels in just the opposite way the authors intended.

The Apostles claimed to have the true gospel of Jesus Christ. They passed on exactly what Jesus told them to pass on. This was revelation from God that they passed on publicly. It was available to anyone and everyone. The Gnostic authors, by contrast, said they had private revelation about the secret knowledge and this was not from the god of the Jews. It was from a different source and it was to remain private revelation. Now, who did Jesus put in charge of the Church when he was gone? Peter. So in this allegorical conversation Peter represents this public apostolic source of revelation. He represents the orthodox Church descended from Jesus through Peter and the Apostles. The author identifies the woman in this passage earlier as Mary Magdalene and in an allegorical fashion; she represents the private revelation of gnostic knowledge. Remember from the Gospel of John that Jesus appears first to Mary Magdalene and it seems that she is alone. She returns to the upper room and tells the disciples who don't believe her. So now the Gnostic author alludes to that to pit what he assumes to be the superior value of private, Gnostic revelation against public, orthodox revelation. He simply uses Peter and Mary to personify these two different sources of revelation and make private revelation win out.

The third feature about Gnostic Gospels that is important to keep in mind is, as I indicated before, that they are not pro-feminine, and we should not use them to support modern feminism. The Gnostics would have thought today's feminist movement is misguided.

Now with that background let's see how Dan Brown misunderstands and usurps the meaning for his own literary goals. After Sophie reads the passage, Teabing interprets (or should I say misinterprets) the passage we just looked at.

"The woman they are speaking of," Teabing explained, "is Mary Magdalene. Peter is jealous of her."

"Because Jesus preferred Mary?" (Sophie asked)

"Not only that. The stakes were far greater than mere affection. At this point in the gospels, Jesus suspects He will soon be captured and crucified. So he gives Mary Magdalene instructions on how to carry on His Church after He is gone. As a result, Peter expresses his discontent over playing second fiddle to a woman. I daresay Peter was something of a sexist?"

Sophie was trying to keep up. "This is Saint Peter. The rock on which Jesus built His Church."

(Teabing) "The same, except for one catch. 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."

Sophie looked at him. "You're saying the Christian Church was to be carried on by a woman?"

(Teabing) "That was the plan. Jesus was the original feminist. He intended for the future of His Church to be in the hands of Mary Magdalene."

From what you have learned so far about Gnostic Gospels, can you see what is wrong with Dan Brown's interpretation of this passage? First, the Gnostic authors made up fictitious conversations to encode their theology in them. They were not trying to relate actual conversations between the Apostles. This is about private Gnostic revelation being superior to public apostolic revelation. Second, since the Gnostics were anti-feminist a conversation like this one in Gospel of Mary cannot possibly mean something like Dan Brown says it means.

Now we come to the fourth part of the first premise about Gnosticism, and this is the big question that is agitating the minds of the public: "Were Jesus and Mary Magdalene married?"

Here is the dialogue from TDVC that Dan Brown uses to claim that:

The Gnostic Gospels teach that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married.

Notice the quote from the Gnostic Gospel of Philip.

Teabing: "The Gospel of Philip is always a good place to start." 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. Langdon concurred with a nod. Sophie read the first line again. And the companion of the Saviour is Mary Magdalene. Teabing flipped through the book and pointed out several other passages that, to Sophie's surprise, clearly suggested Magdalene and Jesus had a romantic relationship ... Sir Leigh Teabing was still talking." I shan't bore you with the countless references to Jesus and Magdalene's union. That has been explored ad nauseum by modern historians. (Chapter 58, p. 245 - 246)

There are at least eight problems with Brown's use and interpretation of this passage. First, as it turns out the Gospel of Philip is actually not really "a good place to start," as scholars agree it was probably written anywhere from 250 - 300 A.D. This is vitally important to a correct interpretation of history. If I wrote an allegorical book composed of fictitious and highly symbolic conversations between George Washington and John Adams that were meant to communicate my speculative views on politics, would you trust it to tell you the truth about Washington and Adams? And if you were an author of a history book on the American Revolution and cited my work as actual historical statements, you would be a laughing stock. The Gospel of Philip was written at least 230 years after Jesus died, so even if it were intended to be a non-fictional account of an actual conversation, it would not be a reliable one.

Second, the only text we have is in Coptic, not in Aramaic. If it existed before that in another language it would have been in Greek, like other Gnostic Gospels, not Aramaic. Therefore, what Dan Brown thinks it might have said in Aramaic is irrelevant.

The third problem is there is no Aramaic or Hebrew word for 'companion' that normally means spouse. Brown or someone he foolishly relied on had the wrong language in mind. To be fair, the Gospel is in Coptic, and the word translated "companion" can mean "spouse" or "wife" in that language. However, this is clearly not what the author of Gospel of Philip had in mind anyway.

The fourth problem involves the highly esoteric and symbolic nature of the language used. We must remember that the author did not intend for readers to assume this was a narrative and conversation that actually took place. Gnostic authors took pride in keeping their ideas from being understood by the unspiritual masses by using esoteric language.

The fifth and related problem is the author of Gospel of Philip never intended it to "match up with the gospels in the Bible." They intended their view to be an alternative view. They would take offense with any attempt to reconcile it with the New Testament Gospels! Montague James writes of them,

"there is no question of any one's having excluded them from the New Testament; they have done that for themselves."

The sixth problem is with Brown's interpretation of the phrase "Christ loved her more than all the disciples and used to kiss her often on her mouth." The problem is that the only ancient manuscript scholars have to work with has a lot of holes in it from deterioration. One of these holes happens to be after the word "her." The Coptic text actually reads "kiss her often on her (blank)." The word that is missing could be "forehead," "cheek," or "hand." Early Christians greeted each other with kisses on the forehead, cheek and hand just like people in various cultures do today.

The seventh and biggest problem is the Gnostics would have gagged at the thought of Jesus and Mary Magdalene kissing in a romantic way, being married, having sex, and having children. A god would never have sex with an evil human body. The author would have cried, "Foul! You can't interpret my words to mean Jesus and Mary Magdalene got married!" To even begin to speculate what this conversation in the Gospel of Philip means one has to become acquainted with the mythological ideas of the gnostics. Dan Brown doesn't seem to have a clue about this aspect.

The eighth problem is there are not countless references in the Gnostic Gospels to a romantic relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. There are no others that could even be remotely construed that way.

We have picked apart the first main premise that Dan Brown uses to build his case.

We have seen that the Gnostic Gospels are not the earliest and most reliable records of Jesus' and Mary Magdalene's lives. We have seen that the Gnostics were only interested in the divine Christ so it is not correct to say the Gnostic Gospels portray him in only human terms. Finally, we saw that the Gnostic Gospels do not in fact teach Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married.

Premise 2: Power hungry church leaders stole this human Jesus away from true Christianity and replaced him with a divine Christ in 325 A.D. This purely political move then associated their power with heavenly power to give the Church absolute power over people's lives.

Dan Brown asserts that until 325 AD

“... thousands of documents already existed chronicling His life as a mortal man.” (TDVC, chapter 55, p. 231)

There is no record of thousands of unique documents if that is what he means. The Gnostic Gospels don't count because they didn't chronicle Jesus' earthly life. There were the four New Testament Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. That is it. No more, none, zip, nada. Now by the fourth century, there might have been thousands of *copies* of the New Testament Gospels, but I don't think he is saying that.

Now let's talk about what happened at the Council of Nicea.

Here is a dialog the characters have in TDVC about the Council of Nicea held in 325 AD. Let's examine it:

“At this gathering,” Teabing said, “many aspects of Christianity were debated and voted upon—the date of Easter, the role of the bishops, the administration of sacraments, and, of course, the divinity of Jesus.”

(Sophie) “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.”

(Sophie) “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.”

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

“A relatively close vote at that,” Teabing added. “Nonetheless, establishing Christ's divinity was critical to the further unification of the Roman empire and to the new Vatican power base. By officially endorsing Jesus as the Son of God, Constantine turned Jesus into a deity who existed beyond the scope of the human world, an entity whose power was unchallengeable. This not only precluded further pagan challenges to Christianity, but now the followers of Christ were able to redeem themselves *only* via the established sacred channel—the Roman Catholic Church.”

Sophie glanced at Langdon, and he gave her a soft nod of concurrence.

“It was all about power,” Teabing continued. “Christ as Messiah was critical to the functioning of Church and state. Many scholars claim that the early Church literally *stole* Jesus from His original followers, hijacking His human message, shrouding it in an impenetrable cloak of divinity, and using it to expand their own power. I've written several books on the topic.”

I really don't know where Dan Brown got these ideas. He certainly didn't read it from scholarly historians who know more than he does. He must have made it all up, because he does not get it from any historical evidence.

It is abundantly clear from a careful study of the New Testament that Jesus' earliest followers believed He was divine. It was no small task for Jesus to convince these fiercely monotheistic Jews that He was divine. His miracles went a long way toward that goal, but what ultimately convinced them was His bodily resurrection. Even liberal scholars who do not believe that Jesus was divine or that He rose bodily from the dead state that His followers believed He was divine and believed that He rose from the dead. This is not simply a conservative or fundamentalist interpretation of the Scriptures. It is a matter of historical fact.

The Council of Nicea in 325 AD was a gathering of 200 church leaders from around the Roman Empire. They did not get together to vote on whether or not they thought Jesus Christ was divine. They already believed He was divine. They had suffered persecution and watched their brethren and families die for their belief that Jesus was divine. Brown's interpretation of what happened at the Council is a cruelly ignorant one. The church leaders came together to decide if God the Father created Jesus as the Son of God or if Jesus had always existed with God the Father. It may seem like theological hairsplitting, but it was an important issue. All of the leaders believed Jesus was God, and all but two voted that Jesus always existed.

In some ways, Constantine did have a motive of power, after all he was the emperor. By this time in the Roman Empire Christians might have represented as much as 40 percent of the population, and they were well organized. The persecutions decreed by previous emperors only showed one thing: persecution was not going to eliminate Christians or Christianity. Constantine was a shrewd leader. He saw the continued unity of the Christian Church as the key to the continued unity of the Roman Empire. Before the Council of Nicea the Church leaders were growing in disagreements about important issues and their unity was fading. Constantine called the Council in order to iron out these differences and restore unity for the sake of the empire. What is important to our time today is to know that Dan Brown's interpretation is not shared by anyone who studies history objectively.

Finally, contrary to the claims of the Roman Catholic Church and Dan Brown the Roman Catholic Church did not exist in 325 A. D.

His historian in the novel, Leigh Teabing, says, "everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false." (TDVC, chapter 55, p. 235)

It turns out that everything Dan Brown is trying to teach us about Christ is false. Christians are not the only ones who are upset with Dan Brown. There are plenty of agnostic historians who are upset with him as well for making up history and foisting it on an ignorant public. I submit that it is Dan Brown who is trying to steal Jesus from Christianity.

Premise 2 is wrong because Jesus was viewed by the majority of both Christians and alternative Christian groups as divine.

Premise 3: To help Constantine and the church leaders accomplish their grab for power they replaced the Gnostic Gospels, which affirmed Jesus' humanness, with Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, who teach that Jesus is divine but not human.

We have already seen that Dan Brown has it backwards. The Gnostic Gospels only care about Jesus' divine nature and care nothing about the human Jesus, while the New Testament Gospels affirm both Jesus' human nature and his divine nature that were and still are inseparably linked.

This premise brings up the questions of when the New Testament books bound together in the way we now have them and how they were chosen. As far as we can tell, throughout the first three centuries the books circulated independently. It was actually primarily in response to heresies that Christians bound the books together into a canon or official New Testament. But long before Constantine convened the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. Christians viewed most of the 26 books as inspired by God and worthy of keeping together in a collection. There were a few they just weren't sure about, and that was because they were not sure they were written by or somehow connected with an Apostle. One of the books is Hebrews since it does not have an Apostle's name associated with it. This was the main criteria—that an Apostle wrote the book or the book contained the apostolic message. The reason the Gnostic Gospels never “made it” into the New Testament is that the Apostles did not write them. In fact, the Gnostic authors despised the Apostles and their message. Why should Christians include their books alongside books written by the Apostles? When Constantine commissioned 50 Bibles as gifts to the churches he wasn't the one who decided which books should go into it. For the most part, Christians already chose the list before he was even born, and these included Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The Bible was very similar to our own.

Premise 3 is wrong. Constantine did not replace the Gnostic Gospels with the four Gospels. And we already discussed the nature of Constantine's role in the Council of Nicea.

Premise 4: After Jesus died, Mary Magdalene fled with her child Sophia to France where Sophia married into the French royal family. The Roman Catholic Church has known about this and will do anything to keep the truth from leaking out.

All I have to say about this is that there are legends, but no one knows where they come from. There is no credible reliable evidence for them. What is ironic is that in TDVC Dan Brown puts down legends as a unreliable sources of historical information but then puts so much stock in these legends about Mary Magdalene.

Premise 5: There are other documents written by Jesus and Mary Magdalene which when discovered will prove that Jesus was not divine and bring the Church's power to an end.

Again, there is absolute no evidence that any such documents exist.

¹ Video: Good Morning America (Host: Charlie Gibson) found at http://www.danbrown.com/novels/davinci_code/breakingnews.html