

Debunking The Da Vinci Code

by Gary C. Burger, MDiv.

Introduction

In the best-selling novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, author Dan Brown makes many assertions concerning early Christianity like: Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married and had a child, Jesus was just a man but declared divine at the Council of Nicea (325 AD), the New Testament does not contain the right Gospels and Mary Magdalene is the Holy Grail.

This article will only address these major assertions. However, I have responded to all of his assertions at www.NewMediaMinistries.org.

The Real Code

It quickly becomes obvious to someone who knows history that Brown presents a false, alternative view of history to promote an anti-Christian agenda, and that is the real code in the book. As a fiction writer Brown makes up the characters and objects he needs to accomplish his literary goals; however, at the beginning Brown makes the following absolute claim: “All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate.”

The problem with this claim is most of them are not accurate. In making this claim he blurs the distinction between fiction and non-fiction and has provoked many a historian to do what they can to counter his false history. For the person who doesn't know history, the book can open the doors to doubt the truth of the Bible and Jesus Christ. The goal of this article is to help restore faith in them by “debunking” *The Da Vinci Code*.

Brown's Historical Sources

The “historical” sources Brown uses are anything but reliable. His primary sources of information are other books in the same genre of religious fiction. It is apparently too similar, as others have charged Dan Brown with plagiarism. The *Da Vinci Code* actually lists several books that provided source material, but these books are more like tabloid writing

one would find at the grocery store. It appears that he actually did no or very little research from the actual historic documents and what the consensus of real historians says about them.

Assertions about the Bible

Dan Brown makes several wrong assertions about how the New Testament came to exist in its final form. He claims that other Gospels, which were left out, told the true story about Jesus and Mary Magdalene.

He asserts that powerful chauvinistic church leaders like the Emperor Constantine kept out of the New Testament any book that was pro-feminist or portrayed Jesus as a mere man, assuming that those would naturally have been the books that presented Jesus and His teachings correctly. Instead they chose the books they did in order to suppress women and derive their authority from an all-powerful divine Christ rather than a human one.

Against these assertions stand the hard facts that real historians agree on. The books of the New Testament including the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) were written in the last part of the first century.

Most of the New Testament books were already put together in a collection similar to what we have now by 200 AD—long before Constantine and the Council of Nicea (325 AD). Constantine merely ordered new copies of an already existing collection. God's gender and the political ambitions of the church leaders had nothing to do with the selection of the books.

The early Christians understood them to be the work of the Apostles themselves, thereby the only authoritative sources on the life, death, resurrection and teachings of Jesus. Rather than a political body convening and deciding which of many books to select, the selection process was simply the preservation of the original Christian texts.

What were the alternative Gospels that Brown thinks should have been in the New Testament instead of the ones

found there now? In the middle to late second century other writers, particularly the Gnostics, wrote short books, some of which they called Gospels. They added names of famous people to the titles to yield, for example, Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Mary, Gospel of Philip, people who were long dead.

Although they called them Gospels they were not at all like the biographical New Testament Gospels. Rather than recounting what actually happened in Jesus' life they contain highly symbolic fictitious dialogs between Jesus and His disciples designed to communicate very different theological beliefs.

The Gnostics claimed to be Christians, but they weren't. They took Christian terms and redefined them with pagan ideas imported from other religions and philosophies in an eclectic and syncretistic approach. Since the distinctive doctrines of Christianity as taught by Jesus and the Apostles were already established in the churches these new aberrations were called heresies and rejected.

Because these Gnostic Gospels were written in the late second through fourth centuries and because of their allegorical nature they cannot give us additional reliable information about Jesus and Mary Magdalene.

To illustrate this, let's say I wrote an allegorical book composed of fictitious and highly symbolic conversations between George Washington and John Adams, which were meant to communicate my speculative views on today's political environment. Would you trust it to tell you the truth about Washington and Adams and their world? Yet these are the Gospels Dan Brown asserts should have been placed in the New Testament to tell us the truth about Jesus and Mary Magdalene.

Were Jesus and Mary Magdalene Married?

Brown asserts that “the marriage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene is part of the historical record.” By historical record he is referring to the Gnostic Gospel of Philip. This gospel contains the line,

“*And the companion of the Saviour is Mary Magdalene.*” However, since it was written at least 230 years after Jesus died and is allegorical it can’t be taken literally. We must remember that the author did not intend for readers to assume this was a narrative and conversation that actually took place among the disciples. Gnostic authors took pride in keeping their ideas from being understood by the “unspiritual” masses by using esoteric language. Even scholars are not sure what this meant!

The third 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. Most, if not all of them, believed that Jesus was only divine and not human, and according to their Greek dualistic philosophy God would never touch flesh, which they deemed was evil. The author would have cried, “Foul! You can’t interpret my words to mean Jesus and Mary Magdalene got married!”

Was Jesus only Human?

Brown asserts that until the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. Christians viewed Jesus as only a mortal prophet, not as God. Then, at the Council, Emperor Constantine wielded his influence to force the members to a “close” vote that Jesus was divine.

In making this assertion he completely misconstrues the issue about Christ’s divinity, which the Council decided upon. The Council’s decision was not whether or not Jesus is divine. They already believed He is. This was assumed from the beginning of the first century Church. The issue was whether Jesus is of the same divine substance as God the Father. I know this sounds like theological hairsplitting, but it was and is important.

Finally, it was not a “close” vote. Only 2 out of the 200 delegates dissented, and even they still believed Jesus is God. This Council did not steal Jesus from His original followers; rather,

they were trying to be as faithful as possible to Jesus and the Apostles. It is Dan Brown who is trying to steal Jesus and remake Him into what he wants Him to be.

Is Mary Magdalene the Holy Grail?

Dan Brown uses the above assertions to support his grand assertion that Mary Magdalene is the Holy Grail. So we may add his work of fiction/legend to the rest of the fictions/legends contrived since the Middle Ages about what the Holy Grail is and where it can be found. There are several more premises he relies on, but these are based on spurious legends and hoaxes.

Did Mary Magdalene flee with her child to France? There is no evidence of these legends being true. I must point out the double standard of what Dan Brown requires as historical proof. He says the New Testament is based on fabrications (i.e. legends) and therefore cannot be trusted to give us objectively true history. So, it seems, that he relies on the legends that support his views while insisting that legends can’t be trusted. How interesting!

Brown believes that Mary Magdalene represents the sacred feminine, yet as a devout first century Jew she would have denounced that as idolatry. There is simply no room in the Bible or Jesus’ teachings for a female goddess or the sacred feminine, etc.

Did Leonardo da Vinci and the Priory of Sion preserve the secret that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married? Did he divulge this secret through his paintings like *The Last Supper* and *The Virgin of the Rocks*? There is no evidence he was a member of any secret society and he completely misinterprets da Vinci’s paintings. Real art historians think he is wrong and I would rather side with them.

He claims there are “thousands of documents” that tell the real story. They are contained in what Brown calls the “Sangreal documents,” “the Purist Documents,” and the “Magdalene Diaries.”

There is absolutely no real evidence of these fictitious documents. The books that Brown cites as authoritative on these documents are pure speculation, not serious academic, historical research. They are on the level of supermarket tabloids—and the *Da Vinci Code* is based on them! Ha!

The last premise is that the modern Roman Catholic Church continues to cover up these secrets. This is absurd. The Roman Catholic Church does not control all access to early Christian literature and historical research. The Internet has a lot of free English translations of ancient Christian literature, which means that the information you need to make your own informed decision is in the public domain.

Conclusion

When we compare Dan Brown’s assertions about Jesus, the Bible and a marriage between Jesus and Mary Magdalene to the publicly available data about the first few centuries of Christianity we see that he is simply wrong.

The additional premises to build his argument that Mary Magdalene is the Holy Grail are also pure fiction. A fiction writer certainly has the right to make up fictional characters, places, events and objects. However, when he contrives an alternative historical backdrop and claims it is non-fiction the literary critics and the reading public usually cry “foul!” But they don’t on this one. This shows that the biased mainstream media wants to support his anti-Christian agenda. If there is any conspiracy it is among the radical liberal cultural leaders of our world to use any means to attack Christianity.

This article is a very brief summary of some major points and for sake of space omits references to the extensive research behind it. Please visit www.NewMediaMinistries.org/DaVinciCode for more detailed articles and references.

About the author

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