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A Christian Perspective on Today's News and Culture

Fact or Fiction?

A New Examination of *The Da Vinci Code*

April 25, 2006

Three years after its original release, Dan Brown's novel *The Da Vinci Code* is riding a whole new wave of publicity. With the recent plagiarism trial in Great Britain and the upcoming release of the film adaptation, the book is making headlines all over again.

So it's an especially good time to arm ourselves with facts about *The Da Vinci Code*. And I highly recommend Dr. Ken Boa's DVD *Unraveling the Da Vinci Code* and his soon-to-be released book, *The Gospel According to the Da Vinci Code*.

Boa, who is one of the most accomplished Christian thinkers I know, has done extensive research on *The Da Vinci Code*. He says that we need teaching tools like these because so many people have a tendency to confuse fact and fiction—even when we know that what we're reading is just a novel. In this case, Dan Brown encourages that delusion with an author's note in the book stating that "all descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate."

So the average reader with little background in theology, history, or art is likely to come away from the book believing that the Christian Church, out of a hatred for all things feminine, has deliberately been hiding the truth about Jesus' identity and His relationship with Mary Magdalene.

The odd thing is, Dan Brown claims on his website to be a Christian, "although," he adds, "perhaps not in the most traditional sense of the word." But as Ken Boa points

out, the negative impression of the Church that Brown's readers receive is no accident. The book itself claims that the secret it supposedly reveals is "so powerful that . . . it threatened to devastate the very foundation of Christianity." Brown's agenda in this book, Boa charges, is no less than "the deconstruction of Christianity."

On the evidence that Boa presents, it's a fair charge. Why else would Brown fudge so many of his supposedly "accurate" facts—facts that can be easily checked? From the correct spelling of the titles of paintings; to the colors, techniques, and materials used in those paintings; even to the name of the artist around whom the book revolves, Brown commits error after error. And his errors don't stop with art. He gets all kinds of details wrong about both Church history and secular history.

Brown is even wrong about the tenets of Gnosticism, the religion he's really pushing here. Brown presents Gnosticism as a religion that glorifies the body, and Christianity as one that considers the body to be evil. In reality, as an examination of the New Testament and Gnostic documents will show, it's exactly the other way around. Gnosticism, in fact, considers all matter, including the human body, evil. That's why, while Christianity emphasizes the incarnation of Jesus, Gnosticism doesn't even believe in it.

I don't have enough time here to go into all the facts shared by Boa, which is why I urge you to get his DVD *Unraveling the Da Vinci Code* and the book *The Gospel According to the Da Vinci Code* and then see for yourself what the facts are.

Then, make sure you talk to your friends and neighbors who have read *The Da Vinci Code* or who plan to see the movie. Make sure they aren't taken in by what is, in the end, pure mischief and fiction.

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For Further Reading and Information

Today's BreakPoint offer: "[Breaking The Da Vinci Code](#)" by Collin Hansen (*Christian History*, 7 November 2003) and "[Thanks, Da Vinci Code](#)" by Chris Armstrong (*Christian History*, 14 November 2003).

Read more [BreakPoint commentaries and articles](#) on *The Da Vinci Code*.

Ken Boa and John Alan Turner, [The Gospel According to the Da Vinci Code](#) (Broadman and Holman, 2006).

Also see the DVD by Ken Boa [Unraveling the Da Vinci Code](#).

BreakPoint Commentary No. 060308, "[The Da Vinci Hoax: A Tour de Distortion](#)."

Carl E. Olson, "[A Closer Look](#)," *To the Source*, 19 April 2006.

Regis Nicoll, "[Braking the Code: Da Vinci's Worldview Deconstructed](#)," BreakPoint Online, 7 March 2006.

Luke Timothy Johnson, [The Creed: What Christians Believe and Why It Matters](#) (Doubleday, 2003).

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

[Home](#) > [Christianity Today Magazine](#) > [Columns](#) > [Christian History Corner](#)

Christianity Today, Week of November 3

Christian History Corner: Breaking *The Da Vinci Code*

So the divine Jesus and infallible Word emerged out of a fourth-century power-play? Get real.

By Collin Hansen | posted 11/07/2003

I guess Christians should be flattered. Who knew the Council of Nicea and Mary Magdalene could be this hot? Thanks in large measure to Dan Brown's fictional thriller *The DaVinci Code*, early church history just can't stay out of the news.

• ***Da Vinci Comes to the Big Screen:***
[Full coverage at Christianity Today Movies](#)

If only a more worthy work could have prompted such attention. Brown first grabbed the headlines and prime-time TV in 2003 with his theory that Jesus married Mary Magdalene. But *The DaVinci Code* contains many more (equally dubious) claims about Christianity's historic origins and theological development. It's left to the reader whether these theories belong to Brown's imagination or the skeleton of "facts" that supports the book.

Watershed at Nicea

Brown is right about one thing (and not much more). In the course of Christian history, few events loom larger than the Council of Nicea in 325. When the newly converted Roman Emperor Constantine called bishops from around the world to present-day Turkey, the church had reached a theological crossroads.

Led by an Alexandrian theologian named Arius, one school of thought argued that

Jesus had undoubtedly been a remarkable leader, but he was not God in flesh. Arius proved an expert logician and master of extracting biblical proof texts that seemingly illustrated differences between Jesus and God, such as John 14:28: "the Father is greater than I." In essence, Arius argued that Jesus of Nazareth could not possibly share God the Father's unique divinity.

In *The Da Vinci Code*, Brown apparently adopts Arius as his representative for all pre-Nicene Christianity. Referring to the Council of Nicea, Brown claims that "until *that* moment in history, Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet ... a great and powerful man, but a *man* nonetheless."

In reality, early Christians overwhelmingly worshipped Jesus Christ as their risen Savior and Lord. Before the church adopted comprehensive doctrinal creeds, early Christian leaders developed a set of instructional summaries of belief, termed the "Rule" or "Canon" of Faith, which affirmed this truth. To take one example, the canon of prominent second-century bishop Irenaeus took its cue from 1 Corinthians 8:6: "Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ."

The term used here—Lord, *Kyrios*—deserves a bit more attention. *Kyrios* was used by the Greeks to denote divinity (though sometimes also, it is true, as a simple honorific). In the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the *Septuagint*, pre-dating Christ), this term became the preferred substitution for "Jahweh," the holy name of God. The Romans also used it to denote the divinity of their emperor, and the first-century Jewish writer Josephus tells us that the Jews refused to use it of the emperor for precisely this reason: only God himself was *kyrios*.

The Christians took over this usage of *kyrios* and applied it to Jesus, from the earliest days of the church. They did so not only in Scripture itself (which Brown argues was doctored after Nicea), but in

the earliest extra-canonical Christian book, the *Didache*, which scholars agree was written no later than the late 100s. In this book, the earliest Aramaic-speaking Christians refer to Jesus as Lord.

In addition, pre-Nicene Christians acknowledged Jesus's divinity by petitioning God the Father in Christ's name. Church leaders, including Justin Martyr, a second-century luminary and the first great church apologist, baptized in the name of the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—thereby acknowledging the equality of the one Lord's three distinct persons.

The Council of Nicea did not entirely end the controversy over Arius's teachings, nor did the gathering impose a foreign doctrine of Christ's divinity on the church. The participating bishops merely affirmed the historic and standard Christian beliefs, erecting a united front against future efforts to dilute Christ's gift of salvation.

"Fax from Heaven"?

With the Bible playing a central role in Christianity, the question of Scripture's historic validity bears tremendous implications. Brown claims that Constantine commissioned and bankrolled a staff to manipulate existing texts and thereby divinize the human Christ.

Yet for a number of reasons, Brown's speculations fall flat. Brown correctly points out that "the Bible did not arrive by fax from heaven." Indeed, the Bible's composition and consolidation may appear a bit too human for the comfort of some Christians. But Brown overlooks the fact that the human process of canonization had progressed for centuries before Nicea, resulting in a nearly complete canon of Scripture before Nicea or even Constantine's legalization of Christianity in 313.

Ironically, the process of collecting and consolidating Scripture was launched when a rival sect produced its own quasi-biblical canon. Around 140 a Gnostic leader named Marcion began spreading a

theory that the New and Old Testaments didn't share the same God. Marcion argued that the Old Testament's God represented law and wrath while the New Testament's God, represented by Christ, exemplified love. As a result Marcion rejected the Old Testament and the most overtly Jewish New Testament writings, including Matthew, Mark, Acts, and Hebrews. He manipulated other books to downplay their Jewish tendencies. Though in 144 the church in Rome declared his views heretical, Marcion's teaching sparked a new cult. Challenged by Marcion's threat, church leaders began to consider earnestly their own views on a definitive list of Scriptural books including both the Old and New Testaments.

Another rival theology nudged the church toward consolidating the New Testament. During the mid- to late-second century, a man from Asia Minor named Montanus boasted of receiving a revelation from God about an impending apocalypse. The four Gospels and Paul's epistles achieved wide circulation and largely unquestioned authority within the early church but hadn't yet been collected in a single authoritative book. Montanus saw in this fact an opportunity to spread his message, by claiming authoritative status for his new revelation. Church leaders met the challenge around 190 and circulated a definitive list of apostolic writings that is today called the Muratorian Canon, after its modern discoverer. The Muratorian Canon bears striking resemblance to today's New Testament but includes two books, Revelation of Peter and Wisdom of Solomon, which were later excluded from the canon.

By the time of Nicea, church leaders debated the legitimacy of only a few books that we accept today, chief among them Hebrews and Revelation, because their authorship remained in doubt. In fact, authorship was the most important consideration for those who worked to solidify the canon. Early church leaders considered letters and eyewitness accounts authoritative and binding only if they were written by an apostle or close disciple of an apostle. This way they could

be assured of the documents' reliability. As pastors and preachers, they also observed which books did in fact build up the church—a good sign, they felt, that such books were inspired Scripture. The results speak for themselves: the books of today's Bible have allowed Christianity to spread, flourish, and endure worldwide.

Though unoriginal in its allegations, *The Da Vinci Code* proves that some misguided theories never entirely fade away. They just reappear periodically in a different disguise. Brown's claims resemble those of Arius and his numerous heirs throughout history, who have contradicted the united testimony of the apostles and the early church they built. Those witnesses have always attested that Jesus Christ was and remains God himself. It didn't take an ancient council to make this true. And the pseudohistorical claims of a modern novel can't make it false.

For more on what the early church fathers can teach us about Jesus and the Bible, see our [sequel](#) to this article.

Collin Hansen is an associate editor of Christianity Today magazine.

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[Home](#) > [Christianity Today Magazine](#) > [Columns](#) > [Christian History Corner](#)

Christianity Today, Week of November 10

Thanks, *Da Vinci Code*

The book sends us back to Christianity's "founding fathers"—and the Bible we share with them

by **Chris Armstrong** | posted 11/14/2003

It's been a while since *Christian History Corner*. We enjoyed reading [your responses](#) to staff writer Collin Hansen's fact-checking piece on Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code*.

One thing that encouraged us about your letters is this: In the face of spurious claims from a man who poses himself as a historian even as he writes a novel ("All descriptions of ... documents ... in this novel are accurate"), some of you turned to the apostles and church fathers, to see what they and their Bible really had to say about the divinity of Jesus Christ.

Anything that leads people back to those dynamic early centuries of the church can only help the Christian cause. Obviously no human untruth can obscure the truth of the Gospel. And the first thing you notice when you read the early "church fathers" is that they are completely convinced Jesus is God himself. I'm talking about those bishops and teachers from the 100s and 200s too—long before the Nicean council (Brown claims) enforced on the church the supposedly minority position of Christ's divinity.

True, few Christians need the knock-down argument that these earliest teachers provide—at least, to convince themselves that Jesus is God. We may find that early testimony helpful in talking with those who have become muddled by Brown's book. Or to respond to those who have grabbed hold of that book's "historical" arguments as a blunt instrument against a faith they already dislike.

But the church's earliest teachers—Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and others—provide us with many more valuable things.

These were, after all, the church's "founding fathers." I don't mean that in the precise political sense used by the Catholic and Anglican confessions: that today's bishops and popes stand in a direct, traceable succession with all the other bishops (for many of the "fathers" were bishops) back to Peter. Rather, I'm

talking about the process of discernment that played itself out in the church's first centuries.

Make no mistake, the questions the first Bible scholars and theologians wrestled to the mat were some of the most momentous ever decided in the church. The question of how the man Jesus could be (as he and the apostles claimed) God himself was only the first of these.

The early fathers also asked how Jesus could be both wholly divine and wholly human—having two natures in one person. They asked which documents being circulated and read in the early congregations could be trusted to continue building up that church in the "nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4, KJV) They asked which of these were most consistent with the first eyewitness reports and, especially, the continued experience of a Jesus who still lived and moved and had his being in his people—the Body of Christ.

But these thinkers faced another crucial question about the Bible—beyond identifying the books that, by the church's second century, had already begun to form themselves into a recognizable New Testament. They asked, what do we do with the Scriptures that Jesus himself used, which describe who God is and how he has dealt with his people before we showed up? That is, how do we read the Torah?

By a few decades after the resurrection, when the church had launched out from its original Jewish population base and was spreading through the empire like a firestorm, this was the question of the hour. The Greek-speaking gentiles, used to their philosophers' high-toned, abstract teachings about a God who was "thought thinking itself," just didn't know what to do with the Hebrew Scripture. It was so—well—"earthy." The God in its pages was always getting his hands dirty in the affairs of humans—kings, wars, marriages. And the Hebrews described God's character with such startlingly

concrete, personal metaphors and terms—wings, hands, emotions.

Moreover, how were the early gentile Christians to find life-giving instruction from the Torah's long passages about wars, genealogies, and ceremonial law—linked to an ethnic people to which they did not belong and a temple that had been destroyed in A.D. 70? Surely these Scriptures had been preserved in order to prepare the world for Christ. But where in their pages was the Christian reader authorized to find him?

So the Bible teachers of those first centuries had daunting work to do. And they did not do it in dusty libraries and obscure classroom debates, as we might imagine from looking at the faith-detached work of some modern academic Bible scholars. Rather, the fathers (and mothers!) of the church approached Scripture reverently and with joy. They found in it the Fountain—the source of everything that mattered.

Irenaeus, Origen, and the rest studied the Hebrew Bible (though usually in Greek translation), along with the apostles' documents that would become the New Testament, with an almost physical thirst for God and his truth. They read them in settings marked by worship and the pursuit of holiness. And they believed that as they read and submitted their lives to the Word and their thoughts to Christ, the Holy Spirit was at work to open the eyes of their hearts and to build his church so "the gates of hell will not overcome it" (Matt. 16:18, NIV).

What came out of those "first Bible studies"? Only the central doctrines of the church, and some of the most exciting, challenging (and yes, sometimes downright strange) interpretive work that has ever been done on the Christian Scriptures. Think these first teachers are worth reading? You bet.

John Chrysostom, Athanasius, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Gregory of Nazianzus—Christian History is trying to do our bit to

bring today's Christians back to these names, which have become obscure to us. Our Fall 2003 issue is dedicated to these and other early Bible teachers, their interpretive techniques, and the questions they asked and answered.

Working on this issue has stirred in me again the passion for Bible study that I first experienced as a college-aged convert. I hope the issue, which will begin mailing at the end of this month (November), will provide to many readers the same experience.

As we do for each issue, we will also be featuring a new article from issue #81, "The First Bible Teachers: Reading over the shoulders of the church's founding fathers," each week on www.christianhistory.net, starting on December 19th. Meanwhile, if you want to explore the fathers' interactions with the Bible, check out Christopher A. Hall's [Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers](#) (InterVarsity Press, 1998). Or, for a thorough soaking in the early fathers' own writings, see any volume of InterVarsity's new [Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture](#).

"Don't know much about history," croons the song. That's surely the condition of the church today. So the editors at Christian History celebrate when something comes along—yes, even the Da Vinci Code—to remind us that the best path to the church's future is through our shared past.

Chris Armstrong is managing editor of Christian History magazine. More Christian history, including a list of events that occurred this week in the church's past, is available at ChristianHistory.net. [Subscriptions](#) to the quarterly print magazine are also available.

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1-8 | [Previous](#) | [Next](#)

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[Braking the Code](#)

[The So-Called 'Gospel' of Judas](#)

[Doubts Resurrected](#)

[Debunking DaVinci](#)

[The Da Vinci Conspiracy](#)

[False Advertising](#)

[Fact or Fiction?](#)

THE DA VINCI HOAX

3/8/2006

A Tour de Distortion

G. K. Chesterton famously said something to this effect: When people stop believing in God, they don't believe in nothing -- they believe in anything. A good example of this is Umberto Eco's novel *Foucault's Pendulum*, in which a group of friends program a computer to "write" a book about secret hidden knowledge. Titled *The Plan*, the book is the result of random links between things like Kabbalah, Rosicrucianism, the Knights Templar, and other crackpot ideas. While *The Plan* was intended as a prank, other people take it seriously, with tragic results.

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Well, *Foucault's Pendulum* shows us how gullible unbelieving people are. And this is particularly so in our postmodern age when truth doesn't matter. This phenomenon partly explains the remarkable success of *The Da Vinci Code*. Like Eco's novel, it's about a heretofore hidden knowledge that promises to let us in on the "true" history of Christianity.

Author Dan Brown gives us a Jesus who neither died on the cross nor rose from the dead. Instead, He married Mary Magdalene and had children by her. This "sacred blood line" is the treasure safeguarded by groups like the Knights Templar and the Masons. And the Catholic Church, in a desperate attempt to cover up this secret, murders those who threaten to expose it.

Devotees of *The Da Vinci Code* -- like the fictional fans in *Foucault's Pendulum* -- have trouble distinguishing fact from fiction. They visit places mentioned in the novel, and "Da Vinci Tours" are a booming business. With the upcoming film, interest in *The Da Vinci Code* will explode. Christians need to seize this teaching opportunity, preparing ourselves to answer questions readers are asking.

The first is: Are the historical events portrayed in Brown's story true? Brown claims to have done extensive historical research and gives his readers no reason to doubt the novel's accuracy. Since the average person knows almost nothing about Christian history, they're vulnerable. For example, when Brown says that Knights Templar were put to death by the Catholic Church because they knew the "true story" about Jesus, people have no basis to question it, never having heard of the Knights Templar. Or when Brown says that at the Council of Nicea, the Vatican consolidated its power, most people are unaware that the Vatican didn't even exist in A.D. 325.

It is our job to expose the falsehoods. We can learn to answer Brown's lies with the truth by reading books like Darrell Bock's *Breaking the Da Vinci Code* and Erwin Lutzer's *The Da Vinci Deception*.

People flock to stories like *The Da Vinci Code* in part because all humans are searching for the secret knowledge that answers the mysteries of life. And when *The Da Vinci Code* debuts in May, millions more Americans will get a condensed *tour de distortion*. Knowing our neighbors will see this film, churches ought to begin to get ready now -- preparing to answer questions about it and to tell our neighbors that there is no secret knowledge about God. It's all in the Bible and all true.

The good news is that *The Da Vinci Code* readers and viewers are seeking answers to the central questions of life. The challenge is for us to supply the true answers.

BRAKING THE CODE

By Regis Nicoll
3/7/2006

Da Vinci's Worldview Deconstructed

Since its release in 2003, Dan Brown's novel *The Da Vinci Code* has been a lightning rod of controversy and hype. While Brown's supporters have praised him for his research and storytelling ability, others have been highly critical of his blurring of history with speculation, deliberate misrepresentations of the Catholic Church and Christianity, and stereotyping of Europeans.

On top of that there have been charges of plagiarism. Last summer, novelist Lewis Perdue alleged that *The Da Vinci Code* contained too many parallels with his books, *The Da Vinci Legacy* (1983) and *Daughter of God* (2000), to be mere coincidence. In a suit brought before a district judge later that year, Perdue's case was summarily dismissed.

Now, with a Ron Howard film scheduled for release in May, charges of plagiarism have surfaced again. Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh, authors of *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* (1982), charge Brown with "lifting the central theme of [their] book." Although Brown makes reference to Baigent and Leigh and their theories in his novel, the authors have brought suit not against Brown, but against his publisher.

Funny thing, the plaintiff and defendant just happen to have the same publisher: Random House. Another funny thing, Baigent and Leigh's work has experienced nothing less than a commercial rebirth in the shadow of *The Da Vinci Code*. Could this all be a marketing ploy orchestrated by the mongers of conspiracy theories? I don't know, but the case is now being heard before a British court.

While there is chatter over this latest suit jeopardizing the upcoming film release, I suspect it will only add to the commercial phenomenon of Brown's tale, which has already sold over forty million copies with translations into forty-four languages.

All of this prompts the question: Why has *The Da Vinci Code* achieved so much popularity and success? What sets Brown's novel apart from other popular yarns?

CONSPIRACIES AND VICTIMS

To begin with, *The Da Vinci Code* is filled with murderous conspiracies, cryptic puzzles, and secret codes. But Brown also capitalizes on another element that everyone loves: victims. From the opening scene the reader is never without a victim to cheer for. Whether mystics from the past or sleuths of the present, it seems that truth-seekers everywhere are being pursued and persecuted by a dark and menacing empire.

And at the heart of all of this mystery and persecution—for those with an axe to grind—is the Catholic Church. Portrayed as suppressor of truth, oppressor of women, and repressor of sex, the Catholic Church is emblematic of Christianity itself.

The thesis is that the "true" faith underwent systematic obliteration, beginning four centuries after its birth. Intent in recasting the faith in its own image, the imperialistic Church created the Bible based on little more than human invention. Playing that tired old record of anti-religious sentiment, the *Code* states, "[E]very faith in the world is based on fabrication . . . every religion describes God through metaphor."

Too bad the Church took its metaphors literally, like the virgin birth and Christ's resurrection. Such literalism fueled their campaign of doctrinal cleansing through witch hunts, Crusades, Inquisitions, and . . . conspiracies to silence free-thinkers and the adherents of the "truth."

"TRUTH" LOST

What was the "truth" that the Church would stop at nothing to suppress? By now, most folks are aware of the spoiler that Jesus was not divine, that Mary Magdalene was his lover and bore his child, that she was the leader of the church (and not Peter), and that she was worshipped as the *sacred feminine*.

But perhaps the most threatening "truth" for the Church was the focus of Jewish and early Christian worship: *Hieros Gamos*—the sexual union of man and woman through which they became spiritually whole. According to the novel, *Hieros Gamos* was the centerpiece of worship in Solomon's temple. Men came to the temple—where both YHWH and his female counterpart Shekinah resided—to encounter God through sexual intercourse with priestesses.

The threat was obvious. If man could experience communion with God through sex, what need did he have for the Church, or for doctrines of faith for that matter? Therefore, to remove individual access to God, the Church initiated a smear campaign against the sexual union, turning it into a shameful act. By hatching a wave of moralistic teachings, the Church became an obstacle to man's spiritual quest.

RECLAIMING THE "TRUTH"

After portraying the Church as oppressive and sex as salvific, the *Code's* answer to the human condition is religious pluralism—sort of. According to *The Da Vinci Code*, the Knights Templar—the guardians of these volatile "truths"—built Rosslyn Chapel according to the design of Solomon's temple. By including religious symbols of all cultures, the chapel was "a shrine to all faiths . . . to all traditions . . . [but], above all to nature and the goddess."

The message? All religions are equal, but some are more equal than others. It's enough to make the pigs in *Animal Farm* smile. In the *Code*, what is more equal is neo-paganism, the religion of the Goddess. For only the Goddess offers us peace, unity, ecological balance, discovery of the God *within*, and salvation through sex. It is the perfect pitch for a narcissistic generation entrenched in postmodern skepticism. For others who have become either disenchanted with traditional religion or have been victims of religious moralizing, the *Code* offers an attractive alternative. But where does that alternative lead?

TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE

The *Code's* "salvation through sex" echoes the

sexual liberation philosophy of Planned Parenthood founder Margaret Sanger. Sanger—who called the morality of self-denial cruel—announced that uninhibited sexual expression would lead to a utopian society. In *Pivot of Civilization*, Sanger writes, “Through sex, mankind will attain the great spiritual illumination which will transform the world, and light up the only path to an earthly paradise.” You don’t say!

Unfortunately for her disciples, Sanger’s hopeful visions have proven wrong. For after more than forty years, the ideology of sexual liberation has not led to utopian bliss, but to a dystopian culture with burgeoning rates of divorce, out-of-wedlock births, single parent homes, abortion, sexually transmitted disease, with all of the concomitant problems of abuse, poverty, and emotional and psychological trauma.

The *Code*’s postmodern themes—truth as relative, history as subjective, morality as oppressive, authority as coercive, and institutions as corrupt—make up a potent tonic in the age of the sovereign Self, where moral autonomy and individual choice reign supreme. Once again, however, history is our schoolmaster. The most oppressive systems, the cruelest regimes, and the bloodiest massacres on record have been the products of societies that denied the existence of transcendent authority and objective moral truth.

That is not to say that the Church is blameless and that atrocities have not been committed in the name of Christianity. Sadly, Church history is blotted by episodes of corruption, oppression, and tyranny. Even today, incidences of sex scandals, investment fraud, and fiscal mismanagement continue to blemish the Church and hinder its mission to “be” the gospel and restore culture. Individual acts of bigotry, prejudice, and hypocrisy on the part of believers still marginalize those on the inside of the Church, and alienate those on the outside.

But unlike the moral vacuum of the *Code*’s relativistic worldview, Christianity has a powerful corrective—the revealed Word of God. The proper application of the revealed Word is rightly credited for the great social movements in history. As chronicled by historian Alvin J. Schmidt, Christianity’s ideals of compassion and human dignity have fueled everything from the establishment of hospitals in the fourth century to the civil rights movement in the twentieth.

Finally, there is the *Code*’s humanized Jesus who, as one Unitarian website put it, “is more believable and accessible to modern, educated Americans.” On close inspection, he is a downsized deity offering no-demands enlightenment with nary a discouraging word. For many today, like author Elaine Pagels, this new Jesus is appealing.

After being turned off by Christian judgmentalism in high school, Pagels had an epiphanal moment after reading the *Gospel of Thomas*. There Jesus is reported to have said, “If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring will save you.” The attraction for Pagels was that this Jesus did not tell her what to believe, but only “to discover what lies hidden within ourselves.” It is a worldview that draws deep into the well of moral relativism, where spiritual evolution depends not on truth, belief, and a transcendent God, but on one’s feelings, sincerity, and an internal compass; and where all faith expressions are considered equally valid, provided that they derive from one’s personal journey rather than from canons and authority.

The worldview of *The Da Vinci Code*, like that of Pagels, may offer us spirituality on our own terms, but it leads to moral vertigo. For if “what lies hidden” in me says that adult-child sex is beneficial to children, and “what lies hidden” in you says that it is injurious, our man-sized Messiah offers us no overarching standard, or ultimate authority to arbitrate our difference.

If that sounds troubling, Dan Brown reminds us that intelligent people everywhere know that authority is coercive, reason is infallible and choice is sublime—so we should just trust our instincts. But haven’t we heard all of this somewhere before?

“For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (The serpent to the woman)

Regis Nicoll is a freelance writer and a Centurion of the Wilberforce Forum. Having worked in the nuclear power industry for over thirty years, Regis serves as an elder, teacher, and men’s ministry leader in the Collegedale Church in Tennessee. Regis publishes a free weekly commentary to stimulate thought on current issues from a Christian perspective. To be placed on this free e-mail distribution list, e-mail him at: centurion51@aol.com.

For Further Reading and Information

Alvin J. Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World* (Zondervan, 2004).

Carl E. Olson, "Gnostic Nonsense," *Touchstone*, April 2005.

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Read the [District Court ruling](#) of Lewis Perdue's suit (PDF).

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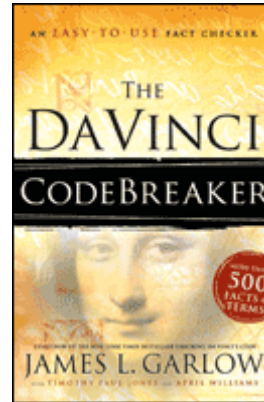
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Da Vinci Codebreaker, The: An Easy-to-Use Fact Checker

Author: James L. Garlow

Edition: Paperback

Price: 9.99

Dimensions: 5.5 x 8.38

Number of Pages: 208

Publication Date: Apr. 06

Status: Available

Description:

Fiction or Fact?

What is the truth about...

- Jesus: Was he married and the father of a daughter?
- Mary Magdalene: Was she Jesus' choice to lead the church until some men took it away from her?
- Christianity: Did it really borrow everything from paganism?
- Women: Did the church really kill 5 million females?
- The Mona Lisa and The Last Supper: Do these paintings contain secret clues?

This easy-to-use fact checker provides answers to the questions readers most often ask about The Da Vinci Code. Historically and theologically correct explanations are given for the more than 500 entries that include terms, concepts, people, locations, and events.

Arranged alphabetically, dictionary style, this book is a must for thoughtful readers who

seek more information about the claims of the novel and film.

A Crossings Book Club Main Selection

Hear a **Audio News Release** [here](#)
(QuickTime MP3 file)

Endorsements: "As a religiously committed Jew, I've been appalled at the number of gullible readers who accept *The Da Vinci Code* as a piece of serious religious scholarship, rather than recognizing the novel for what it is--a cheap, skillfully constructed entertainment that is simulatenously a bitterly biased, utterly irresponsible slander of Christian tradition. *The Da Vinci Codebreaker* provides the factual background fairminded people need to correct the lies, myths, and misunderstandings so recklessly promulgated by Dan Brown's novel and, no doubt, by Ron Howard's upcoming film. This book merits broad circulation and serious discussion."
--**Michael Medved**, nationally syndicated talk show host and bestselling author

"*The Da Vinci Code* reminds us once again how much interest people have in the story of Jesus. Curiosity about who he was and what he did never seems to come to an end. In a work like *The Da Vinci Code*, fiction can be easily confused as an accurate portrayal of history. In this case, the facts about Jesus are far more amazing than anything we could make up or imagine. Jim Garlow provides for us a great glossary to help us unwrap the amazing mystery that goes far beyond *The Da Vinci Code*."

--**Erwin Raphael McManus**, Lead Pastor, Mosaic

"Welcome to the first dictionary you'll want to read from start to finish. *The Da Vinci Code Breaker* is a thorough--and thoroughly readable--overview of the names, facts, dates, and everything else you need to know about *The Da Vinci Code*."

--**Pastor Ted Haggard**, President, National Association of Evangelicals

"This is a book for any person--whether you are for or against the thesis of *The Da Vinci Code*. Garlow has gone beyond the large plethora of books affirming or refuting *The Da Vinci Code*, including his own coauthored

book *Cracking Da Vinci's Code*, by supplying the reader with a bona fide *Da Vinci Code* dictionary. This glossary of more than 500 terms should be a constant companion to anyone who has read *The Da Vinci Code* or who will see the movie. It is a quick, insightful, easy-to-navigate tool. But most important, he provides the correct definitions for terms and concepts. Putting it simply, this is a must-read."

--**Tim LaHaye**, Author, LEFT BEHIND series

"Jim Garlow's previously coauthored book on *The Da Vinci Code* "led the pack" both in timing and sales as well as in content. Now comes a badly needed tool, a dictionary that helps every *Da Vinci Code* reader understand the real meaning of terms that Dan Brown used, plus provides so many words or concepts that should have been in *The Da Vinci Code*, but were omitted. *The Da Vinci CodeBreaker* is a badly needed historical corrective to The Da Vinci Code errors."

--**Jack Hayford**, Founding Pastor, The Church on the Way
Founder & Chancellor, King's College and Seminary

"Satan always aims his big guns at the doctrine of the Trinity. If Jesus is not divine, then He could not have paid for our sins and our faith is in vain. Jim Garlow (along with Peter Jones) has provided such an excellent rebuttal in *Cracking Da Vinci's Code*. Now [Garlow] has provided another helpful book, *The Da Vinci CodeBreaker*, to help counter the lies propagated by this blockbuster book and movie."

--**D. James Kennedy, Ph.D.**

Senior Minister, Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church

Author Information: Dr. James L. Garlow is the coauthor of *Cracking Da Vinci's Code*, written with Peter Jones, which has sold more than a third of a million copies. He has a ThM from Princeton Theological Seminary and a PhD in historical theology from Drew University. Jim speaks nationwide and has appeared on CNN, MSNBC, CNBC, FOX, and NBC. His daily radio commentary, *The Garlow Perspective*, can be heard on nearly 500 radio outlets. He is the senior pastor of Skyline Wesleyan Church. Jim and his wife are the

parents of four children and live in San Diego, California.

Timothy Paul Jones is the author of several works, including *Christian History Made Easy* and *Answers to The Da Vinci Code*. He is the recipient of the Baker Book House Award for excellence in theological scholarship and has a doctorate in educational leadership from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

April Williams, a professional artist, holds a Master's in Theological Studies from the Divinity School of Duke University.

Reviews: "Did the Church take part in a cover-up to hide the true role of women in Christianity? Did Jesus and Mary Magdalene wed? Has the Holy Grail been found? Garlow tackles all of these questions and more in this glossary-formatted book. An easy to read and informative reference, *The Da Vinci Codebreaker* is a must-read for anyone wanting the facts behind these allegations. Hundreds of topics are covered here, most with commentary on the accuracy and verifiability of Brown's assertions."--Renee Maranzino, *Christian Music Planet*

"The dictionary style writing allows readers easy access to alphabetically thumb through key words and phrases found in Brown's novel, and unearth useful facts and actual truth. With Garlow's latest book, people with questions about the accuracy of Brown's book will become better armed with 'historically and theologically correct explanations.'" --Phillip Tomasso III, *In the Library Review*

Buy this book from Amazon.com, ChristianBook.com, Barnes & Noble, or [your local bookstore](#).

[It's a novel! Get it?]

From the author's web site:

The Plot:

http://www.danbrown.com/novels/davinci_code/plot.html

The Greatest Conspiracy of the Past 2000 Years Is About To Unravel....

While in Paris on business, Harvard symbologist Robert Langdon receives an urgent late-night phone call: the elderly curator of the Louvre has been murdered inside the museum. Near the body, police have found a baffling cipher. Solving the enigmatic riddle, Langdon is stunned to discover it leads to a trail of clues hidden in the works of Da Vinci...clues visible for all to see...and yet ingeniously disguised by the painter.

Langdon joins forces with a gifted French cryptologist, Sophie Neveu, and learns the late curator was involved in the Priory of Sion—an actual secret society whose members included Sir Isaac Newton, Botticelli, Victor Hugo, and Da Vinci, among others. The Louvre curator has sacrificed his life to protect the Priory's most sacred trust: the location of a vastly important religious relic, hidden for centuries.

<http://www.breakpoint.org/listingarticle.asp?ID=2103>

THE SO-CALLED 'GOSPEL' OF JUDAS

4/12/2006

Unmasking an Ancient Heresy

Welcome to Holy Week, American style. Just as millions of Christians are preparing to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, the media is once again out to debunk historical Christianity.

Just last weekend I was in an airport bookstore and saw the new book counter filled with numerous editions of *The Da Vinci Code*. Then I picked up the *New York Times*, and there I was greeted with the headline on the front page that read, "In Ancient Document, Judas, Minus the Betrayal."

You probably have seen the hype, including a one-hour *National Geographic* TV spectacular:

After seventeen hundred years, the story goes, the long-lost text of the so-called "Gospel of Judas" has re-surfaced. It claims that Jesus secretly told Judas to betray Him; so Judas is really a good disciple.

Well, it's not a new discovery. This "new gospel" and the heresy it espouses—Gnosticism—were rejected as fiction by Christian leaders and the Church as early as 180 A.D.

Gnosticism was an attempt to add to Christianity an essentially Eastern worldview dressed up with Christian language. It was presented to the Roman world as the true Gospel—complete with endless mysteries that only those with secret knowledge could unravel. Many unsuspecting people were enthralled with Gnostic writings, particularly their sometimes gory and salacious initiation ceremonies. Christian pastors and theologians repeatedly rejected all forms of Gnosticism, until, by the middle of the third century, it had all but disappeared.

But now it is back with a vengeance, with supposed discoveries and works like Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*. It provides the means for Christianity's detractors to debunk the historical Jesus, and it certainly sells books. Seven million copies of *The Da Vinci Code* is testimony to that. Gnosticism has particular appeal today because of the postmodern age, which has rejected historical truth. So you can find God any way you wish, through your own group. This, of course, is the belief that is at the root of the spreading New Age movement.

The danger is that we have a biblically illiterate population. People today don't know—maybe don't care—whether there is a difference between the Gospel of Judas and the Gospel of John. They are unfamiliar with the work of the ancient canonical councils of the Church (which rejected the Gnostic "gospels" time and again) or even of the basic creeds or confessions of the Christian Church. Sadly, people are as gullible today as ever.

Now it is tempting to get angry at *National Geographic* and the liberal press for unleashing this fraudulent "gospel" at the beginning of the holiest week of the year. But don't. Instead, let's use the media attention to debunk the debunkers, to point out to friends that this regurgitated Gnosticism—the *Da Vinci Code* and the "gospel" of Judas included—is nothing more than historically unsupportable fantasy.

Then we can point them to the knowledge that is accessible to all people that has been accessible to Christians for two thousand years and proven historically accurate. It's called the Bible.

But whatever you do, get informed first. Come to our website (see further reading below) or call us here at "BreakPoint" (1-877-322-5527) and find some of the resources that we are offering. And get busy because millions can be suckered in—unless you and I set the record straight.

For Further Reading and Information

Please help support the Christian worldview ministries of BreakPoint and the Wilberforce Forum. [Donate online today!](#) Or call 1-877-322-5527.

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Visit the "[Da Vinci Challenge](#)" website.

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DOUBTS RESURRECTED

By Allan Dobras

4/13/2006

Confessions of an Unbeliever

It must be close to Easter. Public schools are celebrating spring break, what once was the Easter bunny is now the spring bunny, and, predictably, the media has brought to public awareness new "revelations" that cast doubt about the authenticity of the gospel record and the person of Jesus Christ.(1)

So it is not surprising that a March 5 *Washington Post* article featured the views of University of North Carolina religion professor Bart Ehrman, who raised some serious questions about the reliability of the New Testament story and whether or not Jesus ever existed.

Actually, a *more* serious question might be, how did a person who calls himself an "unbeliever" and "happy agnostic" become the head of the prestigious religious studies department at the University of North Carolina?

Professor Ehrman is the author of the bestselling book *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* and a popular campus lecturer. His story is that of a man who eventually loses his faith despite having studied at two of the nation's most solidly orthodox Christian institutions: Moody Bible Institute and Wheaton College. Following his time at Wheaton, he settled in at Princeton Theological Seminary, where he specialized in the study of ancient texts and began to feel "frightened" over what he discovered about the veracity of the extant biblical manuscripts.

RELIABILITY OF NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS

Actually, what the professor "discovered" wasn't really new at all, but has been well known to scholars and serious students of the Bible for

generations, suggesting that he was an easy sell for the purveyors of modern revisionism. According to the Post article, what caused fear to "bubble up" in him was the revelation that the Greek New Testament manuscripts presently in existence do not show a word-for-word correlation with each other. Ehrman, the article states, found that the Bible simply wasn't error-free:

The mistakes grew exponentially as he traced translations through the centuries. There are some 5,700 ancient Greek manuscripts that are the basis of the modern versions of the New Testament, and scholars have uncovered more than 200,000 differences in those texts. "Put it this way: There are more variances among our manuscripts than there are words in the New Testament."

If this criticism is taken at face value, one could only conclude that the New Testament, which contains about 181,000 words, is error-filled from beginning to end. Yet this argument is more than a little disingenuous. If scriptural reliability were based on this premise, the comparison should be made with all 5,700 manuscripts, i.e., 200,000 variances in 1,031,700,000 words, or .00019 percent.

In any case, the exercise is of slight value in determining the reliability of the biblical texts in use today. Ehrman himself acknowledges that the great majority of the variances are "inconsequential errors in grammar or metaphor." In those instances where a notable disparity exists among the body of manuscripts, scholars make a decision on the most likely text by assessing how frequently a particular version of the word or phrase in question is found in comparison to other versions of the same text.

In this manner, and in conjunction with other methodologies, scholars have been able to construct the canon of scripture with a high degree of confidence that it is faithful to the text of the original documents.

THE RESURRECTION

Although the scribes who copied the ancient writings were meticulously careful, they were not infallible, and the original text of a small portion of scripture is open to scholarly debate. Several of the items troubling Professor Ehrman are pointed out in the article, which he describes as "profound" variations:

The last 12 verses of the Gospel of Mark appear to have been added to the text years later -- and these are the only verses in that book that show Christ reappearing after his death.

It is factual that the account of Jesus' appearances in Mark 16:9-19 is only noted in a handful of the extant Greek manuscripts, and the context has led scholars to doubt whether this account was in the original manuscript. Most Bible commentaries recognize this inconsistency and make note of the uncertain validity of these passages in annotations to the text. It is also true that Mark 16:9-19 contains no basic doctrinal issues that are not otherwise established in other portions of scripture.

It is important to note that Mark was not among the original twelve disciples and his gospel is directed toward gentile readers. He was a likely convert of Peter and would not have been present when Jesus appeared to His disciples. Thus, his account of the resurrection story focuses primarily on the discovery of the empty tomb by Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James, who are instructed by the angel to inform the disciples that, "He has risen!" The absence of Jesus' appearances in Mark would in no way diminish the power and validity of His resurrection.

In Matthew 28, Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James, and then to His disciples; in Luke 24, He appears to the women, His disciples, and the two men on the road to Emmaus; in John 20 and 21, He appears to the women and, on more than one occasion, appears to His disciples. Paul, who met the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, gives this account of Jesus' appearances in 1 Corinthians 15:3-6:

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised up on the third day according to the scriptures, and that He appeared to Peter, and then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all He appeared to me also as to one abnormally born. For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, for I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God, I am what I am, and His grace to me was not without effect.

Paul would go on to preach the Gospel to the gentiles and submit to being beheaded by the Roman emperor, Nero, rather than deny his account of the risen Lord.

THE HOLY TRINITY

Professor Ehrman was also troubled by the questionable authenticity of 1 John 5:7-8, which he claims is the only place the Holy Trinity is spelled out in the entire Bible:

For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one.

1 John 5 is certainly not the only place in Scripture where the triune nature of God is present: God the Father, the Son (Word), and Spirit are present at the creation in first chapter of Genesis; the three are present at Christ's baptism in Matthew 3, and Jesus tells His disciples in Matthew 28:19 to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Perhaps most clearly, Jesus tells His disciples in John 15:26:

But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me.

LIAR, LUNATIC, LORD . . . OR LEGEND?

When pondering the question of just who is the Jesus of the Gospels, Ehrman considered the options proposed by Christian apologists such as Josh McDowell. In his book Evidence That Demands a Verdict, McDowell makes the case that the wisdom and moral clarity demonstrated by Jesus ruled out any thought that He could have been a lunatic. He further reasons that "someone who lived as Jesus lived, taught as Jesus taught and died as Jesus died could not have been a liar," which leaves only the option that Jesus is Lord. However, Professor Ehrman offers another hypothesis:

"Sometimes Christian apologists say there are only three options to who Jesus was: a liar, a lunatic or the Lord. But there could be a fourth option—legend."

In other words, the professor believes that Jesus never existed, and the stories about Him were simply contrived. This is quite a statement to make about someone who is so rooted in history

that our reckoning of time is measured by His birth. His story is set among historically factual people, places and events, and those who claimed to have walked with Him purposefully underwent torture and death rather than deny the Gospel or their personal encounters with the risen Jesus. This is certainly not the stuff that legends are made of.

TRAVELING THE SECULAR HIGHWAY

Nevertheless, somewhere on the road that passed through Moody Bible and Wheaton College and into the secular halls of Princeton, Professor Ehrman found disbelief. In a similar journey, a noted Bible scholar and professor of preaching at Gordon-Conwell Seminary, Haddon Robinson, tells a markedly different story about his introduction to the secular world.

Dr. Robinson was teaching and preaching at Dallas Theological Seminary and decided he needed further education to really do that well, so he enrolled in the University of Illinois in order to get a Ph.D. in communication. Thus, he left his secure position in the seminary to enter the very threatening environment of a secular university.

I'll tell you I was scared. When I got to Illinois, it was not a friendly environment, it was a good environment, but there [certainly] was not a religious revival going on. When I got there I went to the Classics Department and the man I got to see was Dr. Otto Deider, a classics scholar who was over in the old classics library.

I walked in and he said gruffly, "Well, what do you want?"

I said, "They sent me over here because they thought you should be my advisor."

"Me, an advisor? Why?"

"I'm interested in preaching . . . they thought you would fit."

He pointed to a huge pulpit Bible and said, "Do you plan to preach from that book?"

"I do."

"Do you know how that book is different from all these other books?"

He didn't wait for me to answer, but continued,

"Aristotle . . . Plato . . . Quintillian . . . I've read them all. Do you know how they differ from that book?"

Then I said, "You tell me."

To my surprise, he said, "I don't know anybody that has ever been changed by reading those books." Pointing to the Bible, he said, "I have met people who have been changed reading that book."

I remember feeling all the insecurities that I had and thinking, God's here. I don't know what this is going to be like, but God's here, and that word from that professor at that moment was as though God was saying to me. "I haven't deserted you." And I tell you when you are wrestling with insecurity just something like that can make a great difference in your life.

UNBELIEF HAS ITS REWARDS

On the other hand, Ehrman traveled the broad secular highway and evidently missed the narrow gate. With his faith shredded, he moved on to the University of North Carolina where his unbelief was rewarded with the chair of the religious studies department, professor of New Testament studies, and a successful career as author and educator. Professor Ehrman takes his personal unbelief into the classroom, imparting to his students the following advice:

You shouldn't think something just because you believe it. You need reasons. That applies to religion. That applies to politics . . . just because your parents believe something isn't good enough.

The University of North Carolina does not introduce students to unbelief in all religious traditions. In the summer of 2002, the university required all incoming freshmen to read and be prepared to discuss the politically correct *Approaching the Qur'an* for the university's Summer Reading Program. The university claimed the book was "an appropriate introduction to the literature and culture of a profound moral and spiritual tradition . . . and a great opportunity to have a conversation on the teachings of one of the world's great religions."

But regarding Christianity, the message from Professor Ehrman's Department of Religious Studies is that it is a faith with no historical record. It was "all incense and myth, told by illiterate men," says Ehrman, and was not committed to writing until decades after the events allegedly took place.

With all due respect for Professor Ehrman's opinions, Christians look to the Scriptures as not

the product of "illiterate men," but the Word of God weaved into a continuous testimony of the promise of the risen Christ:

"Let not your heart be troubled: believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

(1) *The April 9 National Geographic Channel broadcast of "The Gospel of Judas" suggested that Jesus and Judas were co-conspirators in a plot to arrange Jesus' own execution; a study released April 4 by a Florida State University professor claimed that it is likely Jesus walked on an isolated patch of ice on the Sea of Galilee; and the media is agog about the pending release of the clearly blasphemous film, The Da Vinci Code, which alleges that Jesus did not die on the cross but lived to marry Mary Magdalene and father a daughter.*

Allan Dobras is a freelance writer on religious and cultural issues and an electronics engineer. He lives in Springfield, Virginia.

For Further Reading and Information

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<http://www.breakpoint.org/listingarticle.asp?ID=2163>

DEBUNKING DAVINCI

By Mark Gauvreau Judge
5/6/2004

A New Twist on an Old Heresy

A review of *De-Coding Da Vinci: The Facts Behind the Fiction of the Da Vinci Code*, by Amy Welborn and *Fact and Fiction in the Da Vinci Code* by Steve Kellmeyer.

At least Mel Gibson's critics waited until the man had started shooting. Ron Howard hasn't directed a frame of his adaptation of *The Da Vinci Code* and already the onslaught of books has started. While the anti-*Da Vinci's* can sometimes sound as hysterical as Gibson's worst enemy, for the most part they are sticking to the strongest line of attack: talking about facts. With a few exceptions, Gibson's critics didn't really know the subject they were attacking; they just knew that Gibson's conservatism made them uneasy. (One talking head claimed not to have read the Bible then dilated on about how inaccurate Gibson's portrayal of Pilate is.) The secular critics of the Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* seem to know their subject – at least if two new books on the phenomenon are any indication.

Amy Welborn's *De-Coding Da Vinci* and Steve Kellmeyer's *Fact and Fiction in the Da Vinci Code* are small books, not much more than a hundred pages, but every page is chock full of facts – facts about the history of the Bible, facts about the Catholic church, facts about Opus Dei, facts about etymology. Both can lapse into hyperbole, although Kellmeyer is by far the worst offender. Welborn has written several books on Christianity and holds a master of arts in Church history from Vanderbilt. She also avoids Kellmeyer's biggest gaffe by summarizing the plot of *Da Vinci* for three people out there who haven't yet heard anything about the book. *The Da Vinci Code* is basically what you would get if you mix up a season of the X-Files, with a year's subscription to Gnosis magazine, and the mawkish "go-girlfriend" sentimentality of the Oprah Winfrey Show. Be sure to include a good, healthy portion of anti-Christian bias to the pan and simmer on high heat. Distilled, it holds that Jesus was married

and his Church was really meant to be celebrated on female goddess power, but it was subverted and perverted by evil conservative forces in the Vatican.

Admittedly, powerful premise for a novel, but *The Da Vinci Code* is more than a novel, right? Yes and no. The book is a talisman for people who love to see Christians attacked for any reason, but, it is so poorly written that it's doubtful to stand the tests of time. Misunderstanding this is why Kellmeyer makes a grave mistake in his book. In an opening section, he delves into the origin and history of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the crank conspiracy theory document that has been responsible for spilling Jewish blood for over a hundred years. "Whenever we encounter a work of historical fiction," Kellmeyer announces, pointing to *The Da Vinci Code*, "it pays to keep *The Protocols* in mind." Really? Any work of historical fiction? So much for the terrific World War II mysteries of Alan Furst and Civil War novels like the *Killer Angels*.

Kellmeyer nails Brown on several errors – the pagan religion Wicca was invented during world War II and has no relics; Constantine never commissioned a new Bible – but also tends to be sarcastic and melodramatic, which when combined can sometimes get him into trouble. Here he picks up on the fact that Robert Langdon, the hero of *The Da Vinci Code*, has claustrophobia: "Eighty percent of the books in America are sold to women. Mr. Brown is not only a good novelist [!], but a smart man.... His protagonist is a woman's dream. A handsome, sexy man complete with an irrational fear of small spaces that just gives a girl a reason to hold him close. Indeed, the whole plot is meant to appeal to the twenty-first century post-Christian woman."

Does the twenty-first century post-Christian woman really find phobias irresistible? Some of us single men might doubt that. Kellmeyer also defends Opus Dei, the bette noir of *The Da Vinci Code*, noting that the book has its members doing all kinds of "silly pseudo-Catholic acts." Yet this is a difficult fiction to get worked up about – surely it is permissible for a novelist to make a few members of an organization villains. After all, *Forrest Gump* made all 1960s protestors – a group that was bad enough without exaggeration - look like woman-beating psychopaths.

If Kellmeyer overstates the mendacity of the book, he's right that the real problem with *The Da*

Vinci Code lies not as much with the book as with its fans. For most of them the book will reaffirm their hostility towards both men and the Church. Such resentment has become its own theology in recent years, a theology of feelings over reason – a.k.a. the Universal Church of the Divine Me and My Rights. These are the people who are most in need of inoculation from *Da Vinci* fever, and the best thing to do for them would be to get them a copy of the best defense of Christianity as a unique force separate from paganism, G.K.Chesterton's *The Everlasting Man*.

Short of that, Amy Welborn's *De-Coding Da-Vinci* is a strong effort. Where Kellmeyer is sometimes glib, Welborn is sober, reasonable (although like Kellmeyer, she does claim that *Da Vinci* is "more than a novel.") She wastes no time getting to the core of what fuels the *Da Vinci* phenomenon – Gnosticism. The ancient heretical movement, an offshoot of Christianity, had a few consistent themes: the source of goodness is the spiritual; the material and corporeal world is evil; humanity is messed up because we don't realize that the "spark" of the divine is not outside but within us; salvation is attained by acquiring secret knowledge (gnosis means knowledge); only a select few are worthy of having this knowledge.

This is the nub of the entire thing, and the reason for its popularity. Dan Brown has not uncovered some baroque conspiracy that will inaugurate a brand new theology; he has reintroduced a very old heresy. To his credit, he has introduced it at the very time and place where it would be most celebrated: the narcissistic, unbelieving twenty-first century West. Gnosticism, after all, is the official religion of Hollywood.

Of course, Brown has delivered this tonic in a very rickety container. Welborn demolishes many of the myths in *Da Vinci* and reveals enough mistakes to embarrass Jayson Blair. A character says that the mitre, a headpiece worn by bishops in the Western church, originates from ancient mystery religions. In fact, the mitre was not worn until the eleventh century. Brown claims that Paris was founded by the Merovingian royal family; the city was actually founded by Celtic Gauls called the Parisii in the third century BC. He claims that Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman empire but that didn't happen until Theodosius in the late fourth century.

Welborn saves the biggest whopper for the end. Brown actually gets the most important name in

the book wrong. Leonardo Da Vinci was not, is not, called Da Vinci. Da Vinci means “from Vinci.” Art history books, dissertations, librarians, scholars – none of them refer to the artist as Da Vinci, but Leonardo. As Welborn notes, calling him Da Vinci is really like referring to Jesus as “Of Nazareth.” Getting the name of the central character wrong is enough to douse anyone’s inner spark.

Mark Gauvreau Judge is a freelance writer who lives in the Washington, D.C. area. His most recent book, [Damn Senators: My Grandfather and the Story of Washington's Only World Series Championship](#) (Encounter, 2003), is now available in paperback.

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<http://www.breakpoint.org/listingarticle.asp?ID=2164>

THE DA VINCI CONSPIRACY

*By Chuck Colson
1/20/2004*

Distinguishing Fact from Fiction

Several months ago, a friend came to me outraged over Dan Brown’s thriller, *The Da Vinci Code*. He read the book, and while he found the story fascinating, it was filled, he said, with historical distortions and was nothing but an anti-Christian—specifically anti-Catholic—screed. Don’t worry, I told him, it will blow over like all fads. Besides, no thinking person will take it seriously.

Well, I was wrong. Since then I’ve talked to a lot of people who have read the book. And for non-believers, it confirms their unbelief. It turns off honest seekers, and it has confused and disillusioned even many Christians.

That’s because while Brown has a knack for creating suspense, breakneck pacing, and surprising twists, he also has a knack for playing fast and loose with the truth.

The Da Vinci Code begins with the murder of a museum curator. A Harvard professor and a French code breaker are called in to decipher a cryptic message that he wrote just before he died. They discover that he was protecting a powerful and dangerous secret.

So far, just your average thriller, right? We soon find out that the curator had evidence that could disprove the deity of Christ. Although the Church had tried for centuries to suppress the evidence, great thinkers and artists have planted clues everywhere: in paintings by Da Vinci, the architecture of cathedrals—even Disney cartoons.

That sounds like a loony conspiracy theory, except that Brown props up his flimsy edifice with impressive-sounding, supposedly historical “facts.” One of his characters even states, “The historical evidence supporting this [story] is substantial.”

But it’s not. Brown uses a combination of lies and half-truths, founded on a skewed perspective of Church history. In Brown’s view, the heretics in the early Church were the real truth-tellers, and the Church banned their doctrines because they threatened the Church’s power base.

Just in case readers go back to their Bibles to check facts, Brown has his characters claim that the Gospels aren’t historically accurate. Instead, it’s the Gnostic gospels—books discarded by the early Church as unreliable—that tell the truth about Jesus.

As Dan Brown knows, an adventure story like *The Da Vinci Code* is an ideal way to get past people’s guard. Between trying to guess who the real villains are and trying to decode the various clues scattered throughout the book, who’s going to notice that Brown’s religious theories are as phony as a three-dollar bill?

Christians need to notice, that’s who. And we need to do our research so that we can respond to the fabrications in *The Da Vinci Code*. (See the links at the end of this commentary to get started.)

Even though Dan Brown knows the techniques of writing a best-selling thriller, he uses them to reach the most banal conclusions. He apparently thinks it’s exciting to show Jesus as an ordinary human being with strong leanings toward goddess worship. But the biblical story of Jesus—God the Son coming to earth as a man to die and rise again for our salvation—is infinitely more exciting. If you know Christians who are reading the book, tell them, “Throw it away.” And if you have non-Christian friends who have read it, debunk *The Da Vinci Code*. Then tell them a much better story: one that has the added advantage of being true.

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<http://www.breakpoint.org/listingarticle.asp?ID=2165>

FALSE ADVERTISING

By Chuck Colson
5/27/2004

Da Vinci Doesn't Even Get Heresy Right

Dan Brown's historical thriller *The Da Vinci Code* has now reached its sixtieth week on the bestseller list with more than five million copies sold in the United States alone. Plans are being made to turn the book into a movie. It would seem that the influence of Brown's novel—which is based on the premise that Jesus was only human, not divine—has never been greater.

Yet a number of Christian voices are now speaking out about the flaws and fabrications of *The Da Vinci Code*. The *New York Times* reports that in the past couple of months, at least ten books refuting Brown's argument have been released. One such book is Dr. Darrell Bock's *Breaking The Da Vinci Code*.

A lot of people don't understand why Christians are making so much fuss about a mere adventure

novel. But in his book, Bock asserts that *The Da Vinci Code* is much more than a novel. The book is an attempt to promote a worldview, one that's deeply antithetical to the Christian worldview.

Through his characters, Brown argues that the divinity of Jesus and the authority of the four Gospels were not decided until the Council of Nicea in the fourth century. He also claims that the church unjustly suppressed the view of the Gnostics.

By examining church history, however, Bock proves Brown wrong on all counts. The Gnostic gospels of which Brown writes were written well after the Gospels in our New Testament, and the church never considered them authoritative. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were always considered the "preeminent" sources of authority on Jesus' life.

Bock also points out what any serious reader of the Bible would realize: The original Gospels proclaimed Jesus the Son of God, and they were accepted centuries before the Council of Nicea. Gnosticism was rejected, in fact, because it differed from this long accepted and practiced belief.

What's really surprising is that Brown doesn't even get his facts about Gnosticism straight. According to the Gnostic gospels, Jesus is a spiritual being who didn't die on the cross; a human "substitute" was crucified by the people while the real Jesus was "laughing at their ignorance." And Gnosticism teaches that salvation comes not through God's grace, but through secret knowledge that is given only to those intelligent and self-aware enough to receive it—nice if you're one of the chosen ones, but not so nice for the rest of us.

But we get none of this in Brown's account. To the contrary, Brown misstates Gnosticism by asserting Jesus was human. The book is yet another example of what Frederica Mathewes-Green calls "our culture's penchant for pick-and-choose religion." She goes on to say that, "every pick-and-choose religion has this limitation: The follower can never grow any larger than his own preconceptions. He has established himself a priori as the ultimate authority, and his thoughts will never be larger than his hat size."

By contrast, Christian truth is rooted in the authority of the Scriptures—tested, reflected upon, and debated over two millennia—and is

rooted in the Church and creed, not in personal preferences.

Critiquing The Da Vinci Code is a matter of defending truth, and you need to learn to do this from Bock's book or from another. Set your neighbors straight; with five million copies out there we've got a big job.

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<http://www.breakpoint.org/listingarticle.asp?ID=2171>

FACT OR FICTION?

By Chuck Colson

4/25/2006

A New Examination of *The Da Vinci Code*

Three years after its original release, Dan Brown's novel *The Da Vinci Code* is riding a whole new wave of publicity. With the recent plagiarism trial in Great Britain and the upcoming release of the film adaptation, the book is making headlines all over again.

So it's an especially good time to arm ourselves with facts about *The Da Vinci Code*. And I highly recommend Dr. Ken Boa's DVD *Unraveling the Da Vinci Code* and his soon-to-be released book, *The Gospel According to the Da Vinci Code*.

Boa, who is one of the most accomplished Christian thinkers I know, has done extensive research on *The Da Vinci Code*. He says that we need teaching tools like these because so many people have a tendency to confuse fact and fiction—even when we know that what we're reading is just a novel. In this case, Dan Brown encourages that delusion with an author's note in the book stating that "all descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate."

So the average reader with little background in theology, history, or art is likely to come away from the book believing that the Christian Church, out of a hatred for all things feminine, has deliberately been hiding the truth about Jesus' identity and His relationship with Mary Magdalene.

The odd thing is, Dan Brown claims on his website to be a Christian, "although," he adds, "perhaps not in the most traditional sense of the word." But as Ken Boa points out, the negative impression of the Church that Brown's readers receive is no accident. The book itself claims that the secret it supposedly reveals is "so powerful that . . . it

threatened to devastate the very foundation of Christianity." Brown's agenda in this book, Boa charges, is no less than "the deconstruction of Christianity."

On the evidence that Boa presents, it's a fair charge. Why else would Brown fudge so many of his supposedly "accurate" facts—facts that can be easily checked? From the correct spelling of the titles of paintings; to the colors, techniques, and materials used in those paintings; even to the name of the artist around whom the book revolves, Brown commits error after error. And his errors don't stop with art. He gets all kinds of details wrong about both Church history and secular history.

Brown is even wrong about the tenets of Gnosticism, the religion he's really pushing here. Brown presents Gnosticism as a religion that glorifies the body, and Christianity as one that considers the body to be evil. In reality, as an examination of the New Testament and Gnostic documents will show, it's exactly the other way around. Gnosticism, in fact, considers all matter, including the human body, evil. That's why, while Christianity emphasizes the incarnation of Jesus, Gnosticism doesn't even believe in it.

I don't have enough time here to go into all the facts shared by Boa, which is why I urge you to get his DVD *Unraveling the Da Vinci Code* and the book *The Gospel According to the Da Vinci Code* and then see for yourself what the facts are.

Then, make sure you talk to your friends and neighbors who have read *The Da Vinci Code* or who plan to see the movie. Make sure they aren't taken in by what is, in the end, pure mischief and fiction.

For Further Reading and Information

Today's BreakPoint offer: "[Breaking The Da Vinci Code](#)" by Collin Hansen (*Christian History*, 7 November 2003) and "[Thanks, Da Vinci Code](#)" by Chris Armstrong (*Christian History*, 14 November 2003).

Read more [BreakPoint commentaries and articles](#) on *The Da Vinci Code*.

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Also see the DVD by Ken Boa *[Unraveling the Da Vinci Code](#)*.

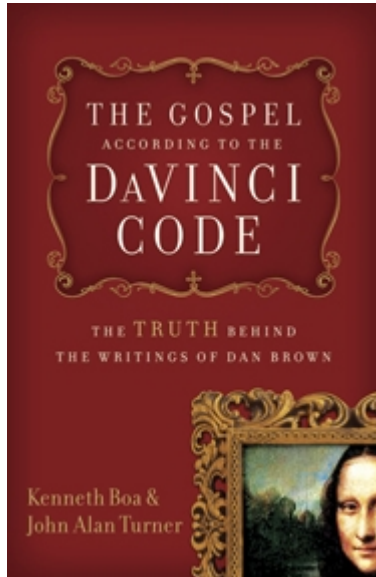
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<http://www.broadmanholman.com/productDetail.asp?isbn=0805441905>



The Gospel According to The Da Vinci Code

Author: Kenneth Boa, John Alan Turner

Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* has become the best-selling hardcover adult novel of all time, spouting a tenuous postmodern worldview akin to the age-old heresy of "Gnosticism." Though Gnosticism has been refuted repeatedly throughout the history of Christianity, and many of Brown's sources have been proven frauds, people are still reading Brown's books to become "enlightened."

The Gospel According to The Da Vinci Code not only refutes the philosophies behind this blockbuster book. It also looks at Brown's other writings to form a clearer picture of the worldview that guides his writings, why this worldview is so popular and what the church must do in response.

Publisher: Broadman & Holman

Pub. Date: May 2006

Type: Paperback

ISBN: 0805441905

Weight: 0.467 lbs

Price: \$14.99

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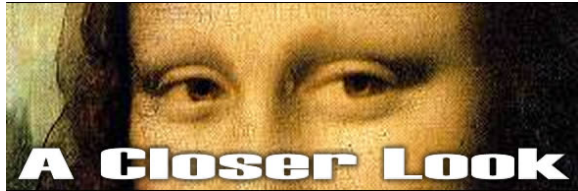
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It's getting harder and harder to ignore religious conspirator Dan Brown as he pyramids *The Da Vinci Code's* million little lies into a billion dollar neo-Gnostic industry. This week alone his smug mug was media-omnipresent as he gloated over his courtroom victory involving the authors of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, who sued him for copyright infringement. Then Fodor's announced a special edition *Code* travel book just as Universal Pictures revved up its marketing efforts for Ron Howard's May 19th release of *The Da Vinci Code* movie.

As literary critics and academic historians gawk in disbelief at Brown's success, Carl Olson, co-author of *The Da Vinci Hoax*, wonders what damage this church-bashing spree is causing all of us, and why so many of us are buying his products. We've asked Olson to explain 3 of the most significant theological distortions in Brown's novel.

April 19, 2006

Dear Concerned Citizen,
by Carl E. Olson

Historical truth takes much abuse in Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*. But even greater damage is done, I think, when the novel makes assertions about theological matters, especially relating to the person of Jesus Christ and early Christian beliefs.

The Divinity of Jesus

Much attention has been given to the *Code's* claim that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene. But an even more audacious claim is made by the character Leigh Teabing, a historian, who insists that until A.D. 325 and the Council of Nicaea, "Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet ..." He later states: "Jesus' establishment as 'the Son of God' was officially proposed and voted on by the Council of Nicaea."

There is clear and copious evidence that the early Christians, dating back to Jesus' time on earth, believed that Jesus of Nazareth was divine. John's Gospel, written between A.D. 80 and 100,

contains some of the strongest statements about the divinity of Jesus. The densely theological prologue proclaims: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made" (Jn1:1-3); the Word is Jesus, the incarnate Son: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" (Jn 1:14). Later, after upsetting some of the Jewish authorities because of his activities on the Sabbath, Jesus' life is threatened, "because he not only broke the sabbath but also called God his Father, making himself equal with God" (Jn 5:18).

The testimony of the New Testament books alone—all written by the late first century or early second century at the latest—clearly refutes Teabing's statement that prior to Constantine and the Council of Nicaea, none of Jesus' followers believed He was anything more than a mortal. But there is also the testimony of numerous Christian writers between A.D. 100 and the fourth century to the belief in Jesus' divinity. In addition to proving what Christians really did believe about Jesus in the first three centuries of Christianity, these writings also provide invaluable context to the theological issues and battles that would eventually be addressed, at least in part, by the Council of Nicaea.

The Council of Nicaea did not define that Jesus, the Son of God, was divine (since that was accepted by Christians) or vote whether or not Jesus was "the Son of God". After all, that title is used over three dozen times in the New Testament to refer to Jesus! Rather, the Council of Nicaea addressed the issue of the exact relationship between the Son and the Father: Are they equal? One in substance? Two Persons? The Council specifically condemned the popular heresy of that time, called Arianism, which insisted that the Son was a lesser god, created by the Father at some point in time and not eternally existent.

The Gnostic "Gospels"

One of the more outlandish claims of Brown's novel is that the early Christians "literally" stole Jesus and shrouded his "human message . . . in an impenetrable cloak of divinity," using it to expand their own power. The novel claims that the gnostic Jesus is far more human than the divinized Jesus of the four canonical Gospels contained in the Christian Bible. Teabing even says that the Emperor Constantine "omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ's human traits and embellished those gospels that made him godlike."

That might sound agreeable to some readers — unless they actually read the so-called "gnostic gospels" and compare them to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The Jesus of the gnostic writings is rarely recognizable as a Jewish carpenter, teacher, and prophet dwelling in first-century Palestine. Instead, he usually described as a phantom-like creature who lectures at length about the "deficiency of aeons", "the mother", "the Arrogant One", and "the archons"—all terms that only the gnostic elite would comprehend, hence their secretive, gnostic character (the Greek word *gnosis* refers to secret or elite knowledge).

Dan Brown's depiction of the early Christians hijacking the truth about Jesus and making Him God while the gnostics emphasized Jesus' humanity is completely incorrect. In fact, it is the exact opposite of the actual case, for the depictions of Jesus in the four Gospels are filled with concrete, historical details, social and political information, and logical narrative, qualities sorely lacking in most gnostic writings.

The vast majority scholars agree that the earliest gnostic texts were written in the middle of the second century A.D., well after the four canonical Gospels. And it was in the second century that orthodox Christianity began to seriously grapple with gnostic heresies, including the idea that the material realm is evil and that salvation comes through special

knowledge, not faith and grace. The nature of this struggle can be seen in the writings of orthodox apologist Irenaeus, who wrote his great polemic refuting certain gnostics, *Against Heresies*, around A.D. 180.

Jesus and Mary Magdalene

Teabing and hero Robert Langdon tell Sophie Neveu, the young French detective, that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married and had children. This alleged marriage, Teabing states, "is part of the historical record" and is "the greatest cover-up in human history." As evidence, he quotes from a gnostic text, *The Gospel of Philip*, dated approximately 180-250 A.D., which describes Mary Magdalene as the companion of Jesus and depicts the two kissing one another. This is said to indicate a marital relationship.

But in the gnostic context, which disdained procreation and the material world, the love of the gnostic Jesus for Mary Magdalene is probably not romantic or sexual, but focused on spiritual insight and secret knowledge. Another gnostic text, *The (Second) Apocalypse of James*, contains a notable parallel to the story in *The Gospel of Philip*, in which the risen Jesus imparts his secret mysteries to James by kissing him on the mouth and calling him, "My beloved!" It is a non-sexual, symbolic act demonstrating James' privileged position as one who recognizes Jesus as teacher (or "Hidden One," in gnostic terms).

So the kiss between Jesus and Mary Magdalene most likely indicates her privileged position, a position due not to her being married to Jesus, but having spiritual insight into his teaching that exceeds that of the other disciples. And kissing is probably the means by which a special spiritual insight is given or symbolized. For the gnostics, the relationship between the two is spiritual only, with Mary being understood to be Jesus' spiritual counterpart.

If Jesus and Mary Magdalene really were married, why wouldn't the gnostics have made it even more obvious? A possible reply is that they were too afraid of orthodox persecution and so chose to be ambiguous and secretive in their communications. And yet the gnostic writings are full of teachings that are obviously incompatible with an orthodox understanding of Jesus Christ, His life on earth, and the Church He established.

Ultimately, an ambiguous third-century gnostic text read through the lens of anti-Christian, feminist ideology does not provide even modest proof that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married.

On and on it goes, with faulty and often blatantly incorrect statements about Jesus, Mary Magdalene, the Vatican, paganism, early Christianity, medieval Christianity, modern day Catholicism, the life and work of Leonardo, secret societies, the origins of the English language, Constantine, and much more.

Stay tuned for part two of our series as my co-author, medieval historian Sandra Miesel, takes aim at 5 key issues from her long list of *Code's* historical inaccuracies.

Carl Olson and Sandra Miesel will appear live on EWTN Wednesday, May 3rd at 8 p.m. to discuss their book "The Da Vinci Hoax".

<http://www.sentinel.org/articles/2006-13/14581.html>
Catholic Sentinel
Volume 2006 Number 18 Date May

Author writes to right Da Vinci Code errors

03/29/2006 Ed Langlois

The Da Vinci Code craze has lasted longer than most fads. That's likely because the book and upcoming film confirm the last accepted prejudice in America, says an author who has written a debunking.

"It shows a gullibility, but it shows more. For many people, the novel has verified a bias against the Catholic Church," explains Carl Olson, an Oregon man who with journalist Sandra Miesel wrote *The Da Vinci Hoax*, published by Ignatius Press in 2004.

The *Da Vinci Code*, which has sold 43 million copies since its publication in 2003, posits that Jesus wed Mary Magdalene and the pair's bloodline continued in France. The book describes a secret and nefarious conspiracy by some sectors of the Catholic Church to cover up facts. In the novel, symbols in the works of Leonardo Da Vinci hold clues.

How much of the *Da Vinci Code* is true? "Not much," answer Olson and Miesel.

The problem, Olson told the *Sentinel*, is that author Dan Brown has allowed readers to speculate that the concoction might be true, though no trustworthy historical sources bear that out. Readers have been willing to float along with the plot and Olson says the May film will take many more people on the fantastical journey.

A plagiarism trial in London is unmasking the light weight of the reclusive Brown's sourcing. As the court proceedings show, he did little of his own research and relied heavily on what Olson calls "ludicrous sources." One of those sources is suing Brown for borrowing too heavily.

But Olson says some people have a predisposition to believe the unfounded portrayal of the Church, even after they accept it is only fiction.

"I get emails from people saying, 'Hey, it's just fiction,' but then they go on to talk about it as if it's true," says Olson, who edits the online Catholic magazine published by St. Ignatius Press. He is a member of Nativity Ukrainian Catholic Parish in Springfield.

St. Ignatius Press plans to update Olson and Miesel's book when *The Da Vinci Code* movie comes out in theaters. The idea will be to look at how fiction about Catholicism gets taken for fact.

Olson has an example of the phenomenon. No one saw Pope Pius XII as sympathetic to Nazis until the 1960s when a play emerged in Germany. There was no scholarship to support the view. Nevertheless, now books have emerged.

"That shows the power of fiction," he says. "Many people don't read serious books or magazines. They feed themselves on intellectual fast food."

The Da Vinci Hoax relies on many secular historical sources.

And it starts by eroding Brown's main sources — the gnostic gospels. These writings, which came decades and centuries after the four canonical Gospels, show a Jesus that is removed from historical context and full of indecipherable pronouncements.

They hardly portray, as Brown asserts, a Jesus that is more human than in Mark, Matthew, Luke and John. It's quite the opposite, Olson says.

"Without the canonical Gospels there would be no historical Jesus at all, no meaningful narrative of his life, and no decent sense of what he did, how he acted, and how he related to others," The Da Vinci Hoax says.

Olson and Miesel take on The Da Vinci Code's claim that the idea of Jesus' divinity was not raised until the Council of Nicea in 325. The letters of Paul, among the earliest church documents, describe Jesus as "Lord." The Council of Nicea did not define Jesus as divine, but instead addressed the issue of how Son and Father were related.

About Leonardo da Vinci, Olson finds no reputable scholars who abide by Brown's notion that the Renaissance man hid cryptic messages in his artwork.

Olson and Miesel report that the Priory of Sion, which Brown says has been guarding the church-busting secret about Jesus since the crusades, was actually founded in France in the 1950s and was largely made up of crackpots.

The Church, say Olson and Miesel, could not have been trying to quash the idea of Mary Magdalene. The Church Fathers remark about her often.

Hippolytus, who died early in the third century, refers to her as "the apostle to the apostles."

The Da Vinci Hoax names many more errors, some of them small, but which in the aggregate point to shoddy work.

"The authors of The Da Vinci Hoax deserve our gratitude for exposing in considerable detail and with sure touch the fabrications of Dan Brown's book," Chicago's Cardinal Francis George says in the introduction.

"Theirs is the definitive debunking. In the end, the fallacy of Brown's book is a common one. It approaches the Christian faith as though its contents were to be found in words and

documents rather than in the witness and collective memory of the community Christ himself left behind, his Church."

Many Oregon Catholics are concerned that people in their secular state will be unduly influenced by the film.

"It's being sold and packaged to a lot of people who don't have a strong faith base and who will be confused," says Becky Griffio, a member of Holy Trinity Parish in Beaverton.

Many local parishes are inviting Wilson to speak. He is scheduled to talk Saturday, May 6, 7:30 p.m. at Holy Trinity. For more information, call (503) 649-6712.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic bishops has launched a website — Jesusdecoded.com — to clarify confusion wrought by The Da Vinci Code.

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/special/davincicode.html>

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[Home](#) > [Christian History & Biography](#)

Decoding *The Da Vinci Code*



I guess Christians should be flattered. Who knew the Council of Nicea and Mary Magdalene could be this hot? Thanks in large measure to Dan Brown's fictional thriller *The Da Vinci Code*, early church history just can't stay out of the news.

If only a more worthy work could have prompted such attention. Brown first grabbed the headlines and prime-time TV in

2003 with his theory that Jesus married Mary Magdalene. But *The Da Vinci Code* contains many more (equally dubious) claims about Christianity's historic origins and theological development. It's left to the reader whether these theories belong to Brown's imagination or the skeleton of "facts" that supports the book.

Da Vinci Comes to the Big Screen:

- [Full coverage at Christianity Today Movies](#)

Related Resources:

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- [The Gospel Code vs. The Da Vinci Code](#)
- [Da Vinci Code resources at Christianbook.com](#)

Brown claims "almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false." Why? Because of a single meeting of bishops in 325, at the city of Nicea in modern-day Turkey. There, Brown argues, church leaders who wanted to consolidate their power base (he calls this, anachronistically, "the Vatican," or "the Roman Catholic church") created a divine Christ and an infallible Scripture—both novelties that had never before existed among Christians.

Christian History and *Christianity Today* magazines have covered the subject widely, and we've compiled the articles below.

Christian History & Biography Issue 85: Debating Jesus' Divinity

The Council of Nicaea and its bitter aftermath.

Editor's Bookshelf: Da Vinci Dissenters

Four books try to break, crack, or decode the deception.

Speaking in Code

A roundup of the many anti-*Da Vinci Code* books from Christian publishers.

The Da Vinci Rejects

What other Christian publishers could have done to respond to Dan Brown's bestseller.

Why the 'Lost Gospels' Lost Out

Recent gadfly theories about church council conspiracies that manipulated the New Testament into existence are bad—really bad—history.

The Da Vinci Code, Corrected

Why the "lost gospels" were really lost

Thanks, Da Vinci Code

The book sends us back to Christianity's "founding fathers"—and the Bible we share with them.

Breaking The Da Vinci Code

So the divine Jesus and infallible Word emerged out of a fourth-century power-

play? Get real.

The Good News of Da Vinci

How a ludicrous book can become an opportunity to engage the culture.

A Hammer Struck at Heresy

What exactly happened at the famous Council of Nicaea, when the Roman emperor convened some 250 quarreling Christian bishops?

Christian History

Readers respond to *The Da Vinci Code*

Film Forum: Talking About Revolutions

What religious critics are saying about *The Matrix Revolutions*, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*, *Elf*, *Brother Bear*, *The Human Stain*, *In the Cut*, *Shattered Glass*, *Mystic River*, *Radio*, *Veronica Guerin*, and the upcoming *Return of the King*, and *Da Vinci Code* films.

Christian History & Biography, Winter 2005

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The Road to Nicaea

The Council of Nicaea strove to answer one of the central questions of the Christian faith, but it also proved that theology is never a tidy business.

John Anthony McGuckin

Also: Who Came to the Council of Nicaea?,

Taking Care of (Church) Business

"Do You Know Whom You Worship?"

Did the Nicene Creed distort the pure gospel, or did it embody and protect it?
D. H. Williams

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/2005/001/7.18.html>

Christian History, Winter 2005



The Road to Nicaea

The Council of Nicaea strove to answer one of the central questions of the Christian faith, but it also proved that theology is never a tidy business.

By John Anthony McGuckin

Graffiti emblazoned on walls, a vicious war of pamphlets, riots in the streets, lawsuits, catchy songs of ridicule ... It's hard for modern Christians to imagine how such public turmoil could be created by an argument between theologians—or how God could work through the messiness of human conflict to bring the church to an understanding of truth.

To us, in retrospect, the Council of Nicaea is a veritable mountain in the landscape of the early church. For the protagonists themselves, it was more in the nature of an emergency meeting forced on hostile parties by imperial power and designed to stop an internal row. After the council, many of the same bishops who had signed its creed appeared at other councils, often reversing their previous decisions according to the way the winds of preferment were blowing. They found themselves less in a domain of monumental clarity and more in a swamp of confusing arguments and controversies that at times seemed to threaten the very continuity of the Christian church. To understand the significance of the Council of Nicaea, we need to enter into the minds of the disputants and ask why so much bitterness and confusion had been caused by one apparently simple question: in what way is Jesus divine?

Of course, like many "simple" questions, this was a highly complex and provocative issue. Theologians of that era were almost beside themselves when they found that Scripture often gave very different-sounding notes when they applied to it for guidance. The disagreements this "simple" question provoked made many of the greatest minds of the era wonder to what extent the Christian doctrines of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit were coherent, and even to what extent Christians could trust in the canon of sacred text (which had hitherto seemed to them sufficient as an exposition of the faith).

In many ways, therefore, Nicaea reminds us of the present era. Rather than being a symbol of clarity, peace, and order, it was a call to a difficult focusing of mind across a church that was often as muddled and confused as ours seems still to be.

How does "one God" fit with "Lord Jesus"?

The argument began innocently enough with a regular seminar that Alexander, the archbishop of Alexandria, was accustomed to hold with his senior clergy.

Alexander was a follower of Origen [see [Issue #80: The First Bible Teachers](#)] who, a century beforehand, had laid the basis for a vast mystical understanding of the relationship of the divine Logos to the Eternal Father. *Logos* was the word the Greek Bible had used to translate "Divine Wisdom," and it was also widely used in Greek philosophical circles to signify the divine power immanent within the world. To many Christians, it seemed a marvelous way to talk about the Eternal Son of God and became almost a synonym for the Son.

Like Origen, Alexander saw the Logos as sharing the divine attributes of the Father, especially that of eternity. The Logos, he argued, had been "born of God before the ages." Since God the Father had decided to use the Logos as the medium and agent of all creation (e.g. John 1:1, Ephesians 1:4, Colossians 1:15-17), it followed that the Son-Logos pre-existed creation. Since time was a consequence of

creation, the Son pre-existed all time and was thus eternal like the Father, and indeed his timelessness was one of the attributes that manifested him as the divine Son, worthy of the worship of the church. Since he was eternal there could be no "before" or "after" in him.

It was inappropriate, therefore, to suggest that there was ever a time when the Son did not exist. God was eternally a Father of a Son, Alexander argued, and just as the Father had always existed, so too the Son had always existed and was thus known to be "God from God." The Christological confessions about the Son (later to be inserted into the creed of Nicaea), "Born not created, God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God," all made this clear. It was at once a high and refined scholarly confession of the faith and a popular prayer that summed up how Christians could be monotheists even as they worshipped the Son along with the Father.

Alexander knew that he was pushing the envelope of the traditional "high Christology" of his church by explaining how Christ's divinity could no longer be understood in the old simplistic ways of a "lesser divinity" alongside a "greater divinity." Alexander wanted to distinguish clearly between Christian and pagan theology by arguing that divinity is an absolute term (like pregnancy) that allows no degrees. One cannot say that the Son is "half God" or "part God" without making the very notion of deity into a mythical conception.

Given this development, many traditional Christian pieties would need to be re-forged in the fourth century. People sensed that they were on the cusp of a major new development—but they were not always quite sure what was happening, and more to the point, they lacked a precise or widely agreed-upon vocabulary to explain to themselves (and others) what exactly was going on.

Theological niceties—or the essence of Christianity?

One of Alexander's senior priests, the

presbyter Arius, was scandalized at the direction in which his bishop was taking theological language. Arius, who had charge of the large parish of Baucalis in the city's dockland, had also been an intellectual disciple of Origen but had taken a different strand of that early theologian's variegated legacy.

As was typical among third-century thinkers, Origen had a deeply ingrained sense of the absolute primacy of God over all other beings. This meant that the Father was superior to the Son in all respects—in terms of essence, attributes, power, and quality. The Son might be called divine in so far as he represented the Father to the created world as the supreme agent of the creation (something like one of the greatest of all angelic powers), but he was decidedly inferior to the Father in all respects. This meant that the Son did not possess absolute timelessness, which was a sole attribute of God the Father.

Thinking that he was defending "traditional values," Arius pressed that insight of Origen's even further. The Son-Logos, Arius allowed, might well have predated the rest of creation, but it was inappropriate to imagine that he shared the divine pre-existence. Thus, it was important to confess the principle that "there was a time when he (the Logos) was not." Arius quickly put this axiom into a rhyme, which he taught his parishioners and so made it into a party cause. Soon slogans were ringing round the docklands, and the diocese of Alexandria was in serious disarray. Arius' supporters chanted, "*Een pote hote ouk een*," and wrote the slogan on the walls. Overnight Alexander's camp added a Greek negative to the beginning: "*Ouk een pote ouk een*": "There was never a time when he was not!"

Everyone, skilled theologian or not, seemed to have been caught by surprise that a controversy over so basic a matter (was the Son of God divine? And how?) could have arisen in the church, and even more surprised that recourse to Scripture was proving so problematic. For every

text that showed the divine status of the Son ("I and the Father are One," John 10:30; "And the Word was God," John 1:1), another could be quoted back to suggest the subordinate, even the created, status of the Son ("In the beginning he created me (Wisdom)," Proverbs 8:22; "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone," Mark 10:18). If Jesus was not fully God, he was not really God at all, and thus to worship him was not piety but simply idolatry.

Alexander (applying good pastoral sense) would not allow a theologian's dispute to mushroom out publicly in this alarming way, so he censured Arius for appearing to deny the Son's eternity and true divinity and deposed him from his priestly office. Arius immediately appealed against that disciplinary decision to one of the most powerful bishops of the era, Eusebius of Nicomedia, a kinsman by marriage to Constantine the emperor. Arius and Eusebius had been students together and shared a common theological view. Eusebius, the court theologian at the imperial capital, knew that if Arius was being attacked then so was he. From that moment onwards he was determined to squash what he regarded as a "foolish Egyptian piety." By elevating the Son of God to the same status as God the Father, he argued, Christianity would compromise its claim to be a monotheist religion. He marshaled many supporters.

The Anniversary Council

The bitterness of the dispute seemed remarkable to many observers, but what was at stake was no less than a major clash between two confessional traditions that had been uneasy companions in the church for generations. In one, the subordination of the Son was stressed (Christ the Servant of God). In the other, the salvific triumph of the Saviour was tantamount (Christ the Lord of Glory in his most intimate union with the Father).

So notorious had the falling out of Eastern bishops become over this matter that it was brought to the attention of Emperor

Constantine who, in 324, had defeated his last rival to become sole monarch of all the Roman Empire. Constantine decided to use the occasion of the 20th anniversary of his claiming of the throne (an event that sparked a civil war), which would be celebrated in 325, to help settle the embarrassing dispute among his allies, the bishops. He felt (rightly) that their disarray was compromising his desire to demonstrate that he had effectively "brought peace" to the eastern territories.

So it was that he summoned bishops to his private lakeside palace at Nicaea ("Victory City") in Asia Minor (now Iznik in Turkey), offering to pay all their expenses, to supply them with the traditional "gifts" that followed an invitation to the court, and even to afford them the prestigious use of the official transport system, a privilege which had always been strictly reserved for officers of state. The buzz this created was all the more remarkable among the bishops of the East, who only a year or so before had lived under a persecutor's oppression. Though Constantine envisaged a truly international meeting of minds, in fact very few Latin bishops attended—only representative delegations from the leading sees such as Rome.

The council opened on June 19. Tradition has it that 318 clergy were in attendance (a Greek number-cipher for the cross), but many modern historians think that 250 is a more accurate figure. As the meeting opened, Constantine took his place on the imperial throne and greeted his guests. He spent the opening session accepting scrolls (secret petitions for favors and for redress) from the many bishops in attendance, and then startled them all the next day by bringing in a large brazier and burning the whole pile of scrolls before them—saying enigmatically that in this way the debts of all had been cancelled. By this he implied that most of the petitions from the bishops had been aimed at one another, and rather than put many on trial he had given a common amnesty.

The order of the day was to resolve the question about the eternity and divine status of the Son of God. Many of the bishops were not well educated, but a few of them were highly skilled rhetoricians and theologians, and they were determined that if anything theological was to be settled by the large council, it would be in favor of the pro-Alexander lobby. So they pressed for a refinement of the baptismal creed of Jerusalem, which had been submitted by Eusebius of Caesarea as a blueprint for a "traditional statement of faith." Eusebius had been deposed at an earlier synod for having publicly attacked Alexander's theology. Under pressure from Constantine, the assembly at Nicaea pardoned him and restored him to office after he offered the creed of his own church as evidence of his change of heart.

All the bishops recognized how unarguably "authentic" this statement of faith was, but the Jerusalem creed did not really resolve the precise issue under consideration, that is, how the Son of God related to the divine Father. To this end, the bishops decided that extra clauses would be interpolated into the old creed as "commentary," in order to amplify the bare statements about the mission of Christ and show how Jesus could be confessed as God.

Creed and Catchword

The origin of these "confessional acclamations" of Christ ("God from God, Light from Light" etc.) was Alexander's party, but since it had become clear in years of wrangling that even their opponents could accept Christ's title as "god from God" (as meaning a nominal, inferior deity from the superior, absolute deity), many of the Alexandrians demanded a firmer test of faith.

It was possibly Ossius, the theological adviser of the emperor, who suggested that the magic word to nail the Arian party would be *homoousios*. The term meant "of the same substance as," and when applied to the Logos it proclaimed that the Logos was divine in the same way as God the Father was divine (not in an inferior,

different, or nominal sense). In short, if the Logos was *homoousios* with the Father, he was truly God alongside the Father. The word pleased Constantine, who seems to have seen it as an ideal way to bring all the bishops back on board for a common vote. It was broad enough to suggest a vote for the traditional Christian belief that Christ was divine, it was vague enough to mean that Christ was of the "same stuff" as God (no further debate necessary), and it was bland enough to be a reasonable basis for a majority vote.

It had everything going for it as far as the politically savvy Constantine was concerned, but for the die-hard Arian party, it was a word too far. They saw that it gave the Son equality with the Father without explaining how this relationship worked. (In fact, it would be another 60 years before anyone successfully articulated the doctrine of the Trinity.) Therefore they attacked it for undermining the biblical sense of the Son's obedient mission. The intellectuals among the group (chiefly Eusebius of Nicomedia) also attacked it for its crassness—it attributed "substance" (or material stuff) to God, who was beyond all materiality. Moreover, the term was unsuitable because it was "not found in the Holy Scriptures," and indeed this did disturb many of the bishops present for the occasion.

The great majority of bishops still endorsed the idea, however, and so with Constantine pressing for a consensus vote the word entered into the creed they published. It was not that the bishops at Nicaea were themselves simply looking for a convenient consensus in the synod's vote. Many synods had been held before this extraordinarily large one at Nicaea, and ancient bishops predominantly worked on the premise that decisions of the church's leadership required unanimity. Their task was to proclaim the ancient Christian faith against all attacks, and this was not something they felt they had to seek out or worry over—they simply had to state among themselves a common and clear heritage, one that could be proclaimed by universal acclamation. They believed that they were

the direct continuance of the first apostolic gathering at Jerusalem, when the Holy Spirit led all the apostles to the realization of the gospel truth.

Because of this, when a few bishops dissented and refused their vote, the remaining bishops excommunicated and deposed them, accusing them of having refused to be part of the family of faith. Among this group was Eusebius of Nicomedia. All of the deposed bishops received harsh sentences from the emperor (although Eusebius was confident he could wiggle out of his disgrace, as soon he did).

The end? Not quite

Once the main item of controversy was settled (the acceptance of Alexander's clauses and the admittance of the word *homoousios*), the other items fell into place quickly. The newly amplified creed was given a set of six legal "threats" attached to it (named *anathemas*) which spelled out in great detail all the classic marks of "Arian" philosophy and threatened with excommunication any who maintained them thereafter.

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The meeting then turned to what most bishops had originally

wanted to do anyway—set up reforms to consolidate a church in the East that had long been torn apart by oppressors and had not been able to regulate its affairs on the larger front for many years. To resolve such problems the bishops drew up a list of laws (named *canons*, from the Greek word for "rule" or "normative measure"). These 20 canons have never attracted as much attention as the doctrines of Nicaea but actually had immense importance, as they were the reference point around which all future collections of church law were modeled and collated.

After all doctrinal and canonical work was finished, the emperor concluded the council with great festivities. Hardly was the council closed when the old party factions broke out with as much rancor as

before. Even stalwart advocates of the Nicene Council—men like Athanasius the Great, Eustathius of Antioch, and Ossius of Cordoba—wondered, as the fourth century progressed, whether this had been a good idea or not. Those who attended the Council of Nicaea might well have felt that they had achieved a lasting settlement. As we shall see, however, the controversy was far from over.

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Who Came to the Council of Nicaea?

Judging from what little we know about the identity of those who attended, the council was overwhelming Eastern. Only six or seven bishops are recorded as having come from Western churches, among them were Ossius (or Hosius) of Cordoba, Caecilianus of Carthage, and two representatives from the church of Rome. The small number of bishops from the West reflected the general ignorance among Western churches of those theological issues that had embroiled the East.

Of the bishops from the East, Asia Minor (present-day Turkey), Syria, Palestine, and Egypt were best represented. Several came from Arabia, Persia, Libya, and Greece. One even came from Armenia [see p. 46]. Bishops from almost all of the oldest and major sees of the East were present: Alexander of Alexandria, Antiochus of Memphis (Egypt), Macarius of Jerusalem, Eusebius of Caesarea, Eustathius of Antioch (Syria), Magnus of Damascus, Januarius of Jericho, Eusebius of Nicomedia, Eutychius of Smyrna, Menophantes of Ephesus, Artemidorus of Sardis and, of course, Theognis of Nicaea.

But the most esteemed personalities at the council were Paphnutius of Upper Thebes and Spyridon of Cyprus. Paphnutius was a confessor, having had

his eyes put out for confessing the faith during the last persecution of Christians, and Spyridon was well known for his life of self-denial and miracle working. The emperor himself was said to have greeted them personally and sought their prayers.

—D. H. Williams

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"Do You Know Whom You Worship?"

Did the Nicene Creed distort the pure gospel, or did it embody and protect it?

By D. H. Williams



In Dorothy Sayers's imaginative play, *The Emperor Constantine*, the defining role of the Nicene creed is put into words when Constantine criticizes a group of bishops for their indecisiveness: "Our Lord said to the Samaritan woman, 'You worship what you know not, but we know whom we worship.' Do you know whom you

worship? It would seem you do not. And it matters now that you should." The question, "Do you know whom you worship?" has been a perennial one for Christians, but it came to the forefront at the beginning of the fourth century when there was as yet no doctrinal consensus about the divinity of Christ.

All Christians asserted that Jesus was God and worshipped Him as such, following the understanding laid down in an early second-century sermon known as I Clement: "brethren, we ought to think of Jesus as we do of God." However, those baptismal creeds which have come down to us from local churches said very little beyond the basic wording: "of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary" (*Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus).

Such confessional statements left many questions unanswered. How could the Son, who was born a human being, suffered and died, also be God in relation to God the Father? Which Bible passages were speaking about the Son's divinity and which were about the Son's humanity? When Jesus declared his dread of the "cup" before him (Matt. 26: 37-38), or displayed ignorance about the time of his second return (Mk. 13: 32), surely these experiences were applicable to his human self, but what did that mean for his divinity? If Christ suffered on our behalf did that mean he was different from God who, by virtue of his immutability and eternity, cannot suffer? There was no agreement among Christians about the Bible's teaching on these issues.

It was inevitable, therefore, that the early church would eventually require a more universal statement of faith like the Nicene Creed. As the church grew in numbers, geographical distance and theological sophistication, the need for a comprehensive explanation of the Christian faith grew as well. The interchurch crisis between Arius and Alexander erupted and spread throughout the East so quickly precisely because Christian teaching was unsettled on these

matters. As this crisis took hold of churches in Egypt, Palestine, Asia Minor and even Greece, local baptismal confessions were obviously insufficient to address the widespread nature of the conflict. While these confessions would continue to be regarded as authoritative throughout the fourth century, their wording was not exact enough to insure future doctrinal orthodoxy.

This is what later prompted Augustine (in *On Faith and the Creed*) to use the Nicene faith as the lens for interpreting the older church creed of North Africa. When the believer professed, "I believe ... in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, only-begotten of the Father, our Lord, who was born through the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary," there was no dispute about its truth, but "under color of the few words found in the [North African] creed, many heretics have attempted to conceal their poison."

It was just a matter of time, therefore, that a formal statement about the identity of Christ in relation to the Father should be debated and endorsed by an official body. Not only would error have to be ruled out, but *it first had to be redefined*, as would the parameters for a proper scriptural interpretation of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Out of the heart of the church

At the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries, some Protestant historians regarded the Council of Nicaea and its creed with the same suspicion as they did the church of Rome. The esteemed German scholar Eduard Schwarz, for example, depicted the conflicts between pro-Nicene and "Arian" opponents as in reality a struggle for power within the church which was disguised as a theological dispute. The council's decisions represented a victory for those who wielded the most influence over the emperor. This meant too that the creed was an unfortunate capitulation of the church to imperial politics and an emblem of the new merger between the Roman empire and Christianity.

To this day, some churches and denominations see creeds, ancient or modern, as little more than legislated statements of power used for manipulating the faithful. Such a view is often built on the assumption that the church by the time of Nicaea had compromised its original biblical standards, replacing principles of Scripture with the authoritarianism of a new imperial and episcopal establishment.

While the council did involve interchurch politics with dissenting groups trying to obtain the emperor's ear, the Nicene Creed had its origin in the worshipping life of the church. A mere collective of bishops could not make for sound Christian doctrine. We are mistaken to cast the early bishops into the role of power brokers and political schemers, rather than the pastors and preachers that most of them were. Interpreting and proclaiming the true faith to their congregations was a major preoccupation with nearly every one of the early church theologians.

Likewise, creedal statements had to represent the common mind of the church or else they would not have been accepted and employed by the larger body of believing Christians. The vigilance of bishops in upholding and preserving Christian truth is exemplified in the opening words of the Council of Antioch (which met in the early months of 325) when it declared that its statement of faith was "the faith that was set forth by spiritual men ... always formed and trained in the spirit by means of the holy writings of the inspired books." At the councils at Antioch and Nicaea, both of which formulated creeds, the concern was the same: articulating a theological vision that emerged from the church's faith. In effect, the creed was a statement *ex corde ecclesiae*—out of the heart of the church.

Rooted in tradition

However the members of the council derived the creed that they finally issued—and no minutes from the proceedings are ever cited by later church historians or have otherwise been

discovered—local baptismal creeds were actively sought and used. After all, a creed was supposed to be exactly what the word meant: a confession of the faith by the people of God, thus reflecting what the churches were confessing.

While no exact parallels can be made, the Nicene formulation seems most closely related to the baptismal declarations used in the churches of Caesarea and Jerusalem. In a letter written his congregation just after the close of the Nicene council, Eusebius of Caesarea explained that though he was reluctant to sign the Nicene creed, he would never have done so had that formula contradicted the faith of the Caesarean church. After making every inquiry into the meaning of the creed's wording, Eusebius wrote, "it appeared to us to coincide with what we ourselves have professed in the faith which we have previously preached."

Scripturally Based

None of the preceding is meant to imply there were no immediate difficulties with the creed that the bishops at Nicaea produced. Many bishops were concerned that the creed failed to distinguish sufficiently the being of the Son from the Father. Describing the Son as "from the substance of the Father" or of "the same substance" (*homoousios*) as the Father made it seem as if the Father and Son were really identical, separated only by their names. Later known as "modalism," this was a heretical view that had been condemned in the previous century because it stressed the monotheist character of Christianity at the cost of upholding a substantial Trinitarianism. Suspicions were further aroused by the fact that two strong supporters of the Nicene creed, Eustathius of Antioch and Marcellus of Ancyra, were known advocates of a modalist type of view about God.

Moreover, these same words were not found anywhere in Scripture. Prior to and throughout the fourth century, all creedal terminology was drawn from the very words of the Bible. Not a few bishops in

the East opposed the new creed in the years after 325 because it seemed to introduce unscriptural terms.

Nevertheless, proponents of Nicaea argued that the creed and its controversial terms were a theological extension of New Testament teaching about Christ. This is exactly the point Athanasius made in his *On the Definition of the Nicene Creed*, which he wrote in defense of the creed a quarter of a century after the council met. New theological language was necessary in order to meet the theological needs brought about by the recent challenges to the church's faith. Despite some of the terms used, Athanasius declared, the final creed was the natural outcome of the church's preaching, reflection, and biblical exegesis. Even if we allow for special pleading on Athanasius' part, we may safely assume that those bishops who signed the creed believed it was a fitting summary of biblical teaching.

The charge laid against Nicaea by later theologians that the creed was more the product of philosophical influence or "Hellenization" than of Scripture is misconstrued for two reasons. First, all Christian thinkers of the time—"orthodox" and "heretical"—were drawing on contemporary philosophical language in order to frame theological truths. Terms such as *person*, *substance*, *essence*, and many others all had a philosophical background that pre-dated Christianity but were borrowed permanently for Christian purposes. Where there was obvious conflict between the Bible and Greek philosophy, the Bible took precedent for even the most erudite Christians.

Second, one of the lessons learned during the "Arian controversy" was that in order to achieve doctrinal orthodoxy you cannot interpret the Bible from the Bible alone. The church needed a vocabulary and a conceptual framework that stemmed from the Bible but were also outside of the Bible. Sooner or later, some means of interpreting the scriptural text would be required.

Whatever else may be said of the ancient creeds, it cannot be denied that they were deliberately constructed to be the epitome of the biblical message. When instructing new converts, Augustine taught, "For whatever you hear in the Creed is contained in the inspired books of Holy Scripture" (*Sermon* 212. 2). It was the task of these creeds not merely to reproduce the Bible but to enable Christians to understand what the Bible, both Old and New Testament, means.

In the end, the Nicene Creed represented a large-scale attempt to answer the question, "Do you know whom you worship?" Christianity's central convictions that God is one and Christ is God had to be put into a cohesive statement that preserved the integrity of both. This was the burden of the fourth century. The Council of Nicaea responded with a creed that was new to church history and was not immediately accepted, but, as time would tell, it was crafted according to the intention of church tradition and biblical principles. As Charles Williams once said of the Christian faith encapsulated by the Nicene Creed, "It had become a Creed, and it remained a Gospel."

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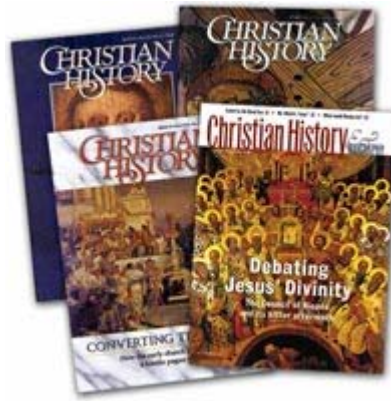
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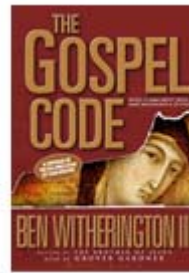
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