

FAQ's About 'The Da Vinci Code'

1. I've seen the book in stores, and heard lots of people talking about it, but what is this "Da Vinci" thing all about?

Since its release in 2003, *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown has sold 40 million copies, and a motion picture version will hit theaters May 19. The plot deals with surprising discoveries of the "true" facts about Jesus and Christian history. The book asserts that Jesus was not the divine Son of God, but a mere man whose true mission and identity have been distorted.

Though largely suppressed throughout history, the real story (according to Dan Brown's book) of Jesus was that he and Mary Magdalene were married; she bore His children; Jesus desired that she be the leader of the church; their descendants survive to this day; the teachings of Christ were hijacked and revised by power-hungry men like Peter; millions throughout history have been misinformed about what Christianity truly is; and finally, these secrets have been known by a select few (such as Leonardo DaVinci, who attempted to present these facts to the world through "clues" incorporated into his paintings).

2. As a Christian, why should I care about a book or movie that is — after all — just fiction?

Some have questioned why Christians are voicing objections to what is essentially a fictional story. The concern raised by numerous clergy and Christian scholars stems from the author's claim — on the very first page — that *The Da Vinci Code* is based

on “fact.” Though the book is a novel, its content demeans and distorts the core teachings of the Christian faith. For Christians, if the truth about our Savior isn’t worth defending, what is?

3. This book hasn’t really shaken my faith; but I wonder, how solid is the evidence for the Bible and Christianity?

Answer: The evidence in support of Christianity is overwhelming, and we believe is more than sufficient to satisfy any honest inquirer. In the New Testament, 2 Peter 1:16 (NKJV) asserts that Christianity is not based on “fables.” Jesus Christ’s coming was predicted in the ancient Jewish Scriptures, and His life and teachings are accurately recorded in the New Testament. The evidence confirming Jesus’ miraculous deeds, His crucifixion at Passover and subsequent physical resurrection have persuaded countless seekers, meticulous thinkers and rigorous historians. Apologists (those who rationally defend the Christian worldview) have amassed much historical data and credible research from a number of disciplines pointing to the conclusion that, yes, Christianity indeed rests on solid historical foundations.

4. A friend of mine who has read *The Da Vinci Code* asked, “Why would it matter if Jesus had been married?” Since our faith is the most important thing, would it really have mattered?

Answer: It is important to remember that our views about Jesus should not be in conflict with what the Bible clearly teaches about Him. Any one is free to believe anything, but we must ask, “What is your authority? What basis do you have for your conclusion?”

Dan Brown has written that Jesus was married and the Bible has been corrupted. But scholars from numerous Christian backgrounds have responded by pointing out, “The evidence shows otherwise.” In the Bible (a book shown to be trustworthy by many

compelling lines of evidence), we find that Jesus' mission was not procreation, but salvation. Establishment of marriage, family and an earthly home were not Jesus' purposes.

Galatians 4:4 (NIV) tells us why Jesus was born: "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law." Why should we believe an assumption about Jesus that is non-biblical and without any evidence? In reality, Jesus didn't need Mary Magdalene, because He already has a bride. The New Testament book of Romans (chapter 7) states that believers are espoused, engaged to be "married" to Jesus. Saved, forgiven, redeemed believers from all of history make up Jesus' perfect "bride," not a fallen human. As far "faith" being the most important thing — remember that one's beliefs should be shaped in light of God's revelation, not man's speculation.

5. How may individuals and churches effectively respond to *The Da Vinci Code*?

The identity of Jesus; his mission and purpose; the origin, content, and trustworthiness of the Bible; the origin of the church; the message and teachings of the earliest Christians; the motives of early church leaders; and the relevancy of Christianity today worth defending. The *Da Vinci* book will be the subject of Dr. Dobson's daily radio broadcast on May 1–2, and will feature a recent interview that was recorded with Lee Strobel, Erwin Lutzer and Focus' director of teen apologetics, Alex McFarland.

'The Da Vinci Code' — Welcome to the Battle for the Canon!

by Erwin Lutzer, Ph.D.

"We are presenting these texts as sacred books and sacred scriptures of the Gnostics."

These words are found in the introduction to *The Gnostic Bible*, a collection of documents which some believe give an alternate interpretation of the early days of Christianity. These writings lie at the heart of *The Da Vinci Code* and other kinds of esoteric literature that insist that originally Christianity was diverse with no strict doctrines as found in the New Testament. In fact, according to this scenario, what we now call heresy was originally the teaching of the church; it is we, the traditionalists, who are the heretics!

Welcome to the battle for the Canon!

The word *canon* originally referred to a measuring rod. Later, it was applied to those books that "measured up" to the standard of divine inspiration and hence were regarded as authoritative by the early church. These books were collected over a period of time; and later generations have always contended that the canon is closed — not open for revision or the inclusion of new material.

Today, this is being challenged. Some want to include the *Gnostic Gospel of Thomas* in the canon, and others insist that *The Gnostic Bible* as a whole is a competing canon more in tune with the diversity of our do-it-yourself generation. These scholars insist that Christianity needs a makeover.

So, whose version of Christianity is most credible?

The Gnostics were teachers who combined Christianity with Greek philosophy. They believed that through special knowledge (*gnosis* means *knowledge*), salvation was possible. Jesus was presented in their writings as a teacher who could bring enlightenment, but his death and

resurrection were not necessary for salvation. In fact, because of the influence of Greek philosophy, which taught that matter was evil, the Gnostics almost universally denied both the Incarnation and the Resurrection.

So, why should we reject their teachings and accept those of the New Testament?

In short, for three reasons:

First, the Gnostic writings are dated after the events of the New Testament had long passed. For example, my *Gnostic Bible* says the *Gospel of Philip* (which refers to Jesus and Mary Magdalene) was written in Syria in 250 A.D. So, I must ask: Whose description of George Washington would have more credibility — that of eyewitnesses who knew him or teachers who lived 200 years after his time?

Second, the Gnostic writings have fraudulent authorship. No one — not even those who are most in favor of Gnostic Christianity — believe that the disciple Philip actually wrote *The Gospel of Philip*, or that Thomas actually wrote *The Gospel of Thomas*. The Gnostics were known to ascribe their writings to apostles to gain credibility. In the New Testament, Paul refers to this popular practice and warns his readers about such deceivers (2 Thessalonians 2: 1–3).

Finally, the clincher: The Gnostics have no historical ties to the Old Testament but, rather, have their historical link to Plato. Many of the Gnostics believed in two different gods: They believed that the god who created the world failed when trying to make it perfect, but the second god has made things better. They taught many notions that are contradicted in the Old Testament, and thus made no claim that what they believed was consistent with previous Scriptures.

Read the Gnostic Gospels, and you will be not be struck with their similarity to the New Testament but, rather, their radical differences. In the New Testament, Jesus is not just a great teacher but a Savior;

indeed, the book of Hebrews shows in detail how he fulfills the whole sacrificial system of the book of Leviticus. The Suffering Servant of Isaiah and the prediction of "Someone greater than Moses" as found in Deuteronomy are fulfilled in Jesus with breathtaking detail.

I was standing in line at a bookstore when the man ahead of me was purchasing a copy of *The Gnostic Bible*. The woman behind the counter said, "You will enjoy reading this . . . it will give you an entirely different picture of Christianity."

Of course, I could not let that pass. I smiled and said, "Do you realize that the Gnostics were not eyewitnesses? And did you know that the early church was aware of these teachings and refuted them? The New Testament has much more historical credibility."

To which she replied, "Well, we all have our interpretations, but I prefer *The Gnostic Bible*."

And this explains why many who read *The Da Vinci Code* are prone to believe it: Forget historical investigation; forget the need for consistency; forget the need for continuity with the Old Testament. It comes down to the *desire* to have a tolerant faith that lets us pick-and-choose our beliefs, cafeteria style.

If we bring this battle for the canon back to rationality, consistency and historical investigation, we have nothing to fear. We can't compete with people's desires, but we can show that all the hard evidence is on our side.

The Top 10 Errors Found in 'The Da Vinci Code'

compiled by Alex McFarland

1. **Fallacy:** The world was once dominated by goddess-based worship. Religion was originally matriarchal and later (under Judeo-

Christian dominance) changed to patriarchal monotheism (male dominated). (*The Da Vinci Code*, p. 124)

Fact: There is no evidence that any significant religious movement had dominant female deities: They were always linked to their male counterparts, and usually in a subservient role. (See, for example, Tikva Frymer-Kensky's *In the Wake of the Goddesses* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993) and Craig Hawkins' *Goddess Worship, Witchcraft, and Neo-Paganism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

2. **Fallacy:** The Bible has been extensively rewritten and revised. Therefore, its original meaning has been lost. The Christian Scriptures "evolved through countless translations, additions, and revisions." (*DVC*, p. 231)

Fact: "Countless translations" is excessive hyperbole and vague generalization. Without a specific charge of what was translated, added or revised, it is impossible to respond to this point specifically. However, consider the following points:

- Translation issues for the Bible are not different from translation issues for any other document, and cause no more difficulty. The quote implies that there is some great confusion over translation that is cause for concern.
- It is true that there are issues to discuss in terms of translating the Bible from ancient Hebrew and Greek to any modern language. This is a natural function of all translation processes and in no way detracts from offering a "definitive," reasonable account of what was originally written.
- In fact, the means of transmission of the ancient texts, the voluminous quantity of manuscript copies, the science of textual criticism and the art of translation ensure that any reputable modern translation of the Bible is an accurate rendering of the original text. This subject has been covered

so comprehensively and so well by so many scholars that Brown's misrepresentation of the facts is inexcusable.

3. **Fallacy:** "Fortunately for historians . . . some of the gospels that Constantine attempted to eradicate managed to survive. The Dead Sea Scrolls were found in the 1950s hidden in a cave near Qumran in the Judean desert." (*DVC*, p. 234)

Fact: According to Dr. Paul L. Maier, professor of ancient history at Western Michigan University, Constantine was never involved in any attempt to eradicate any gospels. The Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1947 and contained no gospels, nor any reference to Jesus. They contained portions of every Old Testament book except Esther, commentaries on the Old Testament, some extrabiblical works, secular documents and business records. The Qumran community, which wrote or preserved these documents, had nothing to do with Jesus or Christianity.

4. **Fallacy:** "The Bible, as we know it today, was collated by the pagan Roman emperor Constantine the Great." (*DVC*, p. 232)

Fact: Although the verdict is out as to whether Constantine was a true follower of Christ, he was not a pagan. He converted to Christianity (regardless of his motives for doing so). And he did not collate the Bible. The Old Testament was compiled even before the time of Jesus. The New Testament began to be recognized by the end of the 1st century. By the 2nd century, church leaders were inserting quotes from the four Gospels into their writings. Athanasius recorded the earliest list of New Testament books in 367 A.D.

5. **Fallacy:** The Bible was "hodge-podged" together over time and is not trustworthy. "The Bible is the product of *man*, my dear. Not of God. The Bible did not fall magically from the clouds. Man created it as a historical record of tumultuous times, and it has evolved through countless translations, additions and revisions. History has never had a definitive version of the book." (*DVC*, p. 231)

Fact: If men wanted to create a new religion, they would never choose one with a God-man as its central figure and a resurrection from the dead as its foundation. (1 Corinthians 15:14, Ephesians 2:20). Further, if men had produced Christianity, it would be man-centered, as are all other religions. In other words, man would

earn his way into eternal bliss through his good deeds. Thus, man would get the glory. In stark contrast, the Bible uniformly declares that man *cannot* work his way to God. There must be a substitute that is acceptable to God according to His holy standard — *perfect righteousness*. Jesus Christ is that perfect substitute — the one and only way to God. Therefore, God gets all the glory. (Isaiah 64:6, Philippians 3:9, 2 Corinthians 5:21, 1 Peter 3:18)

6. **Fallacy:** Many "gospels" existed recounting the life of Christ, some of which were suppressed: "More than eighty gospels were considered for the New Testament, and yet only a relative few were chosen for inclusion — Matthew, Mark, Luke and John among them" (*DVC*, p. 231)

Fact: The "gospels" to which Brown refers are the Gnostic gospels. They were written from about 250-350 A.D., several hundred years after Christ lived. They were written to reinterpret the life of Christ and His teachings, based upon Gnostic philosophy. There were never as many as 80, and they were never considered for inclusion in the New Testament.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were accepted in the 1st century based upon their authorship and their use in the early Christian centers of Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria and Rome. The Gnostic gospels appeared after most of the New Testament was already in use and accepted by the Church. Eusebius, the first church historian, affirms that the early church rejected these gospels as soon as they appeared.

7. **Fallacy:** Christianity as we know it was "invented" by people, rather than revealed by God. "At [the Council of Nicea] . . . many aspects of Christianity were debated and voted upon — the date of Easter, the role of the bishops, the administration of sacraments and, of course, the *divinity* of Jesus . . . [U]ntil *that* moment in history, Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet . . . a great and powerful man, but a *man* nonetheless. A mortal." (*DVC*, p. 233)

Fact: The Council of Nicea debated only one issue: Was Jesus coeternal with the Father? (See *A History of Christianity* by Kenneth Scott Latourette, pp. 152-157.)

Although Jesus' disciples were fearful skeptics who initially did not clearly understand who Christ was and what He came to do, after the resurrection they willingly sacrificed their lives for proclaiming that He was indeed God in the flesh. (John 20:19-28, 31; 2 Peter 1:16-18; Philippians 2:5-11)

8. **Fallacy:** Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene. ". . . [O]ne particularly troubling earthly theme kept recurring in the [Gnostic] gospels. Mary Magdalene. . . . More specifically, her marriage to Jesus Christ." (*DVC*, p. 244)

Fact: None of the Gnostic gospels contain any references to a marriage between Mary and Jesus. There is no support for this claim in the Scriptures or in early church traditions. In 1 Corinthians 9:5, Paul defended his right to have a wife (even though he was unmarried). He cites as support the other apostles, the Lord's brothers and Peter. If Christ had been married, Paul would most certainly have cited Him as conclusive support for being accompanied by a wife.

9. **Fallacy:** Christianity borrowed its practices and symbols from the pagan mystery religions. "And virtually all the elements of the Catholic ritual . . . were taken directly from earlier pagan mystery religions." (*DVC*, p. 232)

Fact: A distinction needs to be made between New Testament Christianity and what developed over time as Greek and Roman converts brought certain non-biblical elements into their worship. In particular, the Church at Rome abandoned the biblical feast days observed by the early church in favor of the feast days of the pagan they were seeking to convert. And to some degree, they adopted the vestments and rituals of the pagan Roman priests.

Most mystery religions, however, flourished long after the closing of the canon of Scripture. Therefore, it would be more proper to say that Christianity influenced mystery religions, rather than the other way around. A careful observation of the mystery religion stories reveals there is a vast difference between the events recorded in the New Testament and the mythologies of the mystery religions. The mysteries were rooted in emotionalism and fantasy. In contrast, Christianity is rooted in history and evidence. The mysteries were a combination of many religious systems,

worshipping numerous deities. Christianity is rooted in the consistent revelation of *one* God who ordained the pure and spotless sacrifice of His Son in payment for man's sin.

10. **Fallacy:** The book is based on fact. "All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate." (*DVC* Page 1)

Fact: Contrary to the book's claim that early Jewish tradition involved ritualistic sex, the Old Testament carefully defined and steadfastly condemned sexual immorality — especially the pagan practice of bringing sex into public worship (Leviticus 10:10-21; Deuteronomy 23:17-18; 1 Kings 14:24).

The novel contends that Da Vinci painted the Apostle John as representing Mary Magdalene. However, John's appearance reflects the way Florentine artists traditionally depicted John. (See *The Truth Behind the Da Vinci Code*, Richard Abanes, pp. 71–72). The claims of ". . . hidden documents that detail the truth about Mary Magdalene, Jesus, and their lineage . . ." (*DVC*, p. 160) are based on forgeries. (See *The Truth Behind the Da Vinci Code*, pp. 51–54.)

Dismantling the Da Vinci Code

Sandra Miesel

Sandra Miesel is a veteran Catholic journalist.

“The Grail,” Langdon said, “is symbolic of the lost goddess. When Christianity came along, the old pagan religions did not die easily. Legends of chivalric quests for the Holy Grail were in fact stories of forbidden quests to find the lost sacred feminine.

Knights who claimed to be “searching for the chalice” were speaking in code as a way to protect themselves from a Church that had subjugated women, banished the Goddess, burned non-believers, and forbidden the pagan reverence for the sacred feminine.” *The Da Vinci Code*, pages 238-239)

The Holy Grail is a favorite metaphor for a desirable but difficult-to-attain goal, from the map of the human genome to Lord Stanley’s Cup. While the original Grail—the cup Jesus allegedly used at the Last Supper—normally inhabits the pages of Arthurian romance, Dan Brown’s recent mega-best-seller, *The Da Vinci Code*, rips it away to the realm of esoteric history.

But his book is more than just the story of a quest for the Grail—he *wholly* reinterprets the Grail legend. In doing so, Brown inverts the insight that a woman’s body is symbolically a container and makes a container symbolically a woman’s body. And that container has a name every Christian will recognize, for Brown claims that the Holy Grail was actually Mary Magdalene. She was the vessel that held the blood of Jesus Christ in her womb while bearing his children.

Over the centuries, the Grail-keepers have been guarding the true (and continuing) bloodline of Christ and the relics of the Magdalen, *not* a material vessel. Therefore Brown claims that “the quest for the Holy Grail is the quest to kneel before the bones of Mary Magdalene,” a conclusion that would surely have surprised Sir Galahad and the other Grail knights who thought they were searching for the Chalice of the Last Supper.

The Da Vinci Code opens with the grisly murder of the Louvre’s curator inside the museum. The crime enmeshes hero Robert Langdon, a tweedy professor of symbolism from Harvard, and the victim’s granddaughter, burgundy-haired cryptologist Sophie Neveu. Together with crippled millionaire historian Leigh Teabing, they flee Paris for London one step ahead of the police and a mad albino Opus Dei “monk” named Silas who will stop at nothing to prevent them from finding the “Grail.”

But despite the frenetic pacing, at no point is action allowed to interfere with a good lecture. Before the story comes full circle back to the Louvre, readers face a barrage of codes, puzzles, mysteries, and conspiracies.

With his twice-stated principle, “Everybody loves a conspiracy,” Brown is reminiscent of the famous author who crafted her product by studying the features of ten earlier best-sellers. It would be too easy to criticize him for characters thin as plastic wrap, undistinguished prose, and improbable action. But Brown isn’t so much writing badly as writing in a particular way best calculated to attract a female audience. (Women, after all, buy most of the nation’s books.) He has married a thriller plot to a romance-novel technique. Notice how each character is an extreme type...effortlessly brilliant, smarmy, sinister, or psychotic as needed, moving against luxurious but curiously flat backdrops. Avoiding gore and bedroom gymnastics, he shows only one brief kiss and a sexual ritual performed by a married couple. The risqué allusions are fleeting although the text lingers over some bloody Opus Dei mortifications. In short, Brown has fabricated a novel perfect for a ladies’ book club.

Brown’s lack of seriousness shows in the games he plays with his character names—Robert Langdon, “bright fame long don” (distinguished and virile); Sophie Neveu, “wisdom New Eve”; the irascible taurine detective Bezu Fache, “zebu anger.” The servant who leads the police to them is Legaludec, “legal duce.” The murdered curator takes his surname, Saunière, from a real Catholic priest whose occult antics sparked interest in the Grail secret. As an inside joke, Brown even writes in his real-life editor (Faukman is Kaufman).

While his extensive use of fictional formulas may be the secret to Brown’s stardom, his anti-Christian message can’t have hurt him in publishing circles: *The Da Vinci Code* debuted atop the *New York Times* best-seller list. By manipulating his audience through the conventions of romance-writing, Brown invites readers to identify with his smart,

glamorous characters who've seen through the impostures of the clerics who hide the "truth" about Jesus and his wife. Blasphemy is delivered in a soft voice with a knowing chuckle: "[E]very faith in the world is based on fabrication."

But even Brown has his limits. To dodge charges of outright bigotry, he includes a climactic twist in the story that absolves the Church of assassination. And although he presents Christianity as a false root and branch, he's willing to tolerate it for its charitable works.

(Of course, Catholic Christianity will become even more tolerable once the new liberal pope elected in Brown's previous Langdon novel, *Angels & Demons*, abandons outmoded teachings. "Third-century laws cannot be applied to the modern followers of Christ," says one of the book's progressive cardinals.)

Where Is He Getting All of This?

Brown actually cites his principal sources within the text of his novel. One is a specimen of academic feminist scholarship: *The Gnostic Gospels* by Elaine Pagels. The others are popular esoteric histories: *The Templar Revelation: Secret Guardians of the True Identity of Christ* by Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince; *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln; *The Goddess in the Gospels: Reclaiming the Sacred Feminine* and *The Woman with the Alabaster Jar: Mary Magdalen and the Holy Grail*, both by Margaret Starbird. (Starbird, a self-identified Catholic, has her books published by Matthew Fox's outfit, Bear & Co.) Another influence, at least at second remove, is *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* by Barbara G. Walker.

The use of such unreliable sources belies Brown's pretensions to intellectuality. But the act has apparently fooled at least some of his readers—the *New York Daily News* book reviewer trumpeted, "His research is impeccable."

But despite Brown's scholarly airs, a writer who thinks the Merovingians founded Paris and forgets that the popes once lived in Avignon is hardly a model researcher. And for him to state that the Church burned five million women as witches shows a willful—and *malicious*—ignorance of the historical record. The latest figures for deaths during the European witch craze are between 30,000 to 50,000 victims. Not all were executed by the Church, not all were women, and not all were burned. Brown's claim that educated women, priestesses, and midwives were singled out by witch-hunters is not only false, it betrays his goddess-friendly sources.

A Multitude of Errors

So error-laden is *The Da Vinci Code* that the educated reader actually applauds those rare occasions where Brown stumbles (despite himself) into the truth. A few examples of his "impeccable" research: He claims that the motions of the planet Venus trace a pentacle (the so-called Ishtar pentagram) symbolizing the goddess. But it isn't a perfect figure and has nothing to do with the length of the Olympiad. The ancient Olympic games were celebrated in honor of Zeus Olympias, *not* Aphrodite, and occurred every four years.

Brown's contention that the five linked rings of the modern Olympic Games are a secret tribute to the goddess is also wrong—each set of games was supposed to add a ring to the design but the organizers stopped at five. And his efforts to read goddess propaganda into art, literature, and even Disney cartoons are simply ridiculous.

No datum is too dubious for inclusion, and reality falls quickly by the wayside. For instance, the Opus Dei bishop encourages his albino assassin by telling him that Noah was also an albino (a notion drawn from the non-canonical 1 Enoch 106:2). Yet albinism somehow fails to interfere with the man's eyesight as it physiologically would.

But a far more important example is Brown's treatment of Gothic architecture as a style full of goddess-worshipping symbols and coded messages to confound the uninitiated. Building on Barbara Walker's claim that "like a pagan temple, the Gothic cathedral represented the body of the Goddess," *The Templar Revelation* asserts: "Sexual symbolism is found in the great Gothic cathedrals which were masterminded by the Knights Templar...both of which represent intimate female anatomy: the arch, which draws the worshipper into the body of Mother Church, evokes the vulva." In *The Da Vinci Code*, these sentiments are transformed into a character's description of "a cathedral's long hollow nave as a secret tribute to a woman's womb...complete with receding labial ridges and a nice little cinquefoil clitoris above the doorway."

These remarks cannot be brushed aside as opinions of the villain; Langdon, the book's hero, refers to his own lectures about goddess-symbolism at Chartres.

These bizarre interpretations betray no acquaintance with the actual development or construction of Gothic architecture, and correcting the countless errors becomes a tiresome exercise: The Templars had *nothing* to do with the cathedrals of their time, which were commissioned by bishops and their canons throughout Europe. They were unlettered men with no arcane knowledge of "sacred geometry" passed down from the pyramid builders. They did not wield tools themselves on their own projects, nor did they found masons' guilds to build for others. Not all their churches were round, nor was roundness a defiant insult to the Church. Rather than being a tribute to the divine feminine, their round churches honored the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Actually looking at Gothic churches and their predecessors deflates the idea of female symbolism. Large medieval churches typically had three front doors on the west plus triple entrances to their transepts on the

north and south. (What part of a woman's anatomy does a transept represent? Or the kink in Chartres's main aisle?) Romanesque churches—including ones that *predate* the founding of the Templars—have similar bands of decoration arching over their entrances. Both Gothic and Romanesque churches have the long, rectangular nave inherited from Late Antique basilicas, ultimately derived from Roman public buildings. Neither Brown nor his sources consider what symbolism medieval churchmen such as Suger of St.-Denis or William Durandus read in church design. It certainly wasn't goddess-worship.

False Claims

If the above seems like a pile driver applied to a gnat, the blows are necessary to demonstrate the utter falseness of Brown's material. His willful distortions of documented history are more than matched by his outlandish claims about controversial subjects. But to a postmodernist, one construct of reality is as good as any other.

Brown's approach seems to consist of grabbing large chunks of his stated sources and tossing them together in a salad of a story. From *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, Brown lifts the concept of the Grail as a metaphor for a sacred lineage by arbitrarily breaking a medieval French term, *Sangraal* (Holy Grail), into *sang* (blood) and *raal* (royal). This holy blood, according to Brown, descended from Jesus and his wife, Mary Magdalene, to the Merovingian dynasty in Dark Ages France, surviving its fall to persist in several modern French families, including that of Pierre Plantard, a leader of the mysterious Priory of Sion. The Priory—an actual organization officially registered with the French government in 1956—makes extraordinary claims of antiquity as the “real” power behind the Knights Templar. It most likely originated after World War II and was first brought to public notice in 1962. With the exception of filmmaker Jean Cocteau, its illustrious list of Grand Masters—which include Leonardo da Vinci, Issac Newton, and Victor Hugo—is not credible, although it's presented as true by Brown.

Brown doesn't accept a political motivation for the Priory's activities. Instead he picks up *The Templar Revelation's* view of the organization as a cult of secret goddess-worshippers who have preserved ancient Gnostic wisdom and records of Christ's true mission, which would completely overturn Christianity if released. Significantly, Brown omits the rest of the book's thesis that makes Christ and Mary Magdalene unmarried sex partners performing the erotic mysteries of Isis. Perhaps even a gullible mass-market audience has its limits.

From both *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* and *The Templar Revelation*, Brown takes a negative view of the Bible and a grossly distorted image of Jesus. He's neither the Messiah nor a humble carpenter but a wealthy, trained religious teacher bent on regaining the throne of David. His credentials are amplified by his relationship with the rich Magdalen who carries the royal blood of Benjamin: "Almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false," laments one of Brown's characters.

Yet it's Brown's Christology that's false—and *blindingly* so. He requires the present New Testament to be a post-Constantinian fabrication that displaced true accounts now represented only by surviving Gnostic texts. He claims that Christ wasn't considered divine until the Council of Nicea voted him so in 325 at the behest of the emperor. Then Constantine—a lifelong sun worshipper—ordered all older scriptural texts destroyed, which is why no complete set of Gospels predates the fourth century. Christians somehow failed to notice the sudden and drastic change in their doctrine.

But by Brown's specious reasoning, the Old Testament can't be authentic either because complete Hebrew Scriptures are no more than a thousand years old. And yet the texts were transmitted so accurately that they *do* match well with the Dead Sea Scrolls from a thousand years earlier. Analysis of textual families, comparison with fragments and quotations, plus historical correlations securely date the orthodox Gospels to the first century and indicate that they're *earlier* than the

Gnostic forgeries. (The Epistles of St. Paul are, of course, even earlier than the Gospels.)

Primitive Church documents and the testimony of the ante-Nicene Fathers confirm that Christians have *always* believed Jesus to be Lord, God, and Savior—even when that faith meant death. The earliest partial canon of Scripture dates from the late second century and already rejected Gnostic writings. For Brown, it isn't enough to credit Constantine with the divinization of Jesus. The emperor's old adherence to the cult of the Invincible Sun also meant repackaging sun worship as the new faith. Brown drags out old (and long-discredited) charges by virulent anti-Catholics like Alexander Hislop who accused the Church of perpetuating Babylonian mysteries, as well as 19th-century rationalists who regarded Christ as just another dying savior-god.

Unsurprisingly, Brown misses no opportunity to criticize Christianity and its pitiable adherents. (The church in question is always the Catholic Church, though his villain does sneer once at Anglicans—for their grimness, of all things.) He routinely and anachronistically refers to the Church as “the Vatican,” even when popes weren't in residence there. He systematically portrays it throughout history as deceitful, power-crazed, crafty, and murderous: “The Church may no longer employ crusades to slaughter, but their influence is no less persuasive. No less insidious.”

Goddess Worship and the Magdalen

Worst of all, in Brown's eyes, is the fact that the pleasure-hating, sex-hating, woman-hating Church suppressed goddess worship and eliminated the divine feminine. He claims that goddess worship universally dominated pre-Christian paganism with the *hieros gamos* (sacred marriage) as its central rite. His enthusiasm for fertility rites is enthusiasm for sexuality, not procreation. What else would one expect of a Cathar sympathizer?

Astonishingly, Brown claims that Jews in Solomon's Temple adored Yahweh and his feminine counterpart, the Shekinah, via the services of sacred prostitutes—possibly a twisted version of the Temple's corruption after Solomon (1 Kings 14:24 and 2 Kings 23:4–15). Moreover, he says that the tetragrammaton YHWH derives from “Jehovah, an androgynous physical union between the masculine Jah and the pre-Hebraic name for Eve, Havah.”

But as any first-year Scripture student could tell you, Jehovah is actually a 16th-century rendering of Yahweh using the vowels of Adonai (“Lord”). In fact, goddesses did *not* dominate the pre-Christian world—not in the religions of Rome, her barbarian subjects, Egypt, or even Semitic lands where the *hieros gamos* was an ancient practice. Nor did the Hellenized cult of Isis appear to have included sex in its secret rites.

Contrary to yet another of Brown's claims, Tarot cards do *not* teach goddess doctrine. They were invented for innocent gaming purposes in the 15th century and didn't acquire occult associations until the late 18th. Playing-card suites carry no Grail symbolism. The notion of diamonds symbolizing pentacles is a deliberate misrepresentation by British occultist A. E. Waite. And the number five—so crucial to Brown's puzzles—has some connections with the protective goddess but myriad others besides, including human life, the five senses, and the Five Wounds of Christ.

Brown's treatment of Mary Magdalene is sheer delusion. In *The Da Vinci Code*, she's no penitent whore but Christ's royal consort and the intended head of His Church, supplanted by Peter and defamed by churchmen. She fled west with her offspring to Provence, where medieval Cathars would keep the original teachings of Jesus alive. The Priory of Sion still guards her relics and records, excavated by the Templars from the subterranean Holy of Holies. It also protects her descendants—including Brown's heroine.

Although many people still picture the Magdalen as a sinful woman who anointed Jesus and equate her with Mary of Bethany, that conflation is actually the later work of Pope St. Gregory the Great. The East has always kept them separate and said that the Magdalen, “apostle to the apostles,” died in Ephesus. The legend of her voyage to Provence is no earlier than the ninth century, and her relics weren’t reported there until the 13th. Catholic critics, including the Bollandists, have been debunking the legend and distinguishing the three ladies since the 17th century.

Brown uses two Gnostic documents, the Gospel of Philip and the Gospel of Mary, to prove that the Magdalen was Christ’s “companion,” meaning sexual partner. The apostles were jealous that Jesus used to “kiss her on the mouth” and favored her over them. He cites exactly the same passages quoted in *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* and *The Templar Revelation* and even picks up the latter’s reference to *The Last Temptation of Christ*. What these books neglect to mention is the infamous final verse of the Gospel of Thomas. When Peter sneers that “women are not worthy of Life,” Jesus responds, “I myself shall lead her in order to make her male.... For every woman who will make herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”

That’s certainly an odd way to “honor” one’s spouse or exalt the status of women.

The Knights Templar

Brown likewise misrepresents the history of the Knights Templar. The oldest of the military–religious orders, the Knights were founded in 1118 to protect pilgrims in the Holy Land. Their rule, attributed to St. Bernard of Clairvaux, was approved in 1128 and generous donors granted them numerous properties in Europe for support. Rendered redundant after the last Crusader stronghold fell in 1291, the Templars’ pride and wealth—they were also bankers—earned them keen hostility.

Brown maliciously ascribes the suppression of the Templars to “Machiavellian” Pope Clement V, whom they were blackmailing with the Grail secret. His “ingeniously planned sting operation” had his soldiers suddenly arrest all Templars. Charged with Satanism, sodomy, and blasphemy, they were tortured into confessing and burned as heretics, their ashes “tossed unceremoniously into the Tiber.”

But in reality, the initiative for crushing the Templars came from King Philip the Fair of France, whose royal officials did the arresting in 1307. About 120 Templars were burned by local Inquisitorial courts in France for not confessing or retracting a confession, as happened with Grand Master Jacques de Molay. Few Templars suffered death elsewhere although their order was abolished in 1312. Clement, a weak, sickly Frenchman manipulated by his king, burned no one in Rome inasmuch as he was the first pope to reign from Avignon (so much for the ashes in the Tiber).

Moreover, the mysterious stone idol that the Templars were accused of worshiping is associated with fertility in only *one* of more than a hundred confessions. Sodomy was the scandalous—and possibly true—charge against the order, *not* ritual fornication. The Templars have been darlings of occultism since their myth as masters of secret wisdom and fabulous treasure began to coalesce in the late 18th century.

Freemasons and even Nazis have hailed them as brothers. Now it’s the turn of neo-Gnostics.

Twisting da Vinci

Brown’s revisionist interpretations of da Vinci are as distorted as the rest of his information. He claims to have first run across these views “while I was studying art history in Seville,” but they correspond point for point to material in *The Templar Revelation*. A writer who sees a pointed finger as a throat-cutting gesture, who says the Madonna of the Rocks was painted for nuns instead of a lay confraternity of men, who claims

that da Vinci received “hundreds of lucrative Vatican commissions” (actually, it was just one...and it was never executed) is simply unreliable.

Brown’s analysis of da Vinci’s work is just as ridiculous. He presents the *Mona Lisa* as an androgynous self-portrait when it’s widely known to portray a real woman, Madonna Lisa, wife of Francesco di Bartolomeo del Giocondo. The name is certainly not—as Brown claims—a mocking anagram of two Egyptian fertility deities Amon and L’Isa (Italian for Isis). How did he miss the theory, propounded by the authors of *The Templar Revelation*, that the Shroud of Turin is a photographed self-portrait of da Vinci?

Much of Brown’s argument centers around da Vinci’s *Last Supper*, a painting the author considers a coded message that reveals the truth about Jesus and the Grail. Brown points to the lack of a central chalice on the table as proof that the Grail *isn’t* a material vessel. But da Vinci’s painting specifically dramatizes the moment when Jesus warns, “One of you will betray me” (John 13:21). There is no Institution Narrative in St. John’s Gospel. The Eucharist is not shown there. And the person sitting next to Jesus is *not* Mary Magdalene (as Brown claims) but St. John, portrayed as the usual effeminate da Vinci youth, comparable to his St. John the Baptist. Jesus is in the exact center of the painting, with two pyramidal groups of three apostles on each side. Although da Vinci was a spiritually troubled homosexual, Brown’s contention that he coded his paintings with anti-Christian messages simply can’t be sustained.

Brown’s Mess

In the end, Dan Brown has penned a poorly written, atrociously researched mess. So, why bother with such a close reading of a worthless novel? The answer is simple: *The Da Vinci Code* takes esoteric mainstream. It may well do for Gnosticism what *The Mists of Avalon* did

for paganism—gain it popular acceptance. After all, how many lay readers will see the blazing inaccuracies put forward as buried truths?

What's more, in making phony claims of scholarship, Brown's book infects readers with a virulent hostility toward Catholicism. Dozens of occult history books, conveniently cross-linked by Amazon.com, are following in its wake. And booksellers' shelves now bulge with falsehoods few would be buying without *The Da Vinci Code* connection. While Brown's assault on the Catholic Church may be a backhanded compliment, it's one we would have happily done without