

The Da Vinci Code Book Review
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Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* begins with the murder of the curator of the Louvre museum in Paris, Jacques Sauniere. As he is dying, Sauniere determines that he is the sole holder of a secret that must be passed on. Robert Langdon, the protagonist, is a Harvard University professor who studies symbology and is visiting Paris at the time. Sauniere is found naked with his arms and legs outstretched and Langdon ascertains that he is positioned like "The Vitruvian Man," Leonardo da Vinci's most famous sketch. More clues lead Langdon to uncover hidden messages in da Vinci's works, "Mona Lisa", "Madonna of the Rocks" and "The Last Supper." Langdon recalls that da Vinci was leader of a brotherhood that guarded an ancient secret regarding the quest for the Holy Grail and the story of Jesus Christ. Later, Langdon discovers that Sauniere was da Vinci's modern-day counterpart in this organization.

The plot thickens as the reader is given a crash course in the "real" story of Christianity's beginnings. Brown (through his fictional expert) writes that "almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false."¹ Christianity was started by Jesus Christ, who was a prophet but made no claims to divinity. Jesus was also married to Mary Magdalene, who was supposed to lead the church; Jesus was the original feminist. After the crucifixion, Mary (in fear of her life) was forced to flee Jerusalem from Peter, who was upset that Jesus had chosen Mary to lead instead of him.² Mary gave birth to Jesus' daughter in France with the support of Jewish protectors. Mary was forced to remain in hiding due to the patriarchal church that changed the original goddess

worshipping church into a Jesus worshipping church by perverting his teachings for their political agenda.³

Mary's line grew quietly in France until they intermarried with the French royal dynasty called the Merovingian bloodline. In the 5th century, the Roman Catholic Church tried to destroy the records that imparted this true story and hid these documents in the ruins of Herod's temple. Searching for these documents was "part of what the Crusades were about. Gathering and destroying information."⁴ The Church failed in this mission, due to truth-honoring knights called Knights Templar who were created by the brotherhood Priory of Sion. French King Godfrey of Bouillon, who was a descendent of Jesus and Mary, established this secret brotherhood in 1099.⁵ The knights discovered these documents and because of their leverage against the Roman Catholic Church they amassed much land, wealth and power over two centuries. Pope Clement V conspired with King Philip IV of France to have all the knights gathered and killed. A few knights survived and guarded this secret bloodline through the Priory of Sion using secret codes. The Holy Grail is one of these codes, not the familiar cup Jesus used during the last supper, but rather a metaphor for Jesus' bloodline preserved through Mary Magdalene.

Where does Leonardo da Vinci fit into this picture? Da Vinci, Isaac Newton and other historical figures were grandmasters of this secret brotherhood. Brown insists one need only examine da Vinci's classic masterpieces to clearly see that he hid numerous symbols and codes to show his disdain for the Church, the truth of Jesus' bloodline and his own worship of the sacred feminine.

Who does not like a good mystery story with a conspiracy twist? Brown engages the reader from the first page with murder and clues that lead to the early Christian roots

and continue through the Knights Templar, da Vinci and the present. Since its publication in 2003, *The Da Vinci Code* has sold over twenty-five million books in forty-four languages worldwide. Doubleday has set no date for a paperback as they expect it to continue to be a top seller. A film by Columbia Pictures is expected by Ron Howard in 2006 starring Tom Hanks as Robert Langdon.⁶ Part of the appeal may be its controversial historic claims which have been dismissed by Roman Catholics, as well as conservative Protestants. I suspect that this sort of book attracts many who have a “beef” with the Catholic Church or those who have bought into post modern thought and consider it arrogant of Christians to suggest they have the “truth”. Unfortunately, television and film media are quick to jump on any sensationalist attacks on traditional Christianity and have contributed to the book’s renown as well.

One typical response to those that protest the book is to suggest this story is only fiction – “Why should your faith be threatened in any way?” I believe there is more to the book than a fictional “what if” story. For one, Brown actually believes the historical accounts that his “experts” portray in the book.⁷ *The Da Vinci Code* begins with a FACT page with the first misinformation regarding the Priory of Sion’s origins and past members. If Brown had researched even a little (and he may have), he would know this organization started in 1956 and its history was a hoax orchestrated by one of the founders, Pierre Plantard, who planted forged documents in the National Library (Paris) in 1967.⁸ Secondly, his publishers and the media have been presenting the work as a fact or historic based work. For instance, USA Today called the novel, “historic fact with a contemporary storyline.”⁹ Lastly, although the reader may realize the story is fiction, Brown has “experts” in the book relay information that is meant to be historic

background for the murder. A reader who has not investigated or read sources such as the Bible, 2nd century church fathers (e.g. Justin Martyr, Irenaeus), or does not understand how textual criticism works unwittingly accepts his “facts” as truth.

This ultimately should disturb Christians as it calls into the question the very roots of Christianity at its source (Jesus). This should also be of concern to those who wish to know historical truth as this culture becomes more and more post literate. This paper will critique many of Brown’s claims and sources, while at the same time providing a polemic for orthodox conclusions. Although Brown makes many assertions and conclusions which are incorrect to support his claims, I will focus on his sources (Gnostic and other current writers) and his main claims: Jesus’ supposed marriage, his lack of divinity and Christianity’s origins. I will invite the reader to acquire a more comprehensive critique (listed in the notes) to address every one of Brown’s mistaken assertions. Even if these others errors are not as damaging to Christianity, it does illustrate the author’s willingness to grab any conspiracy claim to make his story work. Sandra Miesel writes, “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.”¹⁰

Brown’s primary source is the book *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, published in the 1980’s by Baigent, Lincoln and Leigh. These authors stipulate most of the history that Brown regurgitates; Jesus marrying Mary Magdalene establishing a bloodline through the French Merovingian dynasty that later Knights Templar discover and leverage against the Church. Brown’s expert character Leigh Teabing actually references two of the authors (Leigh plus Teabing is an anagram of Baigent). This book was inspired by the popular myth about a priest named Saunier from the French town of Rennes-Le-Chateau. The

murder victim and current grandmaster of Priory of Sion in *The Da Vinci Code* is named after this priest and his story briefly follows:

Berenger Sauniere (1852-1917) became a priest of Rennes-le-Chateau in 1885 and had a normal existence until he found four parchments in 1891. Two of them were genealogies confirming the Merovingian bloodline had survived and continued until at least 1644. One of the remaining two parchments had a complex set of codes imbedded in Latin portions of the Gospels. After showing these parchments to his superior, he was dispatched to Paris to certain ecclesiastical authorities. No one knows what was said at these meetings, but when Sauniere returned, he began erasing messages on tombstones, going on long journeys and writing many letters. He also became suddenly wealthy by 1917. Sauniere then suffered a suspicious stroke.¹¹ The only problem with this story is that it was fabricated by Noel Corbu, who had purchased Sauniere's estate and turned the guest house into a hotel. He needed a gimmick in order to attract customers to his new venture. Pierre Plantard (previously mentioned as the founder of Priory of Sion) developed an interest in Corbu's story and decided to embellish it. In hopes of spreading his hoax, Plantard began planting numerous forged documents throughout France.¹² Plantard's story changed multiple times and is well documented. His career consisted of fraud, embezzlement and deceit ending in 1993, when he found himself involved with the death of Roger-Patrice Pelat, a friend of the French President. Plantard had named Pelat as the grandmaster of the Priory of Sion, which made the authorities suspicious of him. When brought in for questioning, authorities found more forged documents in his house (one document claimed he was the true King of France) and he admitted that he had made it all up.¹³

In an interview with Henry Lincoln (one author of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*), he admitted their reasons for pursuing this story came out of a discussion where they weighed the probability of Jesus rising from the dead versus Jesus being a man like us who married and had children. Since the latter was more probable, they pursued that thesis. He candidly disclosed that none of his books have any validity as they were all based upon hearsay. Lincoln also confirmed that the Priory of Sion did not exist before 1956 and its founder Plantard has been discredited as his documents were forged.¹⁴ Even with this admission, Lincoln did not rush to take the book off the stands as a discredited piece of work (over 4 million copies have sold). Dan Brown has helped perpetuate these untruths by adopting the storyline into his mystery.

This brings us to the primary contention by Dan Brown taken from *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* – that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene. According to Brown’s character Teabing, “the marriage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene is part of the historic record.”¹⁵ His proof of this is two-fold. One, because Jesus was a Jew, the obligation was that he should be married and the Bible’s gospels should have offered some explanation for his unnatural state of bachelorhood. Second, the earliest Christian records in the Dead Sea scrolls and Gnostic Gospels record this union. Teabing claims, “One particularly troubling theme kept recurring in the [Gnostic] gospels. Mary Magdalene...More specifically her marriage to Jesus Christ.”¹⁶ Teabing refers specifically to the Gnostic Gospel of Phillip verse 55b, “The companion of the Savior is Mary Magdalene. Christ loved her more than all the disciples and used to kiss her often on her mouth. The rest of the disciples were offended by it and expressed disapproval. They said to him, ‘Why do you love her more than all of us?’” Teabing subsequently

concludes that “any Aramaic scholar will tell you, the word *companion*, in those days, literally meant spouse.”¹⁷

Brown’s first reason is not compelling as an argument from silence. The Gospels also do not tell us if Jesus had a dog, was right-handed or disliked Brussels sprouts. Assuming in the first century Jewish context, these were norms, it does not follow that Jesus followed suit. Obviously, Jesus was different in many distinctive ways than others. The historic fact is that by the first century, the Jews had become more flexible toward marriage compared to an Old Testament context. Paul Maier, professor of ancient history at Western Michigan University, explains, “Exceptions for bachelorhood were granted by the rabbis, and there were whole sub-groups in Judaism that practiced celibacy, such as a branch of the Essenes or the Egyptian Therapeutae familiar from Philo.”¹⁸ From the Bible, we also have the example of John the Baptist, who remained single, as well as the Apostle Paul who encourages remaining single in I Corinthians 7:8, “Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am.” In this same epistle, Paul also affirms the right to be married, “Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas [Peter].” (I Corinthians 9:5) Surely, if Jesus was married, Paul would have referred to Jesus’ example, rather than Peter or other apostles.

In the second piece of logic, Brown has glaring mistakes in his claims. First, the Dead Sea Scrolls have no early Christian history as they contain text from the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), some Old Testament apocryphal writings and sectarian scrolls (ordinances, commentaries and liturgical works). Possibly, Brown confused the Old Testament apocryphal books with the Gnostic New Testament apocryphal books.

Second, none of the Gnostic Gospels contain any references to a marriage between Jesus and Mary, including the Gospel of Mary. Maier explains, “[There is] not a scintilla of evidence – anywhere in historical sources. Even where one might expect to find such claims in the bizarre, second-century, apocryphal gospels – which the Jesus Seminar and other radical voices are trying so desperately to rehabilitate – there is no reference that Jesus ever got married.”¹⁹ Teabing exaggerates, “I shan’t bore you with the countless references to Jesus and Magdalene’s union.”²⁰ I suspect this is shorthand for “I made it up.” Fourth, the word “mouth” is actually missing from the extant copies that we have. Some translations have added [mouth], but could have added [forehead] or [cheek] and still read just as well. Lastly, the Gospel of Phillip is written in Coptic (a late form of Egyptian) not Aramaic. Even if we grant his blunder here and assume the Gospel of Phillip was originally in Aramaic, his interpretation of *companion* is mistaken. Craig Blomberg, New Testament professor at Denver Seminary, concludes that “no Aramaic or Hebrew words for ‘companion’ normally mean spouse!”²¹

Before addressing Brown’s second attack on Christianity, it is important to address his Gnostic sources and to present a polemic for the authenticity of the documents that orthodox Christianity affirms. The Nag Hammadi discoveries in 1947 unearthed a collection of philosophic and religious writings in a large stone jar in the desert. Most likely these writings were copied down by fourth century Gnostic Christians. They have traditionally been dated to the mid to late second century, although Teabing insists that they are “the earliest Christian records.”²² Prior to this find, our primary sources of information about Gnosticism came from early heresiologists (defenders of Christianity against heresy) such as Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus and

Epiphanius.²³ These early critics of these writings claimed Gnostics used biblical texts for their own purposes and were a combination of Greek philosophy and Christianity. This Gnostic movement persisted until the fourth century and consisted of many different beliefs, although there was no common authority.

The word “Gnosticism” has at its root “knowledge” and it is this secret “knowledge” the Gnostics claimed to have. The way to God becomes a subjective matter and objective knowledge or an objective way to God goes by the wayside. Brown and others would prefer that Christianity becomes a subjective experience because this allows one to create your own “truth”. Orthodox Christianity, on the other hand, places itself within “real” history where evidence can be shown to prove or disprove it.

As one reads the Gnostic writings, you soon realize that the “truths” revealed are all over the map and conflict with each other. Brown conveniently pulls slices of the Gnostic writings to support his arguments, but in no way attempts to explain how to reconcile the inconsistencies within them or between them. For instance, at the end of the Gospel of Thomas, we read, “Simon Peter said to them, ‘Make Mary [Magdalene] leave us, for females are not worthy of life.’ Jesus said, ‘Look, I shall guide her to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every female who makes herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.’”²⁴ This verse is in opposition to divine feminine that Brown thinks the Church suppressed. How can you accept some teachings from these sources and ignore others? Would not this inconsistent nature factor into realizing the Gnostic sources may be fraudulent?

This brings us to consider the records we do have for early Christianity – namely the New Testament. When attempting to determine historical facts about events in

antiquity, the closer a document is to the events themselves, the better. All the books in the New Testament were written in the first century – even the most liberal scholar would not place anything past 95AD. The Gospel accounts themselves which chronicle Jesus’ life are typically dated by conservative scholars as the following: Matthew (40s-60s AD), Mark (40s-60s AD), Luke (late 50s to early 60s) and John (80-95AD). Liberal scholars push out the dates a little later: Matthew (80s AD), Mark (late 60s AD), Luke (80s AD) and John (90s AD).²⁵ These records are the earliest Christian records, not the Gnostic gospels which are dated to the mid 100s to early 200s AD.

Brown challenges that the Christian Scriptures “evolved through countless translations, additions, and revisions. History has never had a definite version of the book.”²⁶ This is in opposition to the wealth of evidence for the New Testament with over 5000 manuscripts. For many of the Gnostic gospels, we have one or two copies, which does not assure us that we possess anything close to the original. Whereas, with the Gospels, we have an unprecedented multiplicity of copies that allows one to cross check them with each other using textual criticism to determine what the original was. In addition to the Greek copies of manuscripts, we also have the translations into other languages early on. Bruce Metzger, Professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, explains, “even if we lost all the Greek manuscripts and the early translations, we could still reproduce the contents of the New Testament from the multiplicity of quotations in commentaries, sermons, letters and so forth of the early church fathers.”²⁷

The number of manuscripts may not appear as impressive until you compare this against other secular works. For instance, the Roman historian Tacitus wrote sixteen books called the *Annals of Imperial Rome* in approximately 116 AD. Only one

manuscript exists for the first six books dated about 850AD. Books seven through ten are lost and books eleven through sixteen are in another manuscript dated to the eleventh century.²⁸ For first century Jewish historian Josephus' work *The Jewish War*, we have nine copies dated to the tenth, eleventh and twelfth century. Next to the New Testament, Homer's *Iliad* has the closest amount of manuscripts (fewer than 650) dated to the second and third century. Considering this was the Greek's equivalent of the Bible and Homer composed the document in 800 BC, this is quite a gap compared to the New Testament. There seems to be a double standard when it comes to the orthodox canon compared to secular works in trusting its reliability. F.F. Bruce comments, "If the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded beyond all doubt."²⁹

Since there exists a plentitude of manuscripts of varying completeness with minor differences, there are some unqualified critiques that suggest one cannot trust the New Testament. This is naively negligent and misses the point that the more manuscripts one has, the more likely one can construct the original using textual criticism. There are different accidental types of errors, such as miscopying a similar looking letter, omitting a letter or word, repeating a letter or word or even deliberate changing such as correcting spelling or grammar or expansions (e.g. expanding "Christ Jesus" to "Christ Jesus Our Lord")³⁰ If I have a small number of copies of a document of antiquity, I have fewer assurances that I can get to the original because of copyist errors or corrupted manuscripts. On the other hand, when I can compare many manuscripts that have been collected from different geographic locations across different time periods, it becomes much easier to recover the original text. Most variations that we do find are minor and do

not affect the text in any substantial doctrinal way. Furthermore, any good Bible will alert the reader to any variant readings that have any consequence. Because of these points and others, Norman Geisler and William Nix conclude, “The New Testament, then, has not only survived in more manuscripts than any other book from antiquity, but it has survived in a purer form than any other great book – a form that is 99.5% pure.”³¹

Brown’s second attack on Christianity is the claim that Jesus was not divine, nor claimed to be divine. Teabing alleges that in the 4th century Constantine, for business and political reasons, decided to adopt Christianity as the official church religion. He shifted the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday to coincide with pagan worship of the sun, then in order to strengthen the new tradition, held the famous ecumenical gathering known as the Council of Nicaea.³² At this council they established many aspects of Christianity including the divinity of Jesus. Teabing explains, “Until *that* moment in history, Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet...a great and powerful man, but a *man* nonetheless. A mortal.” Teabing goes on to enlighten the reader that calling Jesus the “Son of God” and instituting his deity was the result of a relatively close vote at this council. Teabing adds, “Establishing Christ’s divinity was critical to the further unification of the Roman empire and to the new Vatican power base.”³³

Brown makes some unsubstantiated claims on the origins of Christian beliefs and practices to address later. Let us examine briefly what the New Testament has to say in regard to Jesus’ divinity, since we have established that these documents are the earliest writings and uncorrupted. Some easy to remember references are John 1, Colossians 1 and Hebrews 1. In John 1:1 we read, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” Later, John reveals the Word (Greek *logos*) is Jesus

who became flesh (verse 14). This is clearly claiming the ontological nature of Jesus being that of God.

In Colossians 1, Paul informs us that Jesus is the “image of the invisible God” (verse 15), that “all things were created by him” [Jesus] (verse 16) and that he was “before all things” (verse 17). Paul finishes with the claim that “God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him” (verse 19). Paul notifies the reader of Jesus’ divine status throughout his letters and all of them are dated pre 62AD, even by the most liberal scholars. This places the claim of Jesus’ divine status within a generation of his life, not three hundred years later at the Council of Nicaea. The writer of Hebrews is also unmistakably declaring Jesus as God by directly referring to Jesus a passage from the Psalms (originally toward Yahweh). In Hebrews 1 we read, “But about the Son he [the Father] says, ‘Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever’” (verse 8).

In addition to Paul and the writer of Hebrews, Jesus also claimed to be divine directly and by his actions. Jesus called himself the “Son of God” (John 5:18) - which in a Jewish context made himself equal of God. He also called himself the divine name (I AM in John 8:58) equating himself with God in the burning bush in Exodus 3:14. Jesus additionally claimed, “I and the Father are one.” (John 10:30). In all three of these cases, his life was threatened either by stoning or plotting to kill him as his Jewish audience clearly understood that he was equating himself with God charging him with blasphemy. Jesus’ actions are also credentials to his divinity in his lack of sin (I John 3:5, I Peter 2:22, John 8:46), accepting worship when God is the only one we worship (Matthew 28:9, Luke 4:8, Acts 10:25-26), the miracles performed and ultimately his resurrection. This resurrection event itself is the most well attested event of the ancient world and is

testable, whereas some writings from the second century (or even modern writings) that came from creative imaginations should rightly be set aside as rubbish.

For argument's sake, let us grant Brown his opinion that there are issues with accepting the New Testament as the true story of Christianity's beginnings. Do we have historical evidence that the early church did not consider Jesus as divine in the interim period from the late first century until Constantine? Again, Brown's scholarship is woefully remiss of the writings of the late first century fathers, second century apologists/theologians or even secular writers regarding Christianity. Clement of Rome (writing in 96AD) is one of the Apostolic Fathers in that he had contact with the apostles. His letter to the Corinthians was thought of so highly that some considered it canon. Although my intentions are not to prove the doctrine of the trinity, his letter bears witness to God the Father, to the Son, to the Spirit, and mentions all three together. He also speaks of the pre-existent divine Jesus when he says "The Sceptre of the Divine Majesty, the Lord Jesus Christ, did not for all his power, come clothed in boastful pomp and overweening pride, but in a humble frame of mind."³⁴

Another Apostolic Father, Ignatius of Antioch, was the second successor of the apostle Peter. On his way to his well attested martyrdom in the great Flavian Amphitheatre of Rome, he wrote seven epistles addressed to six Christian communities and to Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna. Ignatius composed these letters in 110 AD and over ten times he refers to Jesus as God. In his epistle to the Ephesians he writes, "God became man, true life in death; sprung both from Mary and from God, first subject to suffering and then incapable of it – Jesus Christ Our Lord."³⁵ If this reference is not clear enough of the high Christology in Ignatius, later in the same epistle he writes, "The fact

is, our God Jesus Christ was conceived by Mary according to God's dispensation of the seed of David."³⁶ What is even more revealing from Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch concerns their diverse geographies in the church in close historical proximity; Clement being in the Eastern Church and Ignatius in the Western Church. This demonstrates the prevalence of the teaching of Jesus' divinity throughout the emergence of early Christianity.

In the same historical period, we also have confirmation of the belief in Jesus' divinity from a secular source. Pliny the Younger was a Roman author and administrator who served as the governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor. He wrote many letters and speaks of Christianity in his province as he executed those that continued firm in their belief under the threat of death. This passage appears in his tenth book written in 112AD, "They (the Christians) were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god."³⁷ Pliny clearly confirms that Jesus was worshipped as a deity by early believers.

The Apologists (Justin Martyr and Irenaeus) of the late second century also express conviction in Jesus' divinity. Justin Martyr is concerned with the attacks against Christianity and writes in 150AD in *The First Apology* regarding the Son, "who being the logos and First-begotten is also God."³⁸ He also refers to Jesus as "both God and Lord of hosts"³⁹ in *Dialogue with Trypho*. Irenaeus is regarded as the greatest theologian of the second century and ironically was alarmed about the same sources of Christian heresies that involve this paper (namely the Gnostics and their esoteric subjective truths). He is the first Christian writer who has the entire New Testament (as recognized later) in his hands and writes in approximately 185AD, "Christ Jesus, our Lord and God, Savior and

King.”⁴⁰ Irenaeus also affirms the three articles in the rule of faith and baptism in his book *On The Apostolic Preaching*, which acknowledges not only the Trinitarian doctrine, but also indirectly the deity of Christ. Irenaeus states later in the book, “Therefore the Father is Lord and the Son is Lord, and the Father is God and the Son is God.”⁴¹

Another theologian, Clement of Alexandria writes around 200AD, “truly most manifest Deity, He that is made equal to the Lord of the universe; because he was His Son.”⁴² One could continue with more quotations from these same authors and other authors writing in the second and third century, but I believe the point has been established successfully that Jesus was considered divine from the earliest writings in the New Testament to the Apostolic Fathers to the apologists and theologians of the second and third centuries. Even those in opposition to Christianity (such as Pliny) recognized the Christian belief of “Jesus is Lord” which put itself at odds with “Caesar is Lord”.

The last area to focus on is Brown’s claims that attack the orthodox understanding of Christianity’s origins, specifically surrounding Constantine and the Council at Nicaea. Brown’s character Teabing professes that Constantine “was a lifelong pagan who was baptized on his deathbed”⁴³ and was motivated by business and political reasons to adopt Christianity as the state religion, shifting the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday and also holding the Council of Nicaea. This council is to blame for creating the canon that we currently call the New Testament and establishing Jesus’ divinity over a close vote. Brown has relayed incorrect historical information to the reader again, which should not surprise anyone by this point.

Although Constantine was a flawed individual, historians agree that he was a genuine convert as his reasons for waiting until his deathbed had to do with an incorrect

view that baptism wiped clean all the preceding sins.⁴⁴ Brown is also incorrect regarding the establishment of the Christian state religion as this did not occur until Theodosius' reign in 381AD; it was then that pagan worship was outlawed. Constantine was a tolerant emperor by allowing both paganism and Christianity the freedom to worship under his famous Edict of Milan (or Edict of Toleration) in 313AD. The assertion that Constantine changed the worship day from Saturday to Sunday is without merit as well. We find many passages in the New Testament that refer to this new day of worship (Acts 20:7, I Corinthians 16:2, Revelation 1:10), as well as in writings of the earliest church fathers already quoted (Ignatius, Justin Martyr) and even the secular source, Pliny the Younger. This new day of worship was obviously motivated by Jesus' resurrection on the first day of the week. Although we have addressed the issue of Jesus' divinity pre-Nicene, it is worth pointing out that the vote on whether Jesus was fully divine was not a close vote as Brown contends; it was 300-2!⁴⁵

This brings us to the New Testament canon. By the time of Constantine, the canon was not *determined* by the church but just *recognized* what the church had already accepted as canon. At the Nicene Council, twenty of the twenty seven books were easily accepted. Bruce Metzger emphasizes this point, "Although the fringes of the emerging canon remained unsettled for generations, a high degree of unanimity concerning the greater part of the New Testament was attained among the very diverse and scattered congregations of believers not only throughout the Mediterranean world, but also over an area extending from Britain to Mesopotamia."⁴⁶ Brown would have the reader believe that "more than eighty gospels were considered for the New Testament, and yet only a relative few were chosen for inclusion."⁴⁷ Maier rebuts this claim by explaining that

“Eusebius, the first church historian, tells us how they [four Gospels] were the core of the canon from the start, and how their authority was determined by *usage* in such early Christian centers as Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria and Rome. He also clearly identifies some of the later spurious writings, including the Gnostic gospels, that the church rejected as soon as they surfaced.”⁴⁸

So what principles were used by the early church to recognize the New Testament canon? Robert Bowman outlines five key criteria used to discern the canon:

1. Apostolicity: authorship by an apostle or apostolic associate.
2. Antiquity: authorship by a Christian leader from the church’s first generation.
3. Authenticity: historical traditions as to the writings’ authorship and authority.
4. Ubiquity: acceptance and use by churches throughout the known world.
5. Catholicity: Consonance with known NT writings and the church’s “rule of faith” expressed eventually in creeds.⁴⁹

The primary criterion is the first one listed, as the writing must have been authored by an Apostle or an immediate follower of the Apostle. These criteria do not seem arbitrary as it seems reasonable that God’s actions in history (specifically the resurrection) would be preserved by the immediate followers of Jesus. As one moves away from the events of history and of eyewitness accounts, the information becomes less reliable. It is easy to realize why the Gnostic writings (already addressed) were rejected from canonicity by violating all five criteria listed.

There are many other mistakes or misinformation relayed by Brown (e.g. history surrounding the Knights Templar, supposed messages in Leonardo’s works and other claims he makes against the Church to support the divine feminine) but I have chosen to focus on the claims that attack the core of Christianity. I began by examining Brown’s sources (specifically *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*), which were based upon fabrication and a hoax propagated by Plantard. The claim that Jesus was married was examined and found

wanting in light of the early historical evidence we have. The Gnostic sources for Brown's assertions were scrutinized and established as unreliable documents from the second and third centuries. By examining the New Testament, Apostolic Fathers, apologists and theologians of the second century and even a secular writer, it is apparent that Jesus was thought of as divine well before Constantine. Lastly, historical claims about Constantine and his influence on the canon and Nicene council were disproved.

It is almost beyond comprehension that a tale so error laden can be so quickly embraced by the public and touted as a factual book across the media, but there is a positive side to this attack on Christianity. Heresy has always been a force within the church to renew its focus on its core doctrines, in order to contradict error. Every Christian creed has been the direct result of heresy. All attacks in the long run have failed against Christianity. When a worldview, such as Christianity, makes claim to truth – truth that corresponds to reality – expect and welcome attacks in order that you may be able to defend God's supernatural interaction with mankind through Jesus and his actions. There will be attacks in this pluralistic culture against the existence of God, or the resurrection and divinity of Jesus because these claims are offensive in an age of "tolerance". As Peter instructs us, we are to "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."⁵⁰

¹ Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 235.

² Ibid 248.

³ Ibid 233-4.

⁴ Ibid 254.

⁵ Ibid 158.

⁶ Associated Press, "Two Years Later, 'Da Vinci Code' Still Going Strong" available from www.msnbc.com; accessed July 27, 2005.

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- ⁷ Dan Brown in an interview on Good Morning America, ABC, November 3, 2003 stated, "I began the research for *The Da Vinci Code* as a skeptic. I entirely expected, as I researched the book, to disprove this theory. And after numerous trips to Europe, about two years of research, I really became a believer."
- ⁸ Richard Abanes, *The Truth Behind The Da Vinci Code* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2004), 49.
- ⁹ Bob Minzesheimer, "'Code' Deciphers Interest In Religious History," *USA Today*, 11 December 2003.
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