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“The Da Vinci Code: Fact or Fiction”

Intro. This evening, I am going to deal with *The Da Vinci Code*. Since its release in 2003, over forty million hardback copies have sold. Just recently the movie based on the book has come out and sold millions of tickets. This is more than a book and a movie. It’s a cultural phenomenon. It can hardly be ignored by anyone.

The Da Vinci Code is a conspiracy story. It is a murder mystery, a suspense thriller. Americans love mystery suspense thrillers. The murder victim is the curator of the Louvre Museum in Paris. While searching for the murderer, the story’s two central characters also uncover what is said to be long-held secret kept by the Catholic Church and an alleged covert organization bent on keeping that secret. The curator of the museum was the leader of that small, clandestine society that has protected that secret through history.

The Da Vinci Code mentions Jesus fairly often. Some might think we should be happy about that. But it presents a different Jesus from the Bible. In fact, what drives the action of the story is the argument that the church’s traditional teachings about Jesus are all a fraud. Dan Brown’s novel claims, “Almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false.” And the assertions made about Christian history are made in such a way that they certainly come off as being true. Yet the knowledge of the Bible and church history is so limited, that most people will not know if Dan Brown is right or not. I want to say that the Jesus that Dan Brown presents is a Jesus that can save no one. And the Apostle Paul warned, “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8). Yes, by the authority of Scripture, true believers can pronounce anathema upon the author of *The Da Vinci Code*.

Now if this were just a novel, and if the author asserted that it is all fiction, then perhaps we should not be concerned. But on the opening page of the novel, Dan Brown claims that “all descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate.”¹ The fact is there are *many* blatant factual and historical errors in *The Da Vinci Code* novel and movie. Also, because movies have become so “realistic” today, many undiscerning people are likely to take what is said in them at face value. They have a difficult time separating fact from fiction. Likewise, many people are just too lazy to look into the truth for themselves. Christians who are not strong in the Faith could easily be shaken by such outrageous claims.

Even though I am upset that an author would put out such heresy for the sake of money, I am also a bit hopeful. First, that Jesus is coming again soon. The apostle Paul warned in 2 Tim. 4:4 that in the last days, “they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.” Also, I am happy that this is causing some to search for the truth.

¹ *The Da Vinci Code*, 2.

We need to be prepared to answer the false claims of *The Da Vinci Code* novel and movie. 1 Peter 3:15 says that we should “always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.” So I want to address some of the factual errors that are passed off as fact in *The Da Vinci Code*.

I. The Bible is a product of men, & is not reliable.

Beginning in chapter 55, Brown gets to the very heart of the story when the central character begins to reveal to another character the truth about the conspiracy. Consider what the character Leigh Teabing says: “The Bible is a 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, editions and revisions. History has never had a definitive version of the book.”²

He also says, “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.”³

Answer: You can trust the Bible we have today as an accurate source, being divinely inspired by God and trustworthy as a historical reference as well.

1. The New Testament manuscripts that we have today have stronger support than any other work of classical literature (Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Caesar, etc.) The earliest fragments date back to the 2nd half of the 1st century!
2. There simply was no committee that sat down with 80 gospels and said, “We like this one, but we don’t like that one.” Such an assertion has no basis whatsoever in fact. There were some other pseudo gospels that appeared in the 2nd & 3rd centuries. But the four Gospels were written within 50 years of Christ’s resurrection and accepted by the church as divinely inspired. They were either written by apostles, or by men who had close ties to an apostle. Even many liberal scholars agree they were written by the end of the 1st century.
3. The 27 books of the New Testament were affirmed as Scripture based primarily on their ties to an apostle, as well as their impact on the church and their internal qualities. They were not declared to be inspired because of the initiative of men in the 4th century. They were inspired, and the early church simply discovered that fact and affirmed it.
4. Reliability is confirmed through the eye witness credentials of the authors (Luke 1:1-3, 1 John 1:1, 2 Peter 1:16.)
5. Secular historians such as Josephus (before AD 100), the Roman Tacitus (c. AD 120), the Roman Suetonius (c. AD 110), & the Roman governor Pliny the Younger (c. AD 110) confirm many of the people, places, events and customs chronicled in the New Testament. Early Church leaders such as Irenaeus, Tertullian, Julius Africanus & Clement of Rome also back up biblical accuracy.

² *The Da Vinci Code*, 231.

³ *Ibid.*

6. Archeological evidence also backs up the biblical record (existence of Belshazzar in the book of Daniel, existence of Pontius Pilate, remains of Caiaphas the high priest of Jerusalem found, etc.)
7. The Bible has stood the test of time. Long after Dan Brown's book is forgotten, the Bible will still stand. Jesus affirmed in Mt. 24:35, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away."

II. Jesus was not viewed as divine by His early followers.

Brown writes at length about the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325. Here is the central passage: "Many aspects of Christianity were debated and voted upon. The date of Easter, the role of the bishops, the administration of the 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.' 'Not the Son of God?' 'Right,' Teabing said. 'Jesus' establishment as the Son of God was officially proposed and voted on by the Council of Nicea.' 'Hold on! You're saying that Jesus' divinity was the result of a vote?' 'A relatively close vote at that,' Teabing added. 'Many scholars claim that the early church literally stole Jesus from his original followers, hijacking his human methods, shrouding it in an impenetrable cloak of divinity, and using it to expand their own power.'"⁴

Answer:

1. Long before the Council met in the 4th century, the disciples told of Jesus being fully God. The witness of the apostles is found in John 1:1; Colossians 1:16, 17, 19; Hebrews 1:8, 10-12; Rev. 1:8 and 22:13; 2 Peter 1:11. Keep in mind that Jesus and His disciples were all Jews. They were not from a background inclined to call any great individual a god. There must have been overwhelming evidence to cause them to affirm the deity of Jesus Christ! Furthermore, Mark's gospel reports the words of the Roman centurion who was at Jesus' crucifixion. He said, "Truly this man was the son of God" (Mark 15:39). Luke reported in his Gospel that a demon shouted, "You are the Son of God!" (Luke 4:41).
2. The Gospel writers clearly indicate that Jesus affirmed His own divinity. When Peter affirmed the Deity of Christ in Mt. 16:16, Christ did not rebuke him, but affirmed his assertion. Likewise, in John 20:28 Thomas said the following after seeing the risen Christ, "My Lord and my God!" Christ did not correct Him. In John 5:17 Jesus said, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working." Then in the next verse we see how the Jews understood His words, "Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God." Christ did not correct their understanding of His words! Jesus said in John 8:58, "Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." What a claim! Once again the Jews took up stones to stone Him for blasphemy. Another statement that cause a similar reaction is found in John 10:30, "I and My Father are one." In v.33 the Jews said, "For a good work we do

⁴ *The Da Vinci Code*, 233.

- not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God.”
3. There are many reasons to believe that Jesus is the Son of God. There evidence of His virgin birth. There were many fulfilled prophecies. Many of these would have been impossible for Jesus to conspire to fulfill (decent from Abraham, Isaac Jacob, & King David; birth in Bethlehem; crucifixion with criminals: soldiers gambling for his clothes; burial among the rich, etc.). The most important evidence is the resurrection, supported by eye witness testimony, fulfilled prophecy, the changed lives of the apostles, etc.
 4. The early church fathers, including Ignatius in 105 and Clement in 150, said Jesus was God. Another early church father, Justin Martyr, wrote of Christ, “being the first-begotten Word of God, is even God.”⁵
 5. In the early fourth century there arose a presbyter in the church of Alexandria by the name of Arius, who began to teach that Jesus Christ was not the pre-existent Son of God, but that there once was a time when the Son was not. On the other side of the controversy was a bishop named Athanasius. Here was a man who understood the truth, and who also understood that his responsibility as a shepherd of the sheep was to warn his people about this false teaching. This debate, along with the Gnostic movement, led to a controversy in the early church. Emperor Constantine had become a Christian in 312 A.D., and he wanted the issue settled. So he called together over 300 bishops from all over the empire and financed many of the church leaders’ travel. The controversy was not whether Jesus was divine or human, but what kind of divinity He had. Today, we have the Nicean Creed from their meeting. The part of the creed that deals with the nature of Jesus Christ says, “We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human.” Brown claims that Jesus’ divinity was established by “a relatively close vote at that.” Actually, the bishops of the church came together, adopted a creed to separate the truth from the error, and of the more than 300 bishops in attendance at the Council of Nicea, only two refused to sign that creed.

III. Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and the Church has covered it up for centuries.

To back up his claim, Dan Brown says that it would have been unusual, even scandalous for an adult Jewish male to have *not* been married.⁶ Furthermore, he claimed Christ had a child with her. After the crucifixion, Mary Magdalene and the child supposedly went to Gaul, which is now called France, and established the Merovingian royal dynasty. He quotes the character Teabing to say, “My dear, Mary Magdalene was the Holy Vessel. She was the chalice that bore the royal bloodline....”⁷

⁵ *First Apology in The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, 184.

⁶ *The Da Vinci Code*, 245.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 249.

Answer: There does not exist one piece of evidence that Jesus was married to anyone, including Mary.

1. Dan Brown got this idea from *Jesus Christ Superstar*, from the 1983 book *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, and from the 1988 movie, *The Last Temptation of Christ*. The only other possible source is the Gnostic *Gospel of Phillip*, which says, “And the companion of the Savior is Mary Magdalene. Christ loved her more than all the disciples and used to kiss her often.... 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?’”⁸ But if Mary & Jesus were married, why would the disciples even ask Jesus such a question? And most scholars agree that this Gnostic gospel was written in the 3rd century. Why would we believe it over the 4 gospels that date back to the 1st century?
2. Contrary to Brown’s claim, there is plenty of evidence that He was *not* married. In 1 Cor. 9:5 Paul said, “Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?” If Jesus had been married, He would certainly have been listed among the church leaders who were married. He would have been the greatest example of all! But Jesus’ purpose was not to come and marry and establish an earthly dynasty. He said in John 18:36, “My kingdom is not of this world....” He came the first time to save sinners. Jesus turned over the care of His mother His disciple John, not to Mary Magdalene. The only wife Jesus has is the Church!
3. As for Jesus being single, Paul asserts that he was single, and encouraged others to remain single (1 Cor. 7). Also, the first-century Jewish historian Josephus spoke admiringly of the Essenes, a Jewish sect who “neither marry wives, nor are desirous to keep servants.”⁹

By the way, Dan Brown seems to have a fascination with Mary Magdalene. He even claims that she is a goddess to be worshipped, and that sex should be seen—as in pagan religions—as a means of experiencing God. “The Da Vinci Code” is founded upon the belief that there is a “spark of divinity that man can only achieve through union with the sacred feminine.” Regarding the alleged suppression of the “sacred feminine,” see McDowell, 40-44.

IV. Leonardo Da Vinci’s painting, *The Last Supper*, shows Mary Magdalene at Jesus’ right hand, not John. The figure is obviously feminine.

The book claims Leonardo was a conspirator who worked to hide Jesus’ marriage and resulting blood-line, but he placed a clue of the so-called truth in this famous painting.

Answer:

1. Leonardo, like many other Renaissance artists, usually portrayed young men with feminine characteristics. Since the Apostle John was probably the youngest

⁸ *Ibid.*, 246.

⁹ Josephus, in *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, 531.

- disciple, Leonardo portrayed him as having no beard and looking a bit feminine. It was simply a common artistic style of that time.
2. Earlier planning sketches by Leonardo of this painting have all of the disciples clearly LABELED and John is labeled as “John.”
 3. Portrayals of the Last Supper by other artists of the period also show a beardless John sitting right next to Jesus.
 4. If it is Mary, then where is John? Why would Leonardo leave out one of the most important characters of the last supper? He surely knew that the Bible places John next to Jesus at the Last Supper (John 13:25). Furthermore, he was the most beloved disciple!
 5. Even if Leonardo meant to place Mary in the painting, so what? That doesn't mean that Mary was actually next to Jesus at the last supper. It was an artistic interpretation painted almost 1500 years after the event!

V. The Priory of Sion, a “European secret society” which the book claims included such notables as Isaac Newton and Leonardo da Vinci, **was founded in 1099** by a French king named Godefroi, right after he conquered Jerusalem.

Answer: The Priory of Sion was actually founded in 1956. Also, the documents that serve as the basis of the story -- the Les Dossiers Secrets -- are known forgeries. They were planted in the *Bibliothèque Nationale* by Pierre Plantard. One of Plantard's co-conspirators admitted to helping him fabricate the documents, including the genealogical tables that included Leonardo da Vinci.¹⁰

Conclusion: Scripture tells us there are many who will prefer a lie to the truth, even a lie that is easily dismissible, even a lie that is transparently false, even a lie that is so undocumented that it simply falls of the weight of its own audacity. There are persons who would rather believe a lie packaged in a glittery Hollywood movie than the truth so plainly revealed in the Word of God. I hope you are not among them!

This cultural phenomenon challenges Christians to know what we believe and why we believe it. Will you make a commitment to learn the truth of the Bible better?

Sources: Josh McDowell, *The Da Vinci Code: A Quest for Answers* (Holiday, FL: Green Key Books, 2006); Albert Mohler, www.albertmohler.com; Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Lee Strobel in *Baptist Press*, 5/1/06; Member Dan Whicker's study notes on this subject. Other sources listed in footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). For further study, see www.davinciquest.org.

¹⁰ Hank Hanegraaff & Paul L. Maier, *The Da Vinci Code: Fact or Fiction?* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004), 12.