

The Da Vinci Code: Fact or Fiction?

The *Da Vinci Code* has become one of the most controversial best-sellers ever seen, with over 45 million copies sold in more than 44 different languages. Exact rankings vary, but it is now reckoned to be amongst the ten greatest selling books *of all time!* A recent survey in the UK suggested that one in five of the adult population had read it - *a staggering 5 million people!*

But the book is not only notable for the number of copies it has sold and the box office film bonanza which has followed, *but also for the controversy it has stirred up about Jesus Christ.*

What the book claims

The *Da Vinci Code* makes a number of assertions:-

1. *"The Bible is a product of man...not of God... History has never had a definitive version of the [Bible]"*
2. *"Almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false..."*
3. *"The rock on which Jesus built his church was not Peter but Mary Magdalene..."*
4. *"Jesus Christ has a surviving bloodline [the Sang Real] and was a mortal prophet..."*
5. *That an ancient, secret organization called the Priory of Sion has protected this secret and the descendants of Jesus and Mary Magdalene over the centuries*
6. *That this organization is connected to the Knights Templar*
7. *That the Catholic Church has repeatedly tried to destroy the "evidence" of these "truths," and that the Emperor Constantine tried to destroy the earliest Gospels in the 4th century*
8. *That the Priory of Sion seeks to re-establish the royal line of Jesus on the thrones of France, other European countries & Israel*

These assertions are stated as though they were established facts of history - indeed at the front of the book some of them are listed as facts, whilst the author Dan Brown has gone on record as stating that the book is firmly based on historical truth.

A challenge to faith

"In summary, the book suggests Christianity as we know it is a gigantic fraud," wrote one writer. The survey referred to above found 59% of those who had read the book believed that Jesus had married Mary Magdalene and had a child, whilst only about 30% of those who had not read the book held the same view. One churchgoer who had read the book commented anxiously-

"It shows that the Bible can't possibly be accurate and that the text was changed."

But does the *Da Vinci Code* stand up as soundly based on historical evidence?

Historical Research

It's important to notice at the outset that Dan Brown is not a historian and has relied heavily on others' sources for the so-called "historical facts" in the book.

Even in this his research has been heavily criticised by Mr Justice Smith, the English judge, who became something of an expert on the Da Vinci Code, when he presided over the case brought by the American authors of the book *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* against Dan Brown:-

"The reality of his [Dan Brown's] research is that it is superficial...Mr Brown knew very little about how the historical background was researched."

Mr Justice Smith, April 2006

The poverty of the historical research is evidenced by these examples of mistakes in the book:-

- Versailles is described as located North West of Paris, when it is South West.
- The Merovingian French Kings (5th-8th centuries) are described as the founders of Paris, when it was in existence in Roman times.
- The book claims 5 million women were burned as witches in the Middle Ages (the actual figure was less than 50000).
- The book says that the Knights Templar were involved in the designs of Gothic Cathedrals (in fact, none are known to have been involved).

There are a number of other examples in the book.

The Priory of Sion and the Dossiers Secrets

The book's claim that a secret monastic order called the Priory of Sion existed from the Middle Ages to protect the royal bloodline of Jesus is totally unjustified by any historical evidence.

There is no evidence of such an organization in any reliable historical records and the *Dossiers Secrets* – a collection of documents alleged to have come from the Priory, are admitted forgeries put together by a fantasist called Pierre Plantard in the 1950s.

- Plantard set up the Priory of Sion with three friends who formed a right wing group with monarchist sympathies
- He claimed to be part of the ancient Merovingian Royal Family
- He had a previous criminal conviction as a conman
- He and his friends deposited a number of documents (*Dossiers Secrets*) in the *Bibliothèque Nationale*
- When Plantard was implicated in an insider trading investigation of Roger Patrice Pelat, a friend of Mitterand's. His house was searched & many forgeries found. Plantard admitted under oath the documents were forgeries.
- One of his fellow conspirators, Jean Luc Chaunell, later admitted that the organization and the "evidence" of the *Dossiers Secrets* were part of a huge hoax.

But what about the Knights Templar?



The book claims that the Knights Templar were the military wing of the so-called Priory of Sion and that they discovered and then safeguarded the secret of the bloodline of Jesus.

There is absolutely no historical evidence to justify this claim.

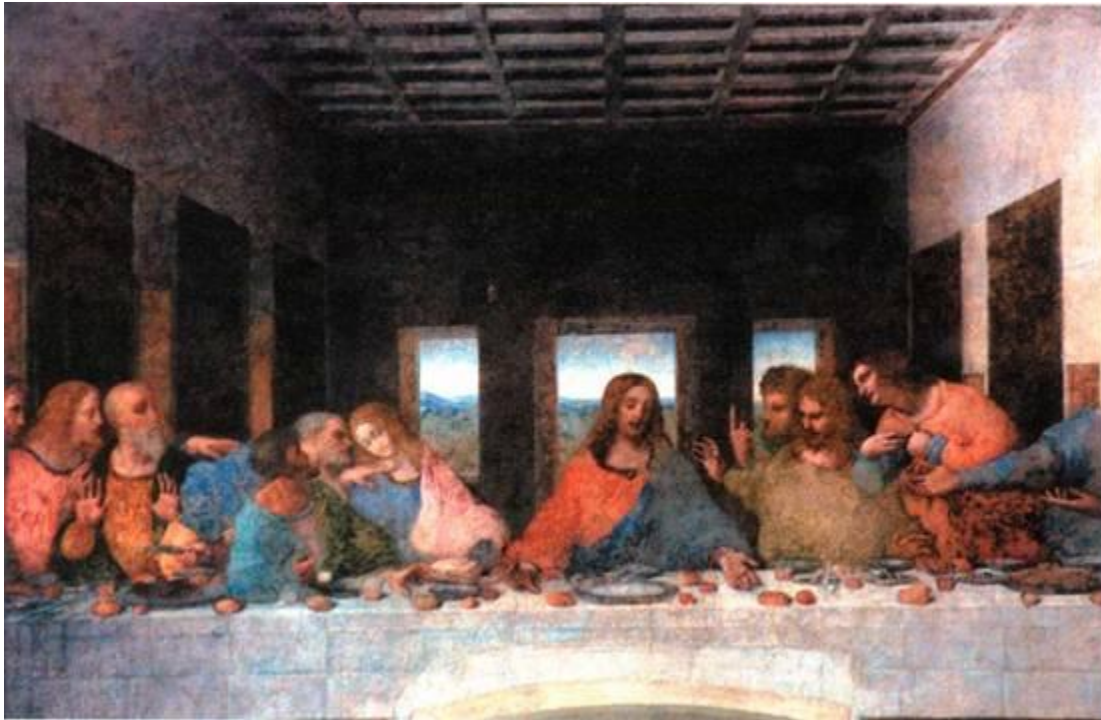
The Knights Templar became established around 1099, after the capture of Jerusalem from the Moslems, as the protectors of the pilgrims and of the Kingdom of Jerusalem. They quickly became rich and powerful as a result of donations of land and wealth from Christians in Europe. As a result the Order became arrogant and began to make its own treaties

with people like the Assassins and butchering other Arabs travelling under a flag of truce. When the Crusader kingdom fell, they returned to Europe, but were attacked by King Edward II of England and King Philip the Fair of France, who coveted their wealth and feared their power.

The current Grand Master of the Temple Church in London says of the *Da Vinci Code*, “Historically it’s rubbish!”

The paintings of Leonardo da Vinci

There are also important errors in the references to two of Leonardo da Vinci’s paintings. The book claims that Leonardo was a Grand Master of the so-called *Priory of Sion* and that he therefore used at least two of his paintings to send coded messages related to the idea that Jesus married Mary Magdalene.



In *The Last Supper* seen above, Jesus is shown as just having told his disciples that one of them will betray him. The picture shows their consternation at this news. The book claims that the figure to the left of Jesus as we look at the painting is not the apostle John, but Mary Magdalene, and that this is evidence that they were married. It claims that the beardless, slightly effeminate nature of the figure is proof of this.



This view is not held by most art historians, who point out that Leonardo painted a number of male figures, including a portrait of John the Baptist in a similar way. An early sketch for the painting labels the figure as John. In any case, a painting by an artist who lived 1400 years after Christ can hardly be described as conclusive proof of the marriage of Jesus. Art historians say that the picture shows the Apostle Peter leaning over to ask John who the betrayer might be, exactly as the Gospel tells us.

The claim made for the second painting is even more far-fetched.

The book suggests that the painting of *Mona Lisa* is also intended to be an anagram of *Amon* and *Isis*, Egyptian

gods, but the Italian version of *Mona Lisa* would have been *Madonna Lisa*, which would not give the same result.

In any case, if there was no Priory of Sion, Leonardo da Vinci was not its Grand Master and had no cause to put such a coded message into the picture.

The Holy Grail

The legend of the Holy Grail alleged that a sacred relic, - *either* the cup used at the Last Supper *or* the cup said to have been used by Joseph of Arimathea to collect some of the blood of Jesus, - existed. If found by a pure knight it would bring him untold blessings. The story emerged around the time of the Crusades, disappeared and then reappeared in Thomas Mallory's *Morte d' Arthur* in the 15th century.

Graal was an Old French word for a common dish or bowl used at table;

San Graal in Old French therefore meant Holy Bowl or Grail. There is no historical evidence to support the view in the book that the French really meant to say *Sang Real*, or *Blood Royal* and that this is a reference to the bloodline of Jesus Christ by Mary Magdalene. The Grail was simply the cup of wine shared by the disciples at the Last Supper or the bowl in which Jesus' blood was collected according to the mediaeval legends. These legends were made up at the time of the Crusades to encourage Christians to go and fight. They have no more validity than stories about the True Cross or the Holy House of Loreto.

The historical evidence for the claims made by the *Da Vinci Code* is non-existent.

The Da Vinci Code and the Gospels

In the book, and in the books from which Dan Brown drew his ideas, it is suggested that the Bible we have cannot be trusted as it was altered over the centuries and that the account of the life and death of Jesus we have in the Gospels was not the original version.

In fact the *Dead Sea Scrolls* provide copies of books of the Old Testament which date back 300 years before Jesus was born. These show remarkable consistency with later copies of Old Testament books. But what about the New Testament?

The early apostles insist on the truth of their record

"For we did not follow cunningly devised fables," says the Apostle Peter in his second letter, *"....but were eyewitnesses of his majesty..."* whilst Paul says, *"If we or an angel from heaven preach another gospel than the one we preached to you, let him be accursed... For the Gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel...but it came through revelation of Jesus Christ."*

Elsewhere they make it clear that their recollections of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ were inspired by God:-

"All scripture is written by inspiration of God ..."

The Apostle Paul to Timothy (2 Tim 3:16)

"Men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God..."

The Apostle Peter (2 Peter 1:21)

These apostles make it quite plain that their record of the life of Jesus Christ in the Gospels was a result of:-

- Their eye-witness records of what happened;
- The direct witness of Jesus to them;

- The inspiration of the Holy Spirit, which gave them the power to recall the words and actions of Jesus as He had promised.

The Four Gospels of the New Testament also date from the period soon after Jesus' death

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were recognized very early as the authoritative account of Jesus' life, death and resurrection:-

- *Clement of Rome (95 AD) cites Matthew, Mark & Luke*
- *Papias (130 AD) and Justin Martyr (140 AD) cite all four Gospels*
- *Likewise Polycarp and Irenaeus (170 AD) and many other writers*

There is no doubt that the Gospels which we have in the New Testament are the writings of the apostles who knew Jesus and/or had spoken to many of those who had met with Jesus during the three and a half years he was teaching the people.

What's more, the 5000 early copies of parts of the Gospels which we have show that the record of the life of Jesus is remarkably consistent in the accuracy of the text. *There is no suggestion that there was any doubt at the outset of Christianity about what Jesus had said and done.*

The Gospel writers were careful to record all the evidence about Jesus exactly

One notable example is the Gospel of Luke - here is Luke's introduction to his account of the life of Jesus:-

"Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished amongst us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eye-witnesses... it seemed good to me also, having followed all things accurately... to write an orderly account.. that you may know the truth" (Luke 1:1-3)

What about the "80 other gospels" the Da Vinci Code claims existed?

There were actually only about 12 other "gospels" which exist in fragmented scraps of papyrus. They all date from at least 100 years after the life of Jesus, (most from the 2nd-4th centuries,) so are less reliable evidence of the life of Jesus than the Four Gospels of the New Testament. Some quote from the Four Gospels, which shows that the Four Gospels were written before the others.



These other writings were mostly found in a collection of scraps of papyrus found in a cave at Nag Hammadi in Egypt in 1945. They represent the writings of a group of people known as *Gnostics* who had left the Christian church and developed a set of ideas quite contradictory to the Gospels. These ideas were first appearing in the times of the Apostles, who strongly condemned them since they set out to change the Gospel of Jesus Christ into something quite different, based largely on Greek ideas.

What did the Gnostics believe?

- Ideas and knowledge are good; the physical world & the body are bad
- Salvation is by access to the hidden mysteries of Knowledge *the Gnosis*

“I am the intellectual spirit filled with radiant light “

(Jesus according to the Apocalypse of Peter)

- Jesus did not die on the Cross

“It was another who drank the gall and vinegar ...”

(Second Treatise of the Great Set 26)

- Jesus was not the Son of God but a mystical teacher of hidden secrets to an exclusive inner group
- Their writings also suggest that they had little regard for women
- Some of them did not believe that Jesus had ever existed as a human being; their so-called gospels of Jesus’ life give far less detail about Jesus the Man than the Four Gospels.

The suggestion that these Gnostic Gospels, written between 100 and 300 years *after* the life of Jesus, are a more accurate account of His life and teaching is fanciful.

Was Mary Magdalene the wife of Jesus?

The suggestion that Mary Magdalene was married to Jesus plays a significant part in the *Da Vinci Code*, but is there any evidence to justify it?

We need to start with the evidence in the Four Gospels, since we have already seen that these were the earliest and most reliable accounts of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. So what do they tell us about Mary Magdalene?

- She is described as a woman who suffered from demonic possession and who was cured by Jesus (Mark 16:9, Luke 8:2)
- She and a number of other women accompanied Jesus during his preaching ministry (Luke8:2)
- She witnessed the crucifixion (Matt 27:56, Mark 15:40; John 19:25)
- She was present when Jesus was buried (Matt 27:61;Mark 15:47)
- She was a witness to the empty tomb (Matt 28:1-10, Mark 16:1-8, Luke 24:10)
- She was the first to see Jesus after his resurrection (Mark16:9 John 20:1-18)

It is also possible that she was the woman who anointed Jesus' feet with precious ointment before his death (John12:3), but the identification of Mary Magdalene with Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus is not at all clear.

What is clear is that there is no hint here that she was married to Jesus!

Even the Gnostic Gospels do not openly claim that Mary Magdalene was the wife of Jesus.

The most commonly quoted passage is from the so-called *Gospel of Philip*-

"And the companion of the Lord Jesus [was] Mary Magdalene...loved her more than all the disciples and used to kiss her often on her mouth. The rest of the disciples said to him: "Why do you love her more than all of us?" The Gospel of Philip 275 AD

This passage is usually quoted as shown above, but the words underlined do not appear in the original text. In any case, this was written nearly 250 years after the time of Jesus!

Even more noticeable is the complete omission of any claim that Jesus and Mary were married in the Gnostic so-called *Gospel of Mary* which claims to be her story!

Nor is there any evidence that, with her daughter Sarah, she travelled to France and died there. French tales about this do not appear until about the 9th or 10th centuries. Earlier Eastern Christian traditions which suggest she died in Ephesus are far more likely to be correct than stories written 1000 years after the time of Jesus!

There are good reasons for believing that Jesus was not married

1. Celibacy was not uncommon amongst Jewish rabbis

As Jesus said: " *there are eunuchs ..who have made themselves eunuchs [i.e. have not married] for the sake of the kingdom of heaven...*" (Matt 19:12)

2. The apostle Paul doesn't mention that Jesus was married in a passage where it would have been obvious to make reference to it (1 Cor 9:4-6)

Paul is talking about other disciples such as Peter travelling about with a wife. If Jesus had been married, Paul would surely have mentioned it.

3. Jesus' life was devoted wholly to the service of His Father and to our salvation.

The Letter of Paul to the church at Ephesus says: *"Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her"* (Ephesians 5:25), giving an example to all husbands as to how they should love their wives. In symbol, Jesus is shown as married to the church.

"Was Jesus married? All the available evidence points to the answer no. She was an important disciple.. But there is no historical evidence for a more intimate relationship."

The Da Vinci Code: Of Magdalene, the Gnostics, the Goddess and the Grail

Where the Da Vinci Code goes wrong

1. It questions the truthfulness of the Gospel records and of the Bible as a whole
2. It questions the unique nature of Jesus as the Son of God
3. It questions the resurrection of Jesus
4. It introduces a view of God wholly alien to the Old and New Testaments and to the teaching of Jesus.
5. It offers no hope, no enlightenment, no salvation for the God's world. At best Plantard, Baigent, Leigh & Lincoln and Dan Brown offer only a new age of Merovingian rule on the thrones of Europe and Israel.

What the true Gospel offers

1. Jesus the Saviour – from sin and death through repentance & baptism (John 3:16; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 10:34-43 & many more)
2. Jesus the Son of God – who freely gave his life on the cross for us (John 10:14-18; Romans 5:6-8)
3. Jesus the Living Lord – resurrected and alive for evermore (1 Corinthians 15:20-28; Revelation 1:4-5)
4. Jesus the coming King:- (Acts 1:6-11; Acts 17:30-31; Revelation 1:7)

"The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this He has given assurance to all men, by raising him from the dead."

The Apostle Paul to the men of Athens, one of the centres of the Gnostics.

Acts 17:30-31

But most of all, the opportunity to be part of the family of Jesus, not by any human descent but by faith:-

"He came to his own home and his own people received him not. But to all who received him who believed on his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God," (John 1:11-13)

This is the true Gospel, found in the Bible and open to everyone who will read it!

John Botten

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