

The da Vinci Code by Dan Brown – Exploring its presuppositions. Jim Reiher

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Well, I finally read it. I think there are only about half a dozen of us left in the country who had not read this book, and so I beat the other five to the punch. I made it holiday reading, got hooked, and finished the 600 pages in three days.

It was a gripping story. Who was responsible for the murders of the four leaders of a secret society (The Priory of Sion)? Clearly the albino monk Titus who pulled the trigger, was working for others, and by all accounts it seems that Opus Dei – an ultra conservative force in the Catholic Church – was behind it. But why? What were they afraid of? Was the Priory of Sion about to reveal something to the world that would change the course of history and significantly undermine the power and influence of the Christian Church?

And so the story unfolds. It has some good twists and turns and the whole book covers about 30 hours of time from the death of the curator of the Louvre Museum in Paris, to the capture of the mastermind behind the murders. There are flashbacks that give the reader context about each of the main characters and their involvement in the story. And the main players are colourfully described: they grab the reader and make us want to find out more about them. ... Is the dead curator's granddaughter Sophie, really a descendant of Jesus and Mary Magdalene? Why is Robert Langdon so important to the Priory of Sion? Is investigator Captain Bezu Fache all he seems to be – or could he be more involved in these murders? And what about "the Teacher". Who is he? Is he Fache? Is he the Pope or one of his trusted workers? Is "the Teacher" ever going to be identified? The eccentric Sir Teabing brings a modern day knight into the search for the Holy Grail, and his suspicious manservant Remy keeps the reader wondering whether or not he might betray Sophie and Robert.

I enjoyed the ride, but I was disappointed with the ending. The riddles were clever. The twists were nice surprises too. But as a reader, I found it most frustrating to finish a mystery and then to think that there was no way at all to have successfully predicted the outcome. There were just no hints along the way, to point to who "the Teacher" ended up

being. There were red herrings (and of course that is permitted and expected). But there were no actual cloaked clues which the reader could reflect back on and go: “Of course! I should have picked that up! I missed it but it was there all the time!”

Nearly everyone will enjoy the book. The one group it will offend, no doubt, is some within the Christian Church. And not just Catholics. It will also upset some Protestants.

Now let me say at this point that I am not shy at identifying problems with the church or its history. I often retitle my introductory Church History class with new first years, as “The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly – the Story of the Christian Church.” There are some tragic faults and embarrassing history that we have to acknowledge and learn from (and determine never to repeat!). What I find unacceptable, however, is to invent or rewrite history to make the up and down story of the church even worse than it actually was!

The underlying assumptions which *The Da Vinci Code* works from are:

- Jesus was just a man – a great man; a prophet; a brilliant teacher of great things – but definitely just a man.¹
- Jesus’ divinity is clearly denied and treated as a later insertion by the Catholic Church at the time of Constantine. The Council of Nicea is said to be the moment when Church and State conspired to promote the lie, and increase both their own power base. Brown has one of the most educated characters in his book say: “before Constantine upgraded Jesus’ status almost four centuries *after* Jesus’ death, thousands of documents already existed chronicling His life as a mortal man. ... Constantine commissioned and financed a new Bible, which omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ’s human traits and embellished those gospels that made Him godlike. The earlier gospels were outlawed, gathered up, and burned.”²
- Jesus married Mary Magdalene and had descendants (later ones of whom became Kings of France).
- Jesus was of the blood line of the royal house of the Kings of Judah (David’s line) and therefore his descendents would have royal blood in their veins.
- Christianity is a religion that has been distorted from the original Jesus, and it has been made into a system to keep powerful groups in power. Miracles, the Virgin birth, the resurrection, and more – all added and fabricated to bolster the power of the church.
- The Bible is a collection of writings by men, and they are not in any way inspired by God. “The Bible did not fall magically from the clouds”³ says one of the professors in the fiction. (Of course it didn’t fall from the clouds, but that is not what *inspired by God* means). The gospels of the New Testament are flawed and have been tampered with.

¹ Dan Brown *The Da Vinci Code*, Corgi Publishers, Great Britain, 2004, p. 313.

² Brown pp. 316-317.

³ Brown p. 312.

- There are true gospels that have not been distorted. They have been opposed and attempts were made to suppress them by the church. *They* are the “unaltered gospels”⁴ and thus the real truth about Jesus and the start of the church.
- There is pure religion that worships the feminine goddess. Sacred sex performed in such a religious system is wonderful and should not be seen as immoral. In fact, it helps you experience God.
- Some of the art of the Renaissance captures the “truth” that Jesus and Mary were married. Leonardo da Vinci especially left us many clues to this (especially in his famous “The Last Supper”).

Anyone offended yet? Each of those starting points is a working assumption. Some of them may seem logical or reasonable, others less so. But they are unproven and in the case of a few of them - extremely questionable. They will be considered shortly.

The da Vinci Code is a novel, of course, and so there is a lot of material just made up. Historical fiction is an accepted form of writing. There is usually the assumption with such writing that the essential story line is true. The fact is that *The da Vinci Code* is not even historical fiction. The book *does* make various factual claims. It does this in a very persuasive and clever way. In the front of the book, on the page before the story begins, under the heading “Fact”, the author states that:

- The Priory of Sion founded in 1099 is a real organization
- Some prominent past members of the Priory of Sion have been identified in a 1975 discovery and the members included Sir Isaac Newton and Leonardo da Vinci.
- There is a conservative group within the Catholic Church called the Opus Dei which is rich and powerful.

Even these “facts” are questionable. Regarding the first two, there is some recent controversy about the actual age of the Priory of Sion and it may not be anywhere near 1000 years old. And the document that supposedly says that Newton, da Vinci and others were members has been shown to be a forgery itself. However, *even* if these first three facts *are* true, they actually imply nothing. It certainly does not mean that everything Dan Brown’s fictional characters say about them is accurate. The final statement on the “fact” page is the one that is too generalized and prone to misunderstanding:

- “All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents and secret rituals in this novel are accurate.”

Now that is open to serious misunderstanding. The *descriptions* of artwork and architecture and the *mention* of the existence of documents like the Dead Sea Scrolls and various secret rituals of different groups, does NOT mean that Dan Brown’s *interpretation* of those same things, is accurate. The art work exists, but his views about what they imply? They are NOT facts, they are only very unsubstantiated *interpretation*. Examples will be given as we continue.

Consider problems with the novel’s underlying assumptions.

⁴ Brown p. 334.

When was Jesus believed to be divine? 325? Or earlier?

Jesus was not declared to be divine firstly and decisively at Nicea in 325 AD. Nicea did grapple with the nature of his divinity, but the debate at Nicea was between two divine positions: Arianism verses Orthodoxy. As Mark A. Noll puts it: the business of the Council of Nicea was “to adjudicate the meaning of Jesus’ divinity.”⁵

The Christian (soon to be called heretic) Arius, was arguing that Jesus was the first created being of God the Father. He said that Jesus was still divine, but of a different essence to the Father. He believed in the virgin birth, the miracles, and all the wonderful stories about Jesus. His beef was on the essence of Jesus: Arius believed Jesus to be different in his very substance to the Father. Arius’ opponents argued that Jesus was of the same substance as the Father, and had always existed from eternity past. There was not a time when he came into being. He was a part of the very essence of the eternal God.

Prior to Nicea, Jesus was already considered to be divine. Theologians in the 2nd and 3rd centuries were saying as much. Some were saying some things that sounded like the later Arius. Origen the great Catholic early Church Father seemed to believe something similar, for example. Others were grappling with his divine nature in the more orthodox sense. Tertullian is a late 2nd century example. He is the man who first used the term “trinity” - thought he did not flesh that term fully out. Note this: in the 100’s not in the 300’s! And the gospel of John that promotes Jesus’ divinity the most out of the four New Testament gospels – it is probably dated from the 90’s AD. We have a fragment of it dated about 120 AD and that is the earliest fragment of any of the New Testament writings. That gospel was circulating in the early 100’s. Jesus’ divinity was not something thought up in 325 to solidify a shaky Roman empire.

Further testimony comes from non-Christian writers too. Two hundred years before the Council of Nicea lived a man named Pliny. He was the secular governor of Bithynia, and is remembered for a number of things, including the tragic fact that he was a persecutor of Christians. He wrote about 112AD, and noted that Christians: “used to meet before dawn and recite a hymn among themselves to Christ, as though he were a god.”⁶

Of course the authors of the New Testament themselves, all of the documents in that collection were written in the first century. These documents contain are numerous references to the divinity of Jesus. Not just John’s gospel does this (in a number of places, including 1:1; 8:58; and 10:30-33). See also Paul in Philippians 2 and Colossians 2 and 3; the writer to the Hebrews in Hebrews 1; and Matthews record of the name of Jesus given at his conception: Immanuel which means “God with us” in Matthew 1:23.

⁵ Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points, Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*. Baker Books, Grand Rapids MI, 1997, p. 48.

⁶ In his correspondence with the Emperor Trajan, on how to deal with the Christian problem. From Internet Ancient History Sourcebook: Pliny and Trajan: Correspondence, c. 112 CE, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/asbook.html> accessed Jan 24, 2006.

Jesus' divinity was never *not* believed in from the earliest days of the start of the faith. There would be debate over the *nature* of that divinity and how best to describe it, and how the Father and the Son related together and what their essence or substance were. But was Jesus ever considered to be *just* a good man by his followers? Not after the resurrection...

Did a new revised Bible get decided on in 325?

The Bible came together over nearly 400 years. Nicea was not a definitive moment when it was suddenly "declared" and given to the world.

In the 100's the church fathers were debating which books should be collected and seen as "inspired" and which should not. Lots of writings were being made. Not just sincere followers of Jesus were writing books and letters either. Even during the lives of the apostles themselves, there were forgeries being made and signed off as if from one of the apostles. Paul has to warn some of his churches that they must not believe every document that comes to them with his name on the bottom of it! (See for example II Thess 2:1-2.) The early church was *always* concerned to have accurate documents that told the truth of Christ – who he was and what he did. And there were always fraudulent writings around.

During the 100's with the rise of both Gnosticism and the Marcionites, the followers of Jesus were compelled to start identifying which books and gospels and letters, were genuine and which were fabricated to promote stuff other than that which Jesus taught. A number of church council meetings took place that included on their agenda discussion about the content of the New Covenant special writings. A number of tests were to be applied to any letter or book, before it would be recognized.

It is strongly accepted that the four gospels were circulating as a group by the late 1st century. About 170 AD Tatian (a disciple of Justin Martyr), wrote his "Diatessaron" which was a Harmony of the 4 gospels we have in the New Testament. This gives important evidence that these four gospels were generally the accepted ones: the four gospels of the New Testament were well and truly accepted as authoritative by this date. Justin Martyr had referred to them in 163 AD and other Church fathers do so after that date. For Dan Brown's book to suggest that the gospels in the New Testament are post Constantine fabrications is just denial of clear history.

Origen (d. 254) used all 27 of the NT books and saw them as Scripture, but admitted disputes over Hebrews, James, II Peter, II and III John; and Revelation, as well as the Shepherd of Hermas; the Epistle of Barnabas; The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles; and the Gospel to the Hebrews. He did not dispute the four gospels, however.

After Constantine, a small church council meeting in Laodicea in 367 AD made up a list and it had all the New Testament books except Revelation. The later church father Athanasius in the same year (367) wrote an Easter letter that had all 27 books of our New Testament listed as the correct ones. "These are the four Gospels; according to Matthew

Mark Luke and John; afterward the Acts of the apostles; and epistles called Catholic – 7 viz. of James 1; of Peter 2; of John 3; after these one of Jude; in addition there are 14 epistles of Paul, . . . and besides the Revelation of John.” He added that the Shepherd and the Didache could be read for edification, but they must not be seen as canon – like the other 27. And the council of Hippo in 390 AD made a similar list (it had no Book of Revelation).

It was at the third council of Carthage (397), in North Africa, where the Western Christian Churches accepted the New Testament as we know it. It has remained that same set of Books ever since. This was confirmed at the 419 council of Carthage.

The different Church Councils that accepted or rejected different Books for the New Testament worked from a small set of general criteria. They really wanted material written by an apostle, or by an apprentice of an apostle, and they really wanted material that was from first century origin. They also chose material that was already widely circulating and accepted by the churches generally. There was no plot to put books in that suddenly made Jesus divine!

Did the church council meetings create the New Testament, or recognize it?

The great debate over the centuries since the reformation has been whether the church has greater authority than the Bible. Protestants have said the Bible should have the greatest authority. Catholics have usually said the Church is the final word. A major Catholic position has argued that the Church decided what the Bible would consist of, and therefore the Church is a greater authority: the church must interpret what it has brought together. Dan Brown *needs* this position to bolster the view taken in his novel.

The Protestant reply would be that the Church did not make the Bible: rather it only recognized it. It did not one day wake up and tell Christian churches everywhere to accept this set of 27 documents that they had never seen before. Rather it recognized what was already being used and accepted, and simply formally acknowledged and listed it. The analogy of a jeweler recognizing an authentic diamond has sometimes been used here. The jeweler does not make the diamond authentic, rather the jeweler only uses his or her expertise to identify the genuine diamond. It is reasonable to say that the canonicity of a New Testament book is not settled by the *authority* of the primitive Church but rather by the *testimony* of the early Church. The primitive church testified to the authorship of the New Testament documents, (not the content first and foremost). If the authorship was considered to be apostolic, then its content would be trustworthy even if it speaks of unexpected topics. The authority of the first church councils and early Christians is not greater than any church council or Christians today: but their *testimony* is because they were closer to the events and had more resources to confirm their conclusions than we do today.

Was Constantine a Christian?

Dan Brown also promotes the view that Constantine was not a Christian at all, remained a pagan all his life, got baptised when he was “on his deathbed too weak to protest”⁷ and was politically astute enough (“a very good businessman”⁸) to hitch his political wagon to the soon to be dominant world religion: Christianity. Christians had apparently grown “exponentially”⁹ by Constantine’s time, and he was a shrewd politician who used that faith to cement the social and religious fabric of Rome and reject paganism in the process.

This is terribly simplistic. One of the great debates in Roman history is how genuine Constantine’s faith in Jesus was. The critics who say he was not a Christian repeat some of Brown’s comments and add other reasons:

- As a “Christian Emperor” he had people put to death who might oppose his power;
- He did not make his children get baptised (and those children did not intervene to stop the Senate declaring Constantine to be a god, after Constantine’s death);
- He kept a pagan title - *pontifex maximus* - as one of his many titles as Emperor;
- During the early years of his leadership, he carried out the duties of *pontifex maximus* of the traditional pagan cult; he restored pagan temples.
- He used pagan as well as Christian rites when dedicating Constantinople.
- He used pagan magic formulas to protect crops and heal disease.
- He did not change pagan symbols on coins for over a decade or more in power;
- When finally baptised, he was baptised by an Arian priest (not an orthodox one).

Brown could have used lots more arguments than he did, but it does not surprise me that he limited his argument to the most commonly repeated criticisms. Brown is a lecturer in English and Creative Writing, after all, not history or archaeology. (That is significant, by the way. His credentials are not in either area that he speculates with and leans so heavily on.)

But there is more to Constantine than this short list of negatives. Great God-fearing leaders in the Bible like King David killed off threats to his throne and recommended that his successor Solomon do the same. All Christian leaders do some very non-Christian things at time: they are not perfect examples of Jesus! (None of us are.) Being the wise leader of a multicultural and multi-religious Empire will require that leader to accommodate all persons and not show partiality in affairs of state – even while that person holds personal convictions about one of the state’s many religions. Tony Blair and John Howard face that same challenge in our day. Does it make them non-Christians because they honour and respect Muslims publicly? Or that they don’t pull down Muslim mosques and Hindu temples? Or that tax concessions can go the way of all religions and not just Christianity? Of course not.

Also, by Constantine’s time, it was expected that after baptism you would not sin again, and so as a leader of the Empire, it is quite natural for him to put off baptism till his

⁷ Brown p. 313.

⁸ Brown p. 314.

⁹ Brown p. 313.

deathbed. And being baptised by an Arian was no big deal then: half the bishops of the empire were Arians and they were not weeded out until a long time after Constantine. The Arian bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia (*not* Eusebius the historian) was a personal friend of Constantine and had his ear theologially at various times during his life. It is no surprise that this bishop baptised the Emperor.

It is also important to consider that the number of Christians at the time of Constantine becoming one, was not huge. It was *not* a majority of the Roman Empire. It was more likely about 10% of the empire¹⁰. And most of that 10% were not upper class people. They were more from the lower end of society's spectrum. There had been massive persecution just before Constantine came to power. It had been the worst persecution ever (under Diocleatian and Galarius, the co-emperors before Constantine). Constantine's mother was a Christian, and that must have had some influence on him. And Constantine's success in the final military battle that won him power, he felt was due to the God of his mother – the God of the cross. He embraced the “religion of the cross” because of various factors, but it seems unlikely that one was because the numbers of Christians was large, or it was politically clever to do so. It was actually politically dangerous to be in the minority and then in a minority made up mostly of powerless or uninfluential people. As Gonzalez writes: “some of his staunchest opponents of this policy (Christianising the Empire) were in Rome, particularly in the Senate, where the old aristocracy bemoaned the eclipse of their ancient gods and privileges.”¹¹

Was Constantine a Christian or a political opportunist? Probably both to varying degrees. I see him as a relatively immature Christian with a lot of secular power. Not the greatest combination, and in many ways it did hurt the church. But that seems to have been the nature of his situation.

Do other gospels exist and tell a different story?

There are dozens of other gospels, all written some time after the life of Christ (usually from the 2nd and 3rd centuries). There are some more famous ones than others, and they say some things similar to the New Testament gospels and some things different.

Dan Brown talks a lot about certain *other gospels*. He gives the impression that they are pure and unaltered, and the New Testament gospels are tampered with. He implies that the other gospels keep Jesus as just a man, and one who married and had children.

Brown's view of the *other gospels* is simplistic and selective. Consider:

- If there is suspicion that the New Testament gospels have been tampered with or push an agenda, then why on earth would we suddenly give “pure” status to some other gospels? Isn't it fair to at least say that *all* gospels are pushing an agenda?

¹⁰ Earle Cairns summarises much research when he notes that the percentage of church numbers, just before Constantine, in about 300 AD, have had various estimates “between 5 and 15 percent of the population of the empire..” *Christianity Through the Ages: A History of the Christian Church*, Zondervan Grand Rapids MI, 1981, p. 94.

¹¹ Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity Vol 1: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*, Harper San Francisco, 1984, p. 118.

All of them are written by people with personal beliefs and views and they want to propagate them? How come *some* gospels get let off the hook and the New Testament gospels get slammed? On what criteria does Brown simplistically suggest that his preferred gospels are the “pure” ones?

- Contrary to Brown’s view, many of the other gospels highlight a divine Jesus too! In fact some of them more so than the gospels in the New Testament. In *The First Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus*, for example, the baby in the manger speaks to his parents and tells them that he is the Son of God¹²! (Brown does not get his fictitious experts to discuss *that* gospel, interestingly.) In the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, the child Jesus spoke “you shall not go further on your way,” to another child who “exasperated” Jesus, and the child died on the spot¹³. Jesus also raised a different child from the dead¹⁴, created live birds from mud¹⁵, and healed an adult’s foot when injured by an axe. That resulted in “the crowd [who] saw what happened worshipped the child...”¹⁶ The Gospel of Peter records clearly says that Jesus was killed on the cross, and in 12:56, has an angel at the tomb on resurrection morning say “He is risen and gone.”¹⁷ It also has a sentence describing Mary Magdalene, as she went to the tomb. “Early in the morning of the Lord’s day, Mary Magdalene, a women disciple of the Lord,”¹⁸ went to the tomb. The Gospel of Peter could have made it clear that she was his wife, but alas, says nothing of the sort! These are just a sprinkling of examples from some of the many other gospels and epistles. Brown’s book is selective in deciding to make use of *some* other gospels but not certain others from the possible selection! He then calls the ones he refers to as the “unaltered” gospels, and he extrapolates them in significantly unsubstantiated ways.
- *None* of the other gospels tell us that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene or that they had children together. It is bizarre exaggeration and conclusion. The closest you can get to anything at all that might be used that way is the **damaged** text in the **Gnostic Gospel of Philip** 63:33-36, which reads: “As for the Wisdom who is called “the barren,” she is the mother of the angels. And the companion of the [...] Mary Magdalene. [...] loved her more than all the disciples, and used to kiss her often on her mouth. The rest of the disciples [...]. They said to him “Why do you love her more than all of us?” The Savior answered and said to them, “Why do I not love you like her? When a blind man and one who sees are both together in darkness, they are no different from one another. When the light comes, then he who sees will see the light, and he who is blind will remain in

¹² Chapter 1:2,3. See *The Lost Books of the Bible being all the Gospels, Epistles and other pieces now extant attributed in the first four centuries to Jesus Christ, his apostles and their companions*. Bell Publishing Company New York, 1976, p. 38.

¹³ 4:1. See *The Other Gospels: Non-Canonical Gospel Texts*, edited by Ron Cameron. The Westminster Press Philadelphia, 1982, p. 125.

¹⁴ 9:1-3. This passage ends when the parents of the raised boy are said to have “worshipped Jesus.” Divinity is clearly implied.

¹⁵ 2:2.

¹⁶ 10:1-2.

¹⁷ In *The Other Gospels: Non-Canonical Gospel Texts*, p. 81.

¹⁸ *Ibid*.

darkness."¹⁹ As church history lecturer from Ridley College, Rhys Bezzant, said recently: "It is beyond logic that you could extrapolate from that the idea that Jesus married Mary Magdalene, had kids and they became kings of France. All it suggests is that they knew each other. Anything else is wishful thinking."²⁰ Decisions have to be made how to best fill in the missing parts of that passage. Brown wants us to see Jesus passionately kissing Mary (which the passage might imply). He then jumps from speculation number 1, to speculation number 2: they were married and had kids. Well . . . that might be one way of filling in the missing parts and deriving conclusions from it. But clearly it is speculation and not nearly as certain as implied in the novel. When Dan Brown quotes that fragmented passage in *The Da Vinci Code* he does not even mention that there are missing words and it is a damaged text. Nor does he entertain the idea that Gnostic persons might write a gospel that pushes their theological bandwagon. Instead he just fills in the missing parts of the passage as: "And the companion of the Saviour is Mary Magdalene. Christ loved her more than all the disciples and used to kiss her often on her mouth..."²¹ And he concludes from this damaged and questionable text that Jesus and Mary were married.

- Bezzant made another interesting point: "One of the world's leading authorities on the Gnostic gospels, Elaine Pagels, was asked during a TV interview whether Jesus had married. She said: 'I'd like to think he did; but there is actually no evidence for it'."²²
- To say that the New Testament gospels are fabricated or have sections that are fabricated, begs the question: on what criteria do we say something is added or made up, and what is original and true? Is it merely what we want to believe or what sounds logical to my mind in this culture and century? How can we *really* know if some parts of the documents have been altered or not? Surely historical tools and textual criticism are better methods! When you apply the same historical criteria and textual criticism to the Bible gospels, that you apply to any other ancient historical document, you find that the gospels hold their own extremely convincingly.

Was Jesus married?

¹⁹ The Gnostic Society Library. The Nag Hammadi Library. The Gospel of Philip. <http://gnosis.org/naghamm/gop.html> accessed 24th Jan 2006.

²⁰ Recorded in Gavin Box, "The Da Vinci Code Revisited: Claims about Jesus just don't stack up says Melbourne Academic". Book Review in the web magazine *Sight*. 6th September 2005. Accessed at: <http://www.sightmagazine.com.au/stories/Features/davinci6.10.05.php> on Jan 20th 2006.

²¹ Brown, p. 331.

²² Quoted in Box. "The Da Vinci Code Revisited: Claims about Jesus just don't stack up says Melbourne Academic". Book Review in the web magazine *Sight*. 6th September 2005. Accessed at: <http://www.sightmagazine.com.au/stories/Features/davinci6.10.05.php> on Jan 20th 2006.

Dan Brown is not the first person to speculate that Jesus was married and had children. The Mormon Church have always taught that Jesus was married, to Mary Magdalene and to two other women as well – the sisters Mary and Martha of Luke 10 and John 11- (thus justifying polygamy). They go on to say that the wedding at Cana was Jesus own wedding day! Others have claimed to be descendants of Jesus from time to time, and even some Christian theologians have speculated on the possibility that Jesus was married. Stephen Twycross argued for a married Jesus, for example²³. He postulated that Jesus was married – to just one women – but *not* Mary Magdalene – rather Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha. The author suggested this on the basis of the two stories just alluded to: Luke 10 and John 11. In Luke 10 the sister Martha requests Jesus to tell Mary to assist her in the food preparations. That was what a sister would need to do if the other sister was married: get the husband’s permission to use his wife’s help. And in John 11 Mary staying in the house until Jesus called for her showed her to be a submissive wife. This interesting speculation is not based on material outside the four New Testament gospels and the bride is *not* Mary Magdalene! It is also a very flimsy argument. Martha asked Jesus if Mary could come and help her because Mary was listening to Jesus’ teachings and wanting to take her away from him. Also, it is just as probable – even more likely – that Mary did not run to meet the Lord at her brother’s tomb, (like Martha did) because Mary was angry at Jesus for not coming at their request to save her brother before he died. She would have been experiencing mixed emotions. I imagine she was annoyed, frustrated, deeply distressed, wanting to be with Jesus and not wanting to be at the same time, and generally very confused²⁴. Was Jesus married? No. There is no evidence in any ancient writing to say he was.

Jesus recommended celibacy for those who could cope with it. Paul seems to do the same in I Cor. 7. Some of the apostles were clearly married (Simon-Peter being the classic example). Jesus and others (like Paul, I Cor. 7:8), however, were not. Celibacy is not *required* of anyone, but it is an option. And Jesus knowing that he would be killed for the atonement of sin, probably chose not to marry and leave behind a widow and fatherless children.

One last thought on the possibility that Jesus was married: Would it damage our theology if he was? It would undermine one of the Roman Catholic arguments for celibacy of priests, but other than that? Could we allow for a divine married Jesus? Dan Brown’s theory is a treat to Christianity not because he speculates about a married Jesus, but rather because *he removes the divinity of Jesus*.

Other problems with Dan Brown’s position

Let me summarise other issues that are a problem for the position *The da Vinci Code* presents.

- 1) The novel says that Jesus was of the royal line of David, and that his descendants have royal blood flowing through their veins. The problem with this is that the

²³ “Was Jesus married?” *The Expository Times*, 107, (1996), p. 334.

²⁴ Ibid. Twycross himself has to admit at the end of his “short comment” that none of his points offers “conclusive evidence” of course, but should be weighed and considered carefully.

- novel ridicules the New Testament gospels as tampered with, and yet it is from the New Testament gospels of Matthew and Luke that we get Jesus' genealogy. If those gospels can't be trusted because they distort the truth and are fabricated by the church, then why on earth accept the genealogies from them? Dan Brown through his characters in the book, is picking and choosing which parts of the "unreliable" gospels are suddenly acceptable without any rational basis for so doing.
- 2) If Jesus is not divine and had children and grandchildren, and he was descended from the royal line of David, then to be perfectly honest, it doesn't mean a thing who the descendants are 2000 years later. It is about as interesting as saying that after 2000 years, I am a descendant of Julius Caesar. Great humans have had terrible and useless descendants. And complete nobodies have had geniuses and the greatest people for descendants. To pretend that a human Jesus' descendants are important to the world today is misguided. It would only be of real interest if the descendants had divine blood flowing through their veins. Then we might have some Hercules around to do great supernatural things! Instead, we are left with mere mortals who may or may not be anything special. Basically, who cares who a descendant of anyone is 2000 years after the fact? It might make for nice stories around the dinner table, but it counts for nothing in the big scheme of things.
 - 3) Brown criticises Christianity as being a distorted religion from its original roots, and that ancient pagan female goddess religion is more the real thing. What is not considered is the possibility that if one religion changes and morphs over time, then surely the same would be true of all religions including pagan religions that worship the sacred feminine. Why does *that* religion get the tick as "real" or "authentic"? How naïve are Brown's readers assumed to be? If humans with power distort and change religions to suit them then wouldn't that be happening in *all* religions over time? The more important questions are: has the Christian message been tampered with to such an extent by the church over the centuries, as to make today's expression of church and faith meaningless? Or have changes that have occurred been either acceptable, necessary, culturally neutral, or unfortunate but not hurting the *core* of the faith and message?
 - 4) The Priory of Sion was set up over a thousand years after Jesus lived, maybe (maybe it is much younger than that too, if recent evidence is valid). They may well be keeping some secrets guarded so they do not get lost to the world. Or they may believe they are at least. But a group that is formed over a thousand years after the events it claims to know about, is not likely to have an accurate account of those truths. Dan Brown writes of the New Testament as distorted: it came in its final canonical form some 300 years after Jesus (actually it was all around by the end of the first century), Nevertheless, Brown says that the Bible is distorted and full of vested interests. But a group that emerges some *1000 years or more* after Jesus, is seen to be holding accurate truth? And yet the group has never shown the world the evidence they have to support that claim. They allude to having documents and evidence, but no one ever sees it or can study it. Why assume they are holding some kind of certain truth when material much closer to the time of Jesus is written off as inaccurate and tampered with? It is inconsistent

- and subjective to the extreme. If they have evidence, they should be prepared to let the world see it, examine it, do scientific and literary and historical tests on it, and then decide if it is authentic and reliable or not. Not showing anyone the evidence, and then speculating that they have accurate and reliable evidence is historical nonsense.
- 5) Regarding Leonardo da Vinci: So what if an eccentric genius artist in the 1400's believed that Jesus was married and had children? What on earth does that prove except that Leonardo's eccentric mind speculated and believed some rather weird things? Is Leonardo infallible? Do his personal beliefs or personal digs at a corrupt medieval church mean that he is telling us something *certain*? It has curiosity value, but nothing more. It is clearly not proven. There are geniuses all through history who have held some rather bizarre beliefs despite having contributed to the world in important ways. Just one quick example: the astronomer Kepler. He believed that there were only 7 planets and that they formed perfect patterns in the sky. He tried to prove it all his life (along with the other work he did and got right), but he was never able to. And for a good reason: he was wrong. Leonardo may or may not have believed Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and had kids, but it means nothing in regards to actual evidence towards proving it.
 - 6) And of course, Leonardo may well have *not* believed that at all. The fact that one disciple in the Last Supper looks feminine does not mean Leonardo believed Jesus to be married to Mary Magdalene! It might mean that he wanted to put a female in the Last Supper after Judas left the room. Perhaps he had read Luke 8:1-3 and was having a dig at the male dominated church of his time. (But of course Judas is still in the painting too, and so another disciple is now missing.) Then again, it might mean that Leonardo wanted to paint John Zebedee more feminine because he wanted to believe Jesus was gay. Or it might mean that he just believed that some men look more feminine than others. Renaissance artists tended to paint younger men with softer features, and John was the youngest of the 12. It was common practice for artists in Leonardo's time. Other than that, how can we be sure what was going on in his mind unless we have something written by him or by a contemporary who testifies to it? And is there any such evidence? Of course not.

Conclusion

Enough has been said. I would conclude by saying that there are things raised by Brown that are important to think about and work through. The church has not had a sinless past! It has lots of things to answer for, including the inquisition, the burning of "witches", and the crusades, to start a short list. There have been terrible times when power hungry men have had the unfortunate ability to use the church badly for tragic ends. But when it comes to Jesus and the essential message of the faith? The Bible documents can be trusted as reliable and accurate. They have not been falsified to bolster the Early Medieval Catholic Church. If they were meant to do that, then the editors did a pathetic job of it! So much of the New Testament challenges the worst features of the established church. The New Testament gospels hold important truth. They can't be so easily dismissed – *especially* on the basis of wild and unsupported allegations.