

**The Da Vinci Code:**  
**Seeking the Truth about Dan Brown's Evidence**

Franklin Church of Christ Edwin Crozier June 4, 2006 AM Worship
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**Introduction:**

Was Jesus married to Mary Magdalene? Did they have a daughter named Sarah who was brought up in what is modern day France? Does Jesus have physical descendants who walk among us today? These are all questions bandied about with the advent of **The Da Vinci Code**. These are the questions upon which many have focused their attention, almost as a smokescreen to the deeper issues. Other questions posed by the book: Did Constantine single-handedly shape modern Christianity by deciding which books would be in the Bible and by editing them to teach his message for Roman unification? Was Jesus just a great human teacher who was deified by a close counsel vote in 325 AD, nearly 300 years after He lived and died? Are there other "gospel" accounts that reveal the real historical Jesus hidden from us by the biggest cover-up scandal of all times? Was Mary Magdalene the rock upon which Jesus was building His church? The reality is we could spend lesson after lesson after lesson dealing with all the issues raised by the runaway bestseller. We will attempt to get down to brass tacks and deal with the important issues in two brief lessons. In this first lesson, we will examine the three pieces of evidence presented in Dan Brown's book. Tonight, we want to get under the surface though and see what the real point of this book is and how it stands up to the test of truth.

**Discussion:**

- I. Why deal with this in a sermon?
  - A. Do I believe Brown's book should be taken off the shelves? His movie banned? No. Do I want to raise an alarm claiming the very fabric of Christianity is in danger of collapse? Clearly not. Frankly, I am not the least bit worried about the nature or existence of Christianity. Dan Brown himself provides the truth on this matter as he quoted a British priest in an address made to New Hampshire writers. He said, "Christian theology has survived the writings of Galileo and the writings of Darwin, surely it will survive the writings of some novelist from New Hampshire."<sup>1</sup>
  - B. Many wonder why books are being written and sermons being presented in response to this novel. After all, it is a work of fiction. Who cares? The sad reality is it seems many people care. 60.5 million copies of the book are in print. By the end of last weekend, the movie had grossed over \$462 million worldwide. In 2005, Time magazine listed Dan Brown as one of their 100 most influential people. Is this book fiction? Absolutely! The question is not whether the book is fictional. The question is whether people are being influenced by it? Undoubtedly.
  - C. Allow me to explain what is happening here. Dan Brown has written a novel providing what he calls a possible other side to the greatest story ever told. Brown's character, Leigh Teabing, expresses what I believe is the authors sentiments about why his own book is important saying, "The Sangreal documents simply tell the *other* side of the Christ story. In the end, which side you believe becomes a matter of faith and personal exploration, but at least the information has survived" (p. 256).<sup>2</sup> On his website, Brown claims he wants open and honest debate over these issues. However, nearly every time someone comes out to claim the book is based on fallacies and already disproven theories, people cry, "It's just a novel, why are you being so mean?" We Christians get put in a bad spot. If we don't say something, the book is allowed unhindered influence for error. If we do say something, we are mean conservative Christian wackos who want to suppress other possibilities. I have no desire to suppress anything. In fact, I welcome the search for truth this book invites. Within this lesson we will examine the truth about the three pieces of evidence for the unorthodox claims made in the book. First, a brief synopsis for those who have neither read the book nor seen the movie.
- II. **The Da Vinci Code** in a nutshell.
  - A. The book begins with the murder of Jacques Sauniere, curator of the Louvre Museum in Paris, France. Shot in the stomach, left to bleed to death and unable to get to help, Sauniere realizes the secret he was sworn to protect is going to be lost if he doesn't act fast. He leaves a riddle on the floor next to where he dies in order to get the attention of his estranged granddaughter,

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.danbrown.com/novels/davinci\\_code/breakingnews.html](http://www.danbrown.com/novels/davinci_code/breakingnews.html) (the link for "Live Audio" is this address)

<sup>2</sup> All page numbers, unless otherwise noted, refer to pages in the hardback edition of **The Da Vinci Code** by Dan Brown.

Sophie Neveu, and Harvard professor of symbology, Robert Langdon. Regrettably, the message left behind leads the French police to believe Langdon is the killer.

- B. With the help of Neveu, Langdon eludes the French police and follows the trail of clues left by Sauniere to uncover the greatest secret of all time. The initial clue leads Langdon and Neveu to the Mona Lisa, where another clue is left. The words “So Dark the Con of Man.” Neveu realizes that is an anagram for “Madonna of the Rocks.” Searching that painting she finds a key to a Swiss bank safe deposit box. In which they find more clues.
- C. What is going on here? The murder victim was actually the member of a secret society known as the Priory of Sion, supposedly founded in 1099 in order to protect and preserve a secret so powerful the Catholic Church historically stopped at nothing to destroy it. If you have not already read the book, I am sure you have already guessed, Leonardo Da Vinci was part of the secret society as well. The murder victim was one of four people who knew the location of the evidence that would prove the secret beyond doubt. However, all four were killed in one night. The final victim left the clues behind to lead his granddaughter to discover the greatest cover up in the history of mankind.
- D. What was the great secret? Jesus, who was actually nothing more than a great human philosopher and teacher, married Mary Magdalene. Together they had a child, whose descendents continue among us today. Further, Mary Magdalene was actually the intended rock of the church Jesus wanted to establish. Within the book, Mary Magdalene is presented as the “true Holy Grail.” Her sarcophagus as well as documents that will definitively prove this whole story are kept secret by the Priory of Sion. The rumor is they will one day reveal this information to the world. This stash is known in the book as “the Sangreal.”
- E. In the midst of this story, asserted as historical fact, are several startling claims that question the very foundations of Christian faith. We are told that the Nicene Council of 325 AD voted Jesus’ deity into the fundamental doctrine of Christianity. The fictional British historian Leigh Teabing refers to that council, which took place nearly 300 years after Jesus died and says, “My dear, until *that* moment in history, Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet...a great and powerful man, but a *man* nonetheless” (p. 233). He further claims, “Christ as Messiah was critical to the functioning of Church and state. Many scholars claim that the early Church literally stole Jesus from His original followers, hijacking His human message, shrouding it in an impenetrable cloak of divinity, and using it to expand their own power” (p. 233). Further, “Because Constantine upgraded Jesus’ status almost four centuries after Jesus’ death, thousands of documents already existed chronicling His life as a *mortal* man. To rewrite the history books, Constantine knew he would need a bold stroke. From this sprang the most profound moment in Christian history...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 god-like. The earlier gospels were outlawed, gathered up, and burned” (p. 234). The long and short of it is this. According to Teabing, “...almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is *false*” (p. 235).
- F. What evidence was given for these claims? Not much. There are some references to what we today call the Gnostic Gospels. There is a look at Leonardo Da Vinci’s **The Last Supper**. Finally, there are the Sangreal documents kept in hiding by the Priory of Sion.

### III. Seek the truth—Examine the evidence.

#### A. The Gnostic Gospels:

1. While we are told there are countless references in the Gnostic Gospels to a marriage between Jesus and Mary Magdalene, we are given only one.

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. The rest of the disciples were offended by it and expresses disapproval. They said to him, ‘Why do you love her more than all of us?’  
—*The Gospel of Philip* (as quoted on p. 246)

- a. According to Leigh Teabing, “As any Aramaic scholar will tell you, the word *companion*, in those days, literally meant spouse” (p. 246). Actually, any Aramaic scholar will tell you that this Gnostic gospel wasn’t written in Aramaic. The only surviving fragment that we have is written in Coptic. The word translated “companion” is borrowed from the Greek

“koinonos,” which does, in fact, simply mean companion, friend or associate.<sup>3</sup> This word is used in the New Testament repeatedly and never once means spouse (e.g. **Luke 5:10; II Corinthians 8:23; Philemon 17; et al**).

- b. Further, scholars also tell us this particular quote is fragmented. The codex, when discovered, was worn thin in many places leaving gaps and missing words. This particular passage is one of the places. According to Bart Ehrman, who is no great friend to the Bible or Christianity, the following is what we really have in the manuscript:

The companion of the [gap in the manuscript] Mary Magdalene [gap] more than [gap] the disciples [gap] kiss her [gap] on her [gap].<sup>4</sup>

We don't really know what this text said about Mary's relationship with Jesus in relation to the other disciples or what it says about how she was kissed—could it be on the cheek, a simple customary greeting with a holy kiss?

- c. One final comment regarding the *Gospel of Philip* and its presentation of Jesus as married. There is an interesting statement made in the book about marriage:

Great is the mystery of marriage! For without it, the world would not exist. Now the existence of the world [...], and the existence of [...] marriage. Think of the [...] relationship, for it possesses [...] power. Its image consists of a defilement.

What a perfect place to have said something about Jesus' marriage if this work really wanted to present Jesus as married. Yet, nothing is said about that.

2. The second reference in **The Da Vinci Code** to the Gnostic Gospels is a quote from the *Gospel of Mary Magdalene*.

And Peter said, “Did the Saviour really speak with a woman without our knowledge? Are we to turn about and all listen to her? Did he prefer her to us?”

And Levi answered, “Peter, you have always been hot-tempered. Now I see you contending against the woman like an adversary. If the Saviour made her worthy, who are you indeed to reject her? Surely the Saviour knows her very well. That is why he loved her more than us.”

—*The Gospel of Mary*

- a. According to the fictional historian in Brown's book, Sir Leigh Teabing, the woman they are referring to is Mary Magdalene. He says, “At this point in the gospels, Jesus suspects He will soon be captured and crucified. So He gives Mary Magdalene instructions on how to carry on His church after He is gone...According to these unaltered gospels, it was not *Peter* to whom Christ gave directions with which to establish the Christian Church. It was *Mary Magdalene*” (pp. 247-248).
- b. Regarding this book, understand that more than half of this book is missing, making it very difficult to understand the point behind it at all. However, within what has been discovered, there is absolutely nothing about Mary Magdalene being the head of Jesus' church. She is not even one who is sent out to teach the world. Rather, she was an encourager, exhorting the men to teach the Gospel Jesus had taught them without fear. At this point, Peter asks Mary what she remembers about what Jesus taught her. She then relates a vision she supposedly had (5:8).
- c. Interesting facts to note. The text never says when Mary supposedly received the vision. Further, the events described are not when Jesus is worried He is about to be arrested. Rather, they are events after Jesus has departed and commissioned the apostles to go teach. Finally, there is nothing here about instructions to carry on the church. There is merely a vision (or a fragment of a vision) that has to do with the difference between the soul and the spirit and then something described as the seven powers of wrath. Interestingly, in the text, Andrew is actually the first to respond saying, “Say what you wish to say about what she has said. I at least do not believe that the Savior said this. For certainly these teachings are strange ideas” (9:2). Then Peter responds as quoted above

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<sup>3</sup> Ehrman, Bart D., **Truth and Fiction in the Da Vinci Code**, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, p178.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

- with Levi's retort. Immediately following this the men went forth to preach as Jesus had told them and Mary encouraged them.
- d. If I might make a comment about the "love" Jesus had for Mary according to this text. There is nothing here to indicate romantic love. Rather, Levi's reference to Jesus loving Mary more than the disciples is a reference to Him giving her a vision He did not give the others. Also, we might point out that had Jesus been married to Mary Magdalene, wouldn't Levi's natural response to Peter and Andrew be, "Look guys, this is Jesus' wife. Shouldn't we expect Him to say things to her that we weren't told?"
3. There you have it. The huge amount of evidence presented from the Gnostic Gospels. Even if we assume these supposed Gospels carry as much weight as the ones in the Bible, the evidence for Dan Brown's claims is pretty sparse here. In fact, non-existent.
- B. *The Last Supper.*
1. The central piece of evidence for this theory is the artwork of Leonardo Da Vinci. Interestingly, since the book is named ***The Da Vinci Code*** and several of Leonardo's works are referenced, we are left with the impression that this message regarding Jesus and Mary Magdalene is found throughout Leonardo's paintings. However, when you review what is presented there is only one painting that is presented as any kind of proof: *The Last Supper*.
  2. What does Brown, through the characters Teabing and Langdon, present as evidence from this picture?
    - a. 13 cups instead of 1.
      - i. Teabing says, "A bit strange, don't you think, considering that both the Bible and our standard Grail legend celebrate this moment as the definitive arrival of the Holy Grail. Oddly, Da Vinci appears to have forgotten to paint the Cup of Christ" (p. 236).
      - ii. Response: Then again, perhaps Leonardo just read his Bible and noticed that the Bible never presents a "Holy Grail." There is nothing special about any cup used at that Supper. There may be legends, but there is nothing Biblical about it.
    - b. The character to Jesus' right, whom most believe to be John, is actually a woman.
      - i. "Sophie examined the figure to Jesus' immediate right, focusing in. As she studied the person's face and body, a wave of astonishment rose within her. The individual had flowing red hair, delicate folded hands, and the hint of a bosom. It was, without a doubt...female.  
"That's a woman!" Sophie exclaimed" (p. 243).
      - ii. Response: I must admit poor John was painted with seemingly feminine features. But why? We can make up reasons for that, that doesn't make them so. Have you ever noticed that some men just seem to have feminine features? Leonardo may have simply painted John that way. Not to mention it appears from other paintings in the same time period that was a standard way to paint John, who was considered to be the youngest of the disciples and would therefore be less manly. If we assume for a moment it is a woman, how on earth would we know it is Mary Magdalene? Finally, keep in mind that this whole thing is predicated on a missing cup, which is not even mentioned in the Bible. John, however, is supposed to be at the supper (**Matthew 26:20, 37; John 13:23**). If this is Mary Magdalene, where is John?
    - c. The presence of "the chalice."
      - i. As Teabing and Langdon tell us about who is really the Holy Grail, we are informed that the most ancient symbol for female is called the chalice. It is basically a V. Langdon said, "The chalice...resembles a cup or vessel, and more important, it resembles the shape of a woman's womb. This symbol communicates femininity, womanhood, and fertility" (p. 238). This chalice is supposedly seen in the painting in the void between Jesus and John (the supposed Mary). The point, the Holy Grail is really not a cup, but a woman and that woman is Mary Magdalene.
      - ii. Response: All I can say is, "Give me a break." This is one of those interesting points where no matter what Leonardo did, it would be interpreted to make the point. What if he had painted John leaning on Jesus' breast as **John 13:23** presents John? Then we would have heard about Jesus' lover laying on Him at the table. Perhaps this negative space is simply a representation of the disciples pulling away from Jesus, a

representation of His coming isolation. Then again, it may be just the way Leonardo painted the conversations among the men. Interestingly, he left Jesus alone and put the apostles in 4 groups of 3. Naturally, there is going to be some leaning. Can we really read into that an ancient symbol of the feminine which means Mary Magdalene is in the picture?

d. The presence of an “M”.

“Finally,” Teabing said, “if you view Jesus and Magdalene as compositional elements rather than as people, you will see another obvious shape leap out at you.” He paused. “A *letter* of the alphabet.”

Sophie saw it at once. To say the letter leapt out at her was an understatement. The letter was suddenly all Sophie could see. Glaring in the center of the painting was the unquestionable outline of an enormous, flawlessly formed letter M.

“A bit too perfect for coincidence, wouldn’t you say?” Teabing asked.

Sophie was amazed. “Why is it there?”

Teabing shrugged. “Conspiracy theorists will tell you it stands for *Matrimonio* or *Mary Magdalene*. To be honest, nobody is certain. The only certainty is the hidden M is no mistake” (pp 244-245).

- i. You may have trouble finding this M. It is not nearly so obvious to me. But if you allow the arms of Jesus and John to form the inner arms of the M and then trace along the outer arms of the two men, you can formulate an M in the picture.
  - ii. Response: So what? If the M is there and is too perfect for coincidence, Brown, through Teabing, admits that they have no idea what it stands for. It could be *Matrimonio*. It could be *Mary Magdalene*. Or how about this? Maybe it is *Messiah!* Additionally, I think if we work hard enough, we could find lots of letters in this painting. For instance, to the right of the painting, we can find an abbreviation of Leonardo’s name—“Leo”. A bit too perfect for coincidence, wouldn’t you say? Or notice a prophetic message encouraging you not to listen to Dan Brown but to a 21<sup>st</sup> century preacher. You may not have been aware, but my name, “Edwin,” is found in Leonardo’s painting. A bit too perfect for coincidence, wouldn’t you say?
3. There it is, **The Da Vinci Code**. One picture with a few pieces of evidence. What do you say? Convincing or contrived? By the way, has it occurred to anyone that if we grant Brown’s thesis about this painting and Leonardo really was putting these clues into the painting, who cares? This picture was painted from 1495 to 1498. A millennium and a half after Jesus instituted the Supper. Even if Brown’s interpretation of Leonardo’s meaning is accurate, why would we take the word of a man nearly 1500 years after the fact especially when it contradicts every piece of evidence we have from within a generation of the event?

C. The Sangreal Documents:

1. Now we get down to the whole crux of the matter. Remember the Sangreal, the Holy Grail itself. The sarcophagus of Mary Magdalene along with thousands of documents that tell us about the real Jesus, His human nature and His marriage, and about the real Mary Magdalene, her goddess nature and her rule over Jesus’ church. In fact, as Langdon describes these documents to Neveu we read the following conversation:  
“There’s an enormous difference between hypothetically discussing an alternate history of Christ, and...presenting to the world thousands of ancient documents as scientific evidence that the New Testament is false testimony” (p. 341).
2. Brown makes an interesting admission through the character Leigh Teabing on p. 268. Teabing, concerned that the Catholic Church will acquire these Sangreal documents before he does and destroy them says, “Then, my dear, with the Sangreal documents gone, all evidence will be lost.” Do you see the admission? Without those documents, all evidence will be lost. Brown admits that nothing else he has presented is really evidence. Guess what. Nobody has seen these documents. Even in the book they remain hidden.
3. Of course, that is saying nothing about the fact that the secret society that guards the secret has been proven to be a hoax propagated by a French con-man in the 1950s and 1960s. There is no secret society called the Priory of Sion. They are not protecting any historical or

scientific evidence behind the claims of Brown's book. What is admitted by the author to be the only evidence doesn't even exist.

4. There you have it. The third piece of evidence. More people have seen the Loch Ness Monster than have seen this evidence. You tell me what the truth is.
- D. Finally, the apostle Paul told us what to do with men like Dan Brown in **Romans 16:17**. "I beseech you brethren, mark them which cause division and offences contrary to the doctrine which you have learned; and avoid them." Interestingly, Leonardo himself has coded this very message for us and Brown has unwittingly revealed that code in his book as well. Do you remember we earlier talked about Leonardo's painting "Madonna of the Rocks" and how Brown's book used that title as an anagram for "So dark the con of man"? Surely you noticed the message and anagram hidden within both of those phrases warning us to "so mark the con of Dan".

### **Conclusion:**

There you have it. A look at all of the evidence presented amid the propaganda of a fictional novel. You tell me. Is there a case to be made here? Or is it a fanciful and entertaining story based on fictional fabrication? The truth is there and it is not hard to find.

I would like to address one further issue. This is an issue of logic. **The Da Vinci Code** is a self-imploding work. If we take the main claim as true, that Jesus is not God the Son but was just a man, a great moral teacher, then who cares about His wife or His offspring? Who cares that Jesus might have descendants walking among us today if He was nothing more than an influential philosopher? No one cares if Socrates, Aristotle or Plato have descendants walking among us. No one even cares if Ramses the Great, Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar or Attila the Hun have descendants among us. Why would anyone care if a philosopher and would-be claimant to the throne of a defunct and destroyed nation of Israel had descendants among us? What do we end up with? If the Bible is incorrect about Jesus, then Brown's assertions of Mary Magdalene and a lineage of Jesus are pointless and not worth the centuries of supposed cover up. On the other hand, if the Bible is correct, then Brown's assertions are just plain wrong.

There is one issue about which Brown, his book and the movie are correct. We need to seek the truth. Why? Because truth has nothing to fear. And, as the Bible says in **John 8:32**, "The truth will set you free." As Jesus prayed in **John 17:17**, "Sanctify them in the truth, Your word is truth." Seek the truth. Do not fear it. Truth is what will set you free. The truth is, Jesus is the Son of God. The Bible is His word. Through submission to it, we can be set free from sin and receive salvation.