

## ***The New Testament, Jesus Christ, and The Da Vinci Code***

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### *The Da Vinci Code: Anatomy of a Phenomenon*

The novel *The Da Vinci Code* took the nation by storm for the next few years after its 2003 release, even if it remains to be seen whether the movie will follow suit.<sup>1</sup> Its impact can be seen not only in the vast number of copies sold, but in the number of television interviews that its author Dan Brown has done, the number of television magazines dealing with several controversial topics introduced by the novel, and the number of books that have come out in response to it.<sup>2</sup> While at least one of its controversial claims was not unique to Brown's novel,<sup>3</sup> nothing has caused the level of scrutiny and reaction that *The Da Vinci Code* has. Because the issues are so important and because the truth of these matters is so readily accessible, it behooves

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<sup>1</sup> The movie certainly did very well on its opening weekend, grossing over 70 million dollars. Its opening weekend was exceeded by only two other movies in their respective openings, viz., *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith* and *Spiderman*. It remains to be seen, however, whether the movie will continue to keep the controversy stirred up to the same level that the novel has.

<sup>2</sup> A sampling of books that have come out refuting the claims of the novel include: Richard Abanes, *The Truth Behind the Da Vinci Code* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2004); Darrell L. Bock, *Breaking the Da Vinci Code: Answers to the Questions Everyone's Asking* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004); James L. Garlow, *The Da Vinci Codebreaker* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2006); James L. Garlow and Peter Jones, *Cracking Da Vinci's Code: You're Read the Fiction, Now Read the Facts* (Colorado Springs: Victor Books, 2005); Hank Hanegraaff and Paul Maier, *The Da Vinci Code: Fact or Fiction?* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale Publishing House, 2004); Erwin W. Lutzer, *The Da Vinci Code Deception: Credible Answers to the Questions Millions Are Asking about Jesus, the Bible, and The Da Vinci Code* (Minneapolis: Tyndale Publishing House, 2006); Josh McDowell, *The Da Vinci Code: A Quest for Answers* (Holiday, FL: Green Key Books, 2006); Ben Witherington, III, *The Gospel Code: Novel Claims about Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and Da Vinci* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> The thesis that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and fathered a bloodline that continues to today was advanced by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, & Henry Lincoln, *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* (Delacorte Press, 1982). For a critical review of the book, see Brian Onken, "Searching for the Holy Grail—Again: A Summary Critique," *Christian Research Journal* 27, No. 1 (2004): 48-51.

Christians to set the record straight in order to "walk in wisdom to those who are outside ... that you may know how you ought to answer each one."<sup>4</sup>

### ***Why All the Fuss?***

Some have responded to the many critics, saying that their reaction is unwarranted since *The Da Vinci Code* is only a novel. As such, they say, it was never intended to be taken seriously. For sure, there is a popular literary genre known as historical fiction that allows a writer to weave a fictional story around historical events. Usually, however, the distinctions between the historical context of the story and the fictional elements of the story are clear enough. But Dan Brown's novel crosses the line in a number of serious ways.

Before one even begins reading the story, Brown makes the bold assertion that "all descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals are accurate."<sup>5</sup> Further, when one takes a closer look at what Dan Brown himself says both about the claims of the novel and other things in his own world view, it becomes clear that, as far as he is concerned, this is more than an entertaining novel.

In response to an interview, Brown commented, "When I started researching [*The*] *Da Vinci Code*, I really was skeptical and I expected on some level to disprove all of this history that's unearthed in the book. And after three trips to Paris and a lot of interviews, I became a believer."<sup>6</sup> One must ask: "A Believer in what?" When asked by Charlie Gibson on *Good Morning, America* how the book might have been different if Brown had written it as a non-

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<sup>4</sup> Col. 4:5-6, New King James Version.

<sup>5</sup> Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 1.

<sup>6</sup> Video interview with Dan Brown downloaded from [http://www.danbrown.com/novels/davinci\\_code/breakingnews.html](http://www.danbrown.com/novels/davinci_code/breakingnews.html).

fiction book, Brown repeated the same sentiment: "I don't think it would have. I began the research for *The Da Vinci Code* as a skeptic. I entirely expected as I researched the book to disprove this theory. And after numerous trips to Europe, about two years of research, I really became a believer. And, it's important to remember that this is a novel about a theory that has been out there for a long time."<sup>7</sup> Matt Lauer of *The Today Show* asked Dan Brown how much of the book is based on reality. Brown answered, "Absolutely all of it. Obviously Robert Langdon is fictional but all of the art, architecture, secret rituals, secret societies—all that is historical fact."<sup>8</sup>

In an address to a gathering of writers in his native New Hampshire, Brown revealed a number of things both about his view of the novel itself and his own world view. "I wrote this novel as part of my own spiritual quest. I never imagined a novel could become so controversial. ... *The Da Vinci Code* describes history as I have come to understand it through many years of travel, research, reading, interviews, exploration."<sup>9</sup> Such comments are nested in a world view characterized in the same speech by historical skepticism, religious relativism, epistemological relativism, a mischaracterization of science and religion, and a non-Christian view of the relationship between faith and reason.

Space and design do not allow a thorough examination of these matters here. But it is important to bear these in mind in order to dispel the criticism that it is unnecessary to go to any

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<sup>7</sup> Video interview with Dan Brown downloaded from [http://www.danbrown.com/novels/davinci\\_code/breakingnews.html](http://www.danbrown.com/novels/davinci_code/breakingnews.html).

<sup>8</sup> Video interview with Dan Brown downloaded from [http://www.danbrown.com/novels/davinci\\_code/breakingnews.html](http://www.danbrown.com/novels/davinci_code/breakingnews.html).

<sup>9</sup> Audio speech by Dan Brown downloaded from [http://www.danbrown.com/novels/davinci\\_code/breakingnews.html](http://www.danbrown.com/novels/davinci_code/breakingnews.html).

trouble in responding to *The Da Vinci Code*. There clearly is an agenda here. These matters are much too important for Christians to sit quietly by and let the claims of the novel go unchallenged.

### *The Da Vinci Code: Its Claims*

There are a number of criticisms to be made regarding the false claims in the novel about artwork and other points from history.<sup>10</sup> While many of these mistakes are somewhat trivial, they serve as an indicator of the poor historical research that went into the work, despite Brown's claims to the contrary. When it comes to a more in-depth analysis, it is Brown's claims about documents that interest me. Remember on his "Fact" page, Brown asserts that all his descriptions are accurate. But what, according to Brown, do these documents say? Through the mouth of the novel's historian Leigh Teabing, the novel makes a number of claims about who Jesus is based upon the contrasts between the New Testament gospels and other ancient documents. Specifically, the novel makes the following four claims:

1. The Christian doctrine of the deity of Christ was the result of a close vote among church leaders convening at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325.<sup>11</sup>

2. The Bible as we know it was collated by Constantine at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> For comments regarding the novel's mistakes about the artwork of Leonardo Da Vinci, see Garlow, *The Da Vinci Codebreaker*, 122-124, 125-127, 137-138. For comments on other historical mistakes, see the DVD, *The Da Vinci Delusion* (Fort Lauderdale: Coral Ridge Ministries, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> *The Da Vinci Code*, p. 233.

<sup>12</sup> *The Da Vinci Code*, pp. 231, 234, and 244.

3. The story of Jesus is more accurately contained within the Gnostic documents than in the New Testament and shows a mere human Jesus.<sup>13</sup>

4. This story also shows that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and fathered children.<sup>14</sup>

The punch line of the novel is that the true identity of the Holy Grail is none other than Mary Magdalene herself. Just as in the traditional legend the grail was reputed to be the repository of the blood of Jesus collected as it dripped from Him on the cross, in a literal way Mary Magdalene is reputed to be the true repository of the blood of Jesus in as much as she carried His child, the progenitor of His royal bloodline.

The title of the novel comes from the idea that this "truth" (that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married and gave rise to a bloodline that continues to the present) was originally suppressed by the male-dominated church authority because Jesus fathered a daughter who was supposed to lead the church. Having been suppressed, the knowledge of this bloodline has been protected throughout the centuries by a secret society whose leadership included such luminaries as Sir Isaac Newton and Leonardo Da Vinci. According to the theory, Leonardo hid a number of clues about this "truth" in his art work, most notably his *The Last Supper* and the *Mona Lisa*.

Does the historical evidence support such a claim? More specifically, can we know anything about the likelihood that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene? How are such historical inquiries conducted? How does the New Testament evidence stack up against other

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<sup>13</sup> *The Da Vinci Code*, pp. 234, 235, 245-246, 248, and 255-256.

<sup>14</sup> *The Da Vinci Code*, pp. 244, 245, 246, and 249.

ancient documents regarding what we can know about Jesus? It is to these questions I should now like to turn my attention.

### *The Da Vinci Code: Responses to the Arguments*

I should like to unpack the novel's arguments for the above four claims and respond to each of them.<sup>15</sup> The evidence will show that not only is it sometimes the case that the claims are unsupported, but often the exact opposite of what the novel has to say is actually the case. As it turns out, Dan Brown (through the mouth of Leigh Teabing) is not the historian that he would want you to think.

### ***The Deity of Jesus and the Historical Evidence***

The novel claims: The Christian doctrine of the deity of Christ was the result of a close vote among church leaders convening at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325.

Response: The divinity of Jesus was affirmed long before Constantine and the Council of Nicaea. The Council of Nicaea was the first of several of ecumenical church councils.<sup>16</sup> It was convened June 19, 325, by the Roman Emperor Constantine in Nicaea in Bithynia (now Iznik, Turkey). There were around three hundred church leaders present to try to settle the dispute between the followers of Arias (who regarded Jesus as a subordinate god and of a *similar* substance to the Father) and Athanasius (who regarded Jesus as co-equal and of the *same*

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<sup>15</sup> Probably the best critique of the claims of the novel is the Bock book cited in note 2. I am especially indebted to him for some of what I have to say in my responses.

<sup>16</sup> An ecumenical church council was a gathering of church officials that dealt with particular doctrinal issues, the results of which were adopted by the entire Christian church. The first instance of such a gathering was when the apostles gathered at Jerusalem to address the matter of circumcision and the Gentile Christians (Acts 15). After the apostolic era, the first of a number of gatherings was at Nicaea. For a helpful summary of these early councils and the doctrinal creeds that arose from them, see Norman L. Geisler, "The Essential Doctrines of the Christian Faith: A Historical Approach," *Christian Research Journal* 28, No. 5, 2005, 24-33. Another helpful discussion of the development of early Christian doctrine is John D. Hanna, *Our Legacy: The History of Christian Doctrine* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2001).

substance as the Father. Notice that, for the most part, none of the leaders present denied the deity of Christ. Rather, the dispute was regarding the exact nature of that deity. Further, there was no "vote" on the deity of Christ. The church leaders were asked to sign the final conclusion of the council, which affirmed the view of Athanasius and the full deity of Christ, and only two out of the three hundred or so refused. This is far from the "close vote" that *The Da Vinci Code* claims.

The historical evidence shows that the Council of Nicaea only confirmed what was already fairly well established within the majority of the church at the time, viz., that Jesus was divine and co-equal with the Father.<sup>17</sup> This can be seen by a look at what some of the early Christian leaders had to say about the identity of Christ. It is important to note that all these church leaders lived well before the Council of Nicaea.

Justin Martyr (AD 100-165), in his *First Apology*, claimed that "...the Father of the universe has a Son; who being the logos and First-begotten is also God."<sup>18</sup> Ignatius (AD 105) said that "God Himself being manifested in human form for the renewal of eternal life."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, this is one of several places where the movie differs markedly from the novel. In the movie, the main character, Harvard Professor of Religious Symbolology Robert Langdon, disputes with the claim by novel's historian, Leigh Teabing, about Nicaea and argues that the council only sanctioned what was already widely held in the churches. Other notable departures of the movie from the novel include: changing the number of alleged murders of women by the church from five million (*The Da Vinci Code*, p. 125) to fifty-thousand (according to Langdon; "some say millions" according to Teabing); creating more of a distance between Opus Dei and the Vatican on the one hand and the rogue murderers seemingly acting in their names on the other; eliminating the reference to Aramaic in the discussion about the quote from the Gnostic *Gospel of Philip* (since the extant copy is a Coptic translation of the original Greek); and adding several expressions of skepticism on the part of Langdon (in addition to the one noted above about Nicaea) regarding the reality of the Priory of Sion and whether Mary Magdalene actually penned the Gnostic gospel that bears her name.

<sup>18</sup> *First Apology of Justin Martyr*, 63:15. The writings of these early Christian leaders are easily accessible both in print and on-line. See, for example, J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976) and L. Russ Bush, *Classical Readings in Christian Apologetics: AD100-1800* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983).

<sup>19</sup> *Epistle to the Ephesians*, 19.

Irenaeus, (AD 130-202) wrote, "The Church ... has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith: [She believes] in ... Christ Jesus, *the Son of God*, who became incarnate for our salvation; ... and His [future] manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father 'to gather all things in one,' and to raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race, in order that to Christ Jesus, *our Lord, and God*, and Savior, and King, according to the will of the invisible Father, 'every knee should bow,'"<sup>20</sup>

We can see here that Jesus was understood to be the Son of God and our Lord and God. Many other quotes could be given from this time period attesting to the fact that the divinity of Jesus, far from being invented by Constantine at the Council of Nicaea, was held by the Christians more than a century before.<sup>21</sup>

### ***The Early Attestation of the New Testament Documents***

The novel claims: The Bible as we know it was collated by Constantine at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325.

Response: The four Gospels of the New Testament were attested to long before Constantine and Nicaea. The early attestation of the four canonical Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John can be seen in several early writings.<sup>22</sup> The *Muratorian Canon* (late second century) was discovered in 1740 by Italian historian Ludovico Antonio Muratori. It is an eight-

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<sup>20</sup> *Against Heresies*, I, 10, 1, emphasis added.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example: Mathetes (AD c. 130) *Letter to Diognetus*, 7 and 9; Clement of Alexandria (AD 150-215) *Christ the Educator*, 3.1; Tertullian (AD 150-225) *Against Praxeas*, 2; Hippolytus (AD 170-236) *Against the Heresy of One Noetus*, 14.

<sup>22</sup> The term 'canonical' means that a given document was recognized by the Christian community as having apostolic authority and as being inspired by God. As such, it was included in what we now refer to as the Bible. The term means 'standard' or 'rule.' For a discussion of the process of canonicity, see Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, rev. and exp. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 203-317.

century copy of a document dated around the late second century. The first few lines are missing, but the text reads "The third book of the gospel is that according to Luke. ... The fourth of the gospels is that of John, one of the disciples."<sup>23</sup> It names only four gospels and names the writings of Valentinus, who was an important Gnostic writer of that time, as excluded from the Church.<sup>24</sup>

The Church Father Irenaeus has an extended discussion why there are four Gospels.<sup>25</sup> Other early Christian writers or writings that attest, quote, or make allusions to the Gospels include Origen's *Homily on Luke* (AD 185-254), the *Epistle of Barnabas* (c. 70-79), the *Didache* (c. 70-130), Papias' *Interpretation of the Oracles of the Lord* (c. 70-163), Marcion (c. 140), the Epistles of Ignatius (c. 110-117), and Clement of Rome's *Epistle to the Corinthians* (c. 95-97).<sup>26</sup>

It is important that one does not misunderstand the argument here. These early attestations do not, in themselves, prove that what the New Testament says about Jesus is true. What they do show, however, are the early views of the Christians regarding which documents were authoritative at an early date. Thus, the novel is wrong when it says that such decisions were not made until the Council of Nicaea. By the time the council convened, much of the New Testament (certainly the four canonical Gospels) was already well established and recognized as authoritative.

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<sup>23</sup> Cited in Bock, *Breaking*, 112. See also, Geisler and Nix, *General Introduction*, 288.

<sup>24</sup> Bock, *Breaking*, 112.

<sup>25</sup> *Against Heresies*, 3.11.7. See also 3.11.8 and 3.1.1.

<sup>26</sup> Geisler and Nix, *General Introduction*, 288-289.

## ***The Jesus of the New Testament vs. the Jesus of the Gnostics***

The novel claims: The story of Jesus is more accurately contained within the Gnostic documents than in the New Testament and shows a mere human Jesus.

Response: A comparison of the Jesus of the New Testament with the Jesus of the Gnostic Gospels reveals some very interesting contrasts. But the contrasts do not follow the description that Teabing gives us in the novel. Let us first take a look at the Jesus of the Gnostic Gospels.

Teabing makes a great deal out of the Nag Hammadi Documents. What exactly are these documents? They were discovered in 1945 in a cave in the Egyptian desert. The documents are eight-century Coptic<sup>27</sup> translations of original Greek documents dating from the second to the fourth centuries, consisting of twelve codices (books) and eight leaves from a thirteenth. Eliminating duplication, there are forty-five separate titles. Some of them have strange names like *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, *The Concept of Our Great Power*, and *The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*. Others have titles that contain names of biblical characters such as *The Apocryphon of James*, *The Gospel of Thomas*, and *The Sophia of Jesus Christ*.<sup>28</sup> These documents have been translated into English and are easily accessible through libraries and bookstores.<sup>29</sup>

Interestingly, much of the teachings contained in these documents has been known to modern scholars by way of the critics of these teachings that wrote in early church history;

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<sup>27</sup> Coptic basically was an Egyptian language that utilized Greek letters.

<sup>28</sup> It is important to note that none of the documents bearing the name of a biblical figure was actually written by that biblical figure. These Gnostic documents were written more than a century after the period of the New Testament.

<sup>29</sup> The standard English translation is James M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library: The Definitive Translation of the Gnostic Scriptures Complete in One Volume* 3<sup>rd</sup> rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1988). All of my citations come from this edition.

particularly Irenaeus in his *Against Heresies*. But with the discovery of the primary sources, it allows us to read these teachings in the words of those who held them. The doctrines are a combination of Christian themes and Gnosticism, thus they are often referred to as the Gnostic Gospels or Gnostic writings.<sup>30</sup>

But just what is Gnosticism? The term 'gnosticism' comes from the Greek word *gnosis*, meaning 'knowledge.' The term refers to a religious movement which began to flourish toward the end of, or soon after, the apostolic era. The movement taught that one is saved, not because of any atoning work of a Savior, but through a secret knowledge. Some tenets of Gnosticism include:

- The true God is a pure, immaterial fullness of light, removed from the creation.
- The material world is evil and is not a subject of ultimate redemption in the end.
- The one who suffered on the cross was not Jesus but a physical substitute.

In order to evaluate the claims of the novel, it is necessary to see the picture of Jesus that these documents actually portray. Remember that in the novel, Teabing said "And, of course, the Coptic Scrolls in 1945 at Nag Hammadi ... in addition to telling the true Grail story ... speak of Christ's ministry in very human terms."<sup>31</sup> But do they? Most of the documents are very strange and sometimes border on the incoherent (e.g., "Jesus said 'Blessed is he who came into being before he came into being.'"<sup>32</sup> Thus, it is difficult to glean a consistent picture of anything, though most of the teachings fall within the Gnostic world view. Several points, however, do come through regarding the nature of Jesus. First, in the Gnostic documents, there is a distinction

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<sup>30</sup> Other Coptic Gnostic documents have been found apart from the Nag Hammadi documents and are sometimes grouped together with them in translations (e.g., *The Gospel of Mary*; discovered in Cairo in 1896.) This document is also referenced in the novel.

<sup>31</sup> *The Da Vinci Code*, p. 234.

<sup>32</sup> *The Gospel of Thomas*, 19.

between the Living Jesus and the fleshly Jesus, the latter being the one who was crucified.<sup>33</sup> Second, the true identity of the Gnostic Jesus seems to reside in his transcendence apart from his incarnation.<sup>34</sup> In other words, the *real* Jesus was an immaterial essence, not a physical human being. This comes through to such an extent that it shows how absurd Teabing's claim actually is. Third, the Gnostic Jesus is an exalted being and an associate of the unknowable creator.<sup>35</sup> Fourth, the Gnostic Jesus seemingly had little regard for women.<sup>36</sup> This point is significant since the tenor of both the novel and Dan Brown's world view is that Christianity is largely responsible for the repression of women and that women were much more liberated within the culture and world view depicted by the Gnostic documents. Fifth, the Gnostic Jesus seemingly had little regard for human sexuality.<sup>37</sup> This is especially interesting in light of the novel's emphasis on the sacred feminine and the role of human sexuality in religious experience. Sixth, the Gnostic Jesus seemingly had little regard for decency.<sup>38</sup>

In stark contrast to the bizarre picture of Jesus portrayed in the Gnostic Gospels, the New Testament gives a picture of a very human Jesus.<sup>39</sup> We find that Jesus had a human ancestry

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<sup>33</sup> *Apocalypse of Peter* 81:4-21; *Second Treatise of the Great Seth* 56:6-19.

<sup>34</sup> *The Letter of Peter to Philip*, 136:16-23.

<sup>35</sup> *The Second Treatise of the Great Seth*, 69:22-26, 70:4-7.

<sup>36</sup> *The Gospel of Thomas*, 114.

<sup>37</sup> *The Book of Thomas the Contender*, 144.9; *The Testimony of Truth*, 30:19-31:6.

<sup>38</sup> *The Gospel of Thomas*, 37. In the passage, Jesus talks about disrobing and not being ashamed. In all fairness, the reference here likely has to do with shedding one's physical body. But even this is in contrast to Teabing's characterization since this would show that the Gnostic Jesus had little regard for the physical body.

<sup>39</sup> The following points on the humanity of Jesus were adapted from Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), s.v., "Docetism," pp. 202-203.

(Matt. 1:20-25), a human birth (Luke 2:4-7), human flesh and blood (John 19:34), and a human childhood (Luke 2:21-22; 41-49; 52). In addition, Jesus experienced human hunger (Luke 4:2), human thirst (John 4:6-7), human fatigue (John 4:6), human sorrow (John 11:35), human temptation (Heb. 4:15), human pain (Matt. 26:38; 27:34, 46), and human death (Matt. 16:21).<sup>40</sup>

Further, the New Testament also gives a picture of a divine Jesus. Jesus claimed to have had glory with the Father (John 17:5 (cf. Isaiah 42:8; 48:11) and to be the I AM (John 8:55-59 (cf. Exodus 3:14)). He spoke with absolute authority (Matthew 7:24-29). He claimed that God was His Father (John 5:17-18). He claimed to be one with the Father (John 10:30-33). He claimed to come forth from God (John 8:42-47). He claimed to be the only access to the Father (John 14:6). He claimed to be able to forgive sins (Matthew 9:2-7). He claimed to deserve absolute allegiance (Luke 14:26). He claimed to be the judge of all mankind, and to dishonor Him is to dishonor the Father (John 5:21-23). Last, Jesus accepted worship (John 20:28; Matthew 28:9; Luke 24:52).

We see from these, and many other references that could be marshaled, that it is the New Testament that acknowledges the reality of the humanity of Jesus, not the Gnostic Gospels. Further these same early descriptions, and the very words of Jesus Himself, show that Jesus was also God in the flesh. If Teabing were really interested in advancing a human Jesus, he could have done no better than the Jesus of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. But by placing his faith in the Nag Hammadi documents, he has undermined some of the very points about Jesus' humanity that he sought to advance. Since Teabing was interested in denying a divine Jesus, it is

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<sup>40</sup> All of these points were recognized by Jesus' contemporary critics as claims to deity. The reason some critics today say that Jesus never claimed to be divine is because they are expecting Jesus to claim deity the way they themselves would claim deity in the western culture of the twenty-first century. But that is not at all how a first-century Jew would claim deity.

understandable that he would want to eliminate the earliest and most reliable historical evidence, since that is exactly the picture of Jesus that the New Testament portrays. But, once again, he ends up being scandalized by the Nag Hammadi documents since the picture of Jesus there ends up being one of a strange metaphysical being.

### ***The Alleged Marriage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene***

The novel claims: This story also shows that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and fathered children.

Response: Jesus was not married. The novel advances several arguments to show that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene. The novel's main character, Harvard Professor of Religious Symbology Robert Langdon, argues that it would have been unseemly for a first-century Jewish man to be unmarried. Further, it is sometimes argued that even if certain men were unmarried, it would have been unheard of for a Jewish Rabbi to be unmarried.

In response, it needs to be pointed out that celibacy was not unheard of in the first century Judaism. We see from the writings of the Jewish historian, Josephus, that the sect of the Essenes celebrated celibacy.<sup>41</sup> Further, Jesus was not, technically speaking, a Rabbi. Though He was referred to as such on occasion by His disciples, this was more of a generic term for 'teacher' rather than an indication that Jesus was officially installed as a Jewish Rabbi. Thus, any argument that Jesus must have been married that is based on the assumption that He was a Rabbi is faulty.

Besides the supposed social demands that Langdon thinks require one to conclude that Jesus was married, Teabing advances an argument from the Gnostic *Gospel of Philip*.

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<sup>41</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, Book XVIII, 1, §5; *The Wars of the Jews*, II, 8, §2.

Flipping toward the middle of the book, Teabing pointed to a passage. "The Gospel of Philip is always as good place to start." Sophie read the passage. *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 expressed disapproval. They said to him, "Why do you love her more than all us?"* The words surprised Sophie, and yet they hardly seemed conclusive. "It says nothing of marriage." "*Au contraire.*" Teabing smiled, pointing to the first line. "As any Aramaic scholar will tell you, the word *companion*, in those days, literally meant *spouse*."<sup>42</sup>

There are several observations to make regarding Teabing's argument. First, regarding the quote, the text does not say that Jesus kissed her on the mouth. Teabing's translation is actually an embellishment. It actually reads: "*And the companion of the [...] Mary Magdalene. [...] loved] her more than [all] the disciples [and used to] kiss her [often] on her [...] The rest of [the disciples ...] They said to him 'Why do you love her more than all of us?'"*<sup>43</sup> While one may safely conclude that it is saying that Mary Magdalene was the companion of Jesus,<sup>44</sup> it is not at all certain that Jesus would kiss her on the mouth.

Second, if kissing hints that they were married, what are we to make of Judas kissing Jesus in Matt. 26:49? The fact is that culturally, kissing was a common gesture of hospitality and affection among friends. (Rom. 16:16) Even in *The Gospel of Philip*, kissing seems to have a more spiritual connotation.<sup>45</sup>

Third, Teabing says "as any Aramaic scholar will tell you" but *The Gospel of Philip* as we have it today is a Coptic translation of a Greek document. Thus, there is no Aramaic word to

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<sup>42</sup> *The Da Vinci Code*, p. 246, emphasis in original.

<sup>43</sup> *The Gospel of Philip*, 63:34-64:2. The brackets indicate holes in the manuscript. Words within the brackets are supplied by the translator based on several considerations including context and the constraint upon the suggested word length based on the size of the hole.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. 59:9.

<sup>45</sup> See 58:26-59:8.

translate. Even if one argued that it was likely that Jesus spoke Aramaic, there is no way to know what the Aramaic word was that Jesus used.<sup>46</sup>

Fourth, in this passage, the disciples seem to be offended that Jesus would kiss Mary Magdalene. But if Jesus and Mary were married (as surely the disciples would know) why would they be offended at a man kissing his own wife?

Fifth, the disciples ask "Why do you love her more than all of us?" But if Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married, then this seems to be a ridiculous question to ask a man regarding his wife. They would in effect be asking, "Why do you love your wife more than us—a group of men?" These last two points show that the disciples were offended that Jesus seemed to show favoritism to Mary Magdalene. Clearly, even in *The Gospel of Philip*, in the disciples' minds there was no good reason for Him to do so, and, thus, in their minds there was no special relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene.

Another reason to conclude that Jesus was not married is that it is conspicuous that Paul in, 1 Cor. 9:4-5, when defending the right of the apostles to be accompanied by their believing wives, refers to the other apostles and even the Lord's brothers, but does not mention Jesus. Surely if Jesus was married, Paul would have appealed to this fact to seal his argument. The most likely reason that he did not is because Paul knew that Jesus was not married.<sup>47</sup>

A closer look at Mary Magdalene reinforces the conclusion that Jesus was not married to her. It is reasonable to think that Mary Magdalene was not married at all. Though she was part of a group of women who traveled with Jesus, Mary Magdalene is never singled out as being

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<sup>46</sup> As mentioned in note 17, the movie eliminates the reference to Aramaic.

<sup>47</sup> Bock, *Breaking*, pp. 42-44.

anything special, as surely she would have if she were the wife of Jesus. She is not tied to any male in Scripture, unlike other women (e.g., Mary, the mother of Jesus or Mary, the wife of Clopas). Rather, this Mary is designated by her geography (of Magdala). Further, while she was present at the cross, Jesus shows no special concern for her. Rather, He addresses His mother Mary and the disciple John. Thus, then it seems certain that Jesus was not only not married to Mary Magdalene; neither she nor Jesus were married at all.

### ***Conclusion***

Each of the four important claims of the novel has been refuted. The doctrine of the deity of Christ was not the result of the Council of Nicaea. The Bible as we know it (particularly the four Gospels) was not collated by Constantine. The story of Jesus is not more accurately contained in the Gnostic documents. Last, Jesus was not married. What we find with the historical evidence is that the divinity of Jesus was affirmed long before Constantine and the Council of Nicaea. The four Gospels of the New Testament were attested to long before Constantine and Nicaea. A comparison of the Jesus of the New Testament with the Jesus of the Gnostic Gospels reveals that the Gnostic Jesus is a bizarre metaphysical being with some strange views, whereas the Jesus of the New Testament is both human and divine. Last, Jesus was not married to Mary Magdalene.