

What about *The Da Vinci Code*?

(The following is a summary of an address given at Loughbrickland Reformed Presbyterian Church by David Silversides on 27th November, 2005)

The Da Vinci Code, a novel by thriller-writer Dan Brown, is big business. Despite its length, millions have bought and read the book. The film, with Tom Hanks as the lead, will be seen by millions more, especially as there are far more film-watchers than book-readers in our present generation. We need some awareness of what it represents, so that we can answer its claims and bear witness to the truth when it comes up in conversation. The aim of this pamphlet is to give you the bare bones of the book (to save you feeling any need to read it) and the relevant facts to answer it. Christians, even those with little time to spare, need a basic knowledge of the fallacies of the book for when it comes up for discussion among friends and work colleagues.

The Plot

It is not necessary to have a detailed knowledge of the book in order to address the supposed secret around which the plot develops, so we will keep this to the minimum. The two main characters in the book are Robert Langdon, a middle-aged Harvard Symbolology Professor, who is in Paris to give a lecture, and Sophie Neveu from the Police Cryptology Department in Paris. It begins with the murder of the old curator at the Louvre in Paris, Jacques Sauniere, who turns out to be Sophie's grandfather. Before he dies, he writes a note to Sophie telling her to find Robert Langdon.

It transpires that Sauniere was one of four people (the other three having been murdered already) who were guarding an ancient secret. These four were supposed to be members of the Priory of Sion, a centuries' old secret society with the Knights Templar as its military wing, founded by the French King, Godefroy de Bouillon, in whose family the secret was to be kept. The secret is presently preserved on a scroll in a cylinder in a Swiss bank vault. To open the cylinder, a code is needed since the scroll will be destroyed if the cylinder is broken open. Much of the book revolves around preserving this secret from the hands of the enemy in the form of Opus Dei (meaning 'work of God'), a real and somewhat secretive Roman Catholic organisation represented by Bishop Aringarosa and Silas, an albino gunman.

All the intricate web of intrigue and hot pursuits is set around gaining access to this secret, though it is claimed that its contents are now known to many scholars and are also concealed in the paintings of Leonardo da Vinci. Nevertheless, in order to prove its truth and expose the cover-up, it is necessary to open this cylinder.

The Secret

The secret, around which Brown wraps his clever novel, is blasphemous and would be so even if clearly intended to be completely fictional. It is as follows: the church has been engaged in a cover up for two thousand years, having invented the idea that Jesus Christ was the Son of God. The real Jesus was a royal descendent of King

David who married Mary Magdalene, who was also of royal descent from King Saul. A child was born of royal blood and Sophie is of this royal bloodline. The reason this has all been concealed for so long is that the authentic Jesus supported the idea of the sacred feminine that the woman-hating church wished to stamp out, in order to maintain male domination. The Holy Grail was in fact code for the idea of female deity that had been outlawed by the church.

It is further put forward that the disciples were jealous of Mary Magdalene and that she fled with the child to France. Among her descendents is the Merovingian dynasty of French kings, including King Godefroy de Bouillon.

The Roman Emperor Constantine supported the Church and its male-dominant version, along with the idea of a Divine Christ, as set forth in the biblical gospels. The biblical gospels themselves were a later production and the genuine gospel accounts are in what are known as the Gnostic gospels which were suppressed by Constantine. (The Gnostics were an heretical sect, the seeds of which seem to have been present in the apostolic age, but which developed more fully later. The epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Colossians is regarded by many as opposing an early form of the errors of this movement. The term 'Gnostic' is derived from 'gnosis' [knowledge], because of the idea of secret inner knowledge among the initiated).

There are various documents known as 'Gnostic gospels' and the argument is that they were earlier than the biblical ones, that they represent the true account of Christ and that the biblical gospels were an anti-feminine masculine-dominant invention. As you can see, this secret at the core of the novel is deeply offensive to Christians.

The Illusion of Fact

The reason we have to give more attention to this blasphemous novel than to others is due to the air of factuality at its core. Dan Brown does not say that all of it is fiction. The very first page in the book is headed 'Fact' and under this are details of the Priory of Sion, including the claim that Sir Isaac Newton, Botticelli, Victor Hugo and Leonardo da Vinci were members. We then read, 'all descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents and secret rituals are accurate.'

In an interview on his own official website, Dan Brown was asked, 'How much of this novel is true?' He answered:

'The Da Vinci Code is a novel, and therefore a work of fiction. While the book's characters and their actions are obviously not real, the artwork, architecture, documents and secret rituals depicted in this novel all exist, for example, Leonardo da Vinci's paintings, the Gnostic gospels, Hieros Gamus etc. These real elements are interpreted and debated by fictional characters. While it is my belief that some of the theories discussed by these characters may have merit, each individual reader must explore these characters' viewpoints and come to his or her own interpretations. My hope in writing this novel was that the story would serve as a catalyst and a springboard for people to discuss the important topics of faith, religion and history.'

In other words, he is doing us all a service by stimulating discussion. He also happens to be making a lot of money.

Then comes the question, 'But doesn't the novel's 'Fact' page claim that every single word in the novel is historical fact?' This is his answer:

'If you read the 'Fact' page, you will see it clearly says that the documents, rituals, organisations, artwork and architecture in the novel all exist. The 'Fact' page makes no statement whatsoever about any of the ancient theories discussed by fictional characters. Interpreting those ideas is left to the reader.'

Next, Brown is asked, 'Is this book anti-Christian?'

'No, this book is not anti anything. It's a novel. I wrote this story in an effort to explore certain aspects of Christian history that interest me. The vast majority of devout Christians understand this fact and consider The Da Vinci Code an entertaining story that promotes spiritual discussion and debate. Even so, a small but vocal group of individuals has proclaimed the story dangerous, heretical and anti-Christian. While I regret having offended those individuals, I should mention that priests, nuns and clergy contact me all the time to thank me for writing the novel. Many church officials are celebrating The Da Vinci Code because it has sparked renewed interest in important topics of faith and Christian history. It is important to remember that a reader does not have to agree with every word in the novel to use the book as a positive catalyst for introspection and exploration of our faith.'
(http://www.danbrown.com/novels/davinci_code/faqs.html)

We must notice:

Firstly, Dan Brown avoids scholarly accountability. It is deceitful to write a novel, claim a factual base for the antichristian core theory involved, and then, if challenged, fall back on the fact that it is only a novel after all.

Secondly, vastly more people will be directly affected by a novel purporting to have an element of fact, than would be by any heretical academic thesis. If a scholar maintained the theory found in the book, the general population would take little notice and the academic world would justly ridicule it as nonsense.

Thirdly, despite his claim of sweet reasonableness, Brown is not remotely objective. Whether he is governed by a conscious desire to attack Christianity, or simply to sell books, or both, we cannot tell. Certainly, the powers of darkness use it to discredit the gospel. According to a newspaper report (Daily Telegraph 17th May 2006), a recent survey carried out by Opinion Research Business showed that,

"Two thirds of Britons who have read Dan Brown's thriller believe that Jesus fathered a child with Mary Magdalene, a claim rejected as baseless by historians and Bible scholars".

What is clear is that Brown makes his most unsavoury characters to be the truth-concealing defenders of the biblical gospel account. They are a woman-hating bishop and a gunman. By contrast, the hero and heroine, Langdon and Sophie, courageously seeking to unveil the truth (i.e. the anti-biblical view supposedly concealed for centuries), are presented as pleasant, attractive, intelligent and reasonable people.

Furthermore, the biblical gospels are represented as not merely teaching male headship, but as supporting the woman-hating views of the Bishop. On the other hand, the concealed version supports the liberation of women. All of this is geared to incline the modern reader, whose unregenerate heart is opposed to the biblical gospel anyway, towards giving credit to the conspiracy theory that he wants to believe rather than the true gospel. Brown has made the false gospel seem attractive by the people who defend it and by the obnoxiousness of those who oppose it, together with its contemporary feminist agenda as opposed to the woman-hating view that he attaches to the authentic account. In other words, it is calculated to present this false version as more than plausible and to give it credit in the eyes of unregenerate feminist thinking.

Falsehoods

The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi Documents. Brown has a character called Sir Leigh Teabing saying the following:

‘Fortunately for historians some of the gospels that Constantine attempted to eradicate managed to survive. The Dead Sea Scrolls were found in the 1950s hidden in a cave near Qumran in the Judean Desert and of course the Coptic Scrolls in 1945 at Nag Hammadi’ (p.317 paperback edition).

In fact, the Dead Sea Scrolls do not purport to be Christian at all, nor are they about our Lord Jesus Christ, nor do they claim to be. They are about a Jewish community in the desert.

The Nag Hammadi Scrolls are dated no earlier than late second century and the so-called 'Gospel of Philip' belongs to the second half of the third century AD. Not even liberal scholars date the biblical gospels anywhere near as late. It is further claimed that there are 80 Gnostic gospels (p.313). In fact there are only a maximum of 26, even if each fragment is treated as from a different document.

The Roman Emperor Constantine. Constantine is alleged to have re-invented the gospel account, by suppressing the Gnostic gospels and pushing forward the four biblical gospels. The Gnostic gospels were not suppressed at all, they were simply never recognised, but treated as false. It was well known that they came from heretics. The biblical gospels, on the other hand, were written, circulated and universally recognised as early as 130 AD, long before Constantine was born in 274 AD. Irenaeus reports the four gospels were circulated as Scripture in the first half of the second century. The Muratorian Canon, dated in the late second century, gives a list of Scripture books and it includes the four gospels; Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Biblical and Gnostic Views of Women. Brown represents the biblical gospels as giving a low view of women and the Gnostic gospels as doing the opposite. The biblical gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, certainly teach male leadership. The twelve were all men and the women are in the background. These women do not

preach and this is in line with the teaching of the rest of the Bible. Much as feminists hate this, the truth is that the Bible teaches that the leadership of the church (preaching, teaching and governing) is to be in the hands of suitably qualified men.

Within that framework of male leadership, however, the biblical gospels contain a high view of women.

‘Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.’ (Matthew 15:28).

Here is Christ commending a woman’s faith and healing her daughter. He spoke well of and, where necessary, defended women. Again, we read:

‘Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat. But when the disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor. When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always. For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.’ (Matthew 26:6-13).

The Lord Jesus Christ defended this woman in her devotion to him over against the men who wrongly opposed her.

The Lord Jesus evangelised the woman of Samaria and spent time with her and explained the truth to her as he brought her to the knowledge of himself. He showed compassion on the woman taken in adultery in John 8. He was followed by women.

‘And all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things’ (Luke 23:49).

He was loved of women and loved them.

‘Therefore his [Lazarus’] sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick...Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus...Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat still in the house...And when she had so said, she went her way, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is come, and he calleth for thee. As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly, and came unto him...When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled.’ (John 11:3, 5, 20, 28-29 & 33).

The Lord Jesus Christ loved these genuine believing women and he had compassion for them in their sorrow. Women, like men, were in awe of the Lord Jesus because of the glory of his Person, but they had no fear of him as a man and did not feel threatened by him.

Women were first at the empty tomb:

'In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it...And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.' Matthew 28:1-2 & 5).

The risen Lord Jesus first spoke to women:

'And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.' (Matthew 28:9-10).

Again:

'Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.' (John 20:15).

So the Lord Jesus taught male headship, but did not in the slightest degree come near teaching a degrading view of women. The claim in *The Da Vinci Code* is utter falsehood.

On the other hand, the so-called 'Gospel of Thomas', one of these apocryphal Gnostic gospels, has the following fiction,

'Simon Peter said to them, 'Let Mary depart from our midst, because women are not worthy of the life.' Jesus said, 'See I will so draw her as a man, in order that she may become a living spirit like you men. For every woman who becomes a man will enter into the kingdom of heaven.' (Saying 114).

The biblical gospels teach male leadership, but with a high view of women. Misogyny is reserved for the false Gnostic gospels. Dan Brown has it the wrong way round.

The Alleged Marriage of Jesus. Brown maintains that the Gnostic gospels teach that Christ married Mary Magdalene. We have seen that these false gospel accounts were written long after the life of Christ on earth and were always regarded as spurious by the church. False as they are, however, they do not even teach what Brown says they do. To support his idea, Brown uses references from the 'Gospel of Philip', in which there are two references to the Lord Jesus allegedly kissing Mary Magdalene. We do not believe this actually happened, since these documents were fraudulent, but even liberal scholars have interpreted this as simply intended to be expression of fellowship, not of sexual desire that the Gnostics, who authored these books, would have regarded as essentially defiling. Indeed, they were not even very favourable to marriage. Nevertheless, from these references, Brown develops the idea of Christ marrying Mary Magdalene.

The claim is also backed up by the idea that the 'Gospel of Philip' refers to Mary as Jesus' companion. So Brown on page 331 of the paperback edition has Teabing saying this,

'As any Aramaic scholar will tell you, the word 'companion' in those days literally means spouse.'

The facts are as follows: first of all, any Aramaic scholar will tell you no such thing. Stephen Clarke in his book, *the Da Vinci Code on Trial* (p.47, see note at the end), quotes Professor Craig Bloomberg who says:

'No Aramaic or Hebrew words for 'companion' normally mean spouse.'

Secondly, the 'Gospel of Philip' was not written in Aramaic, but in Coptic. Thirdly, though many scholars think that the 'Gospel of Philip' extant is a translation, they believe it was originally written, not in Aramaic, but in Greek. Brown is either ignorant or dishonest.

The Priory of Sion. The Knights Templar did exist but the Priory of Sion, supposedly founded in 1099, was a hoax invented in 1956 by a Frenchman called Pierre Plantard. In 1967 one of his co-conspirators, a journalist called Gerard de Sede, reported the story. Later, de Sede wrote a book admitting that it was a fraud and giving the whole account of how they invented the story. Brown has the 'Priory of Sion' on his 'Fact' page.

Conclusion

If Dan Brown had written such a book about Islam, he would quickly have had a fatwa issued against him, as did Salman Rushdie. He chose Christianity as a soft target. It is true that it attacks not only biblical Christianity, but the Vatican as well. The latter institution is quite capable of a response that Dan Brown may well fear. The Papacy, however, claims to be Christian and, in the present climate of opinion, must appear to behave in a benign manner in the eyes of the world.

The book has appeal. A clever plot, a love story and help in ignoring the message of God's Word all wrapped into one. The sophisticated air of knowledge will be attractive to multitudes. The fact that no scholar worth two-pence would give the theory house-room will not alter general gullibility or sales. Dan Brown is set to become an extremely wealthy man.

But what should we do?

Don't buy the book or go to see the film. There is absolutely no good reason to do so. Beware of itching ears 'For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears.' (2 Timothy 4:3). Don't be like the Athenians who 'spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing' (Acts 17:21). Do not feel any need to dabble in something that is obviously false and dishonouring to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Do get a grip on the main facts to answer this blatant nonsense. As you have opportunity, uphold the truth of the Christ of the Scriptures, the Christ who is no invention of Constantine or the Pope, but who is the Son of the living God of whom the Old Testament prophets foretold, whose life and redeeming work is recorded in the four biblical gospels and expounded in the New Testament epistles. The Christ of Dan Brown and the Gnostics does not exist and could save nobody if he did. Our Lord Jesus of the Scriptures is the only Saviour of sinners. *"Unto you therefore which believe he is precious"* (1 Peter 2:7).

For further Reading:

The Da Vinci Code on Trial by Stephen Clark, (Bryntirion Press)

The Gospel Code by Ben Witherington III, (Inter-Varsity Press, USA)