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Abundant Life

"I have come that they may have life . . . abundantly"

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The Movie Designed to Destroy Your Faith

By Mark Roberts, editor • robertsmark@sbcglobal.net

The Da Vinci Code (TDVC) is the movie based on Dan Brown's best-selling novel of the same name. First published in March 2003, it rocketed to the top of best-seller lists everywhere. What exactly is the book and movie all about? *TDVC* begins with a Harvard professor of religious symbols, Robert Langdon (in the movie Tom Hanks), being awakened in the middle of the night in Paris to help police with a murder at the famous museum, the Louvre. Upon arriving at the crime scene, Langdon finds that the victim, the Louvre's curator, has left a series of coded messages about an important secret. He also finds that he is the chief suspect in the murder. Joined by the curator's grand-daughter, Sophie Neveu, who is also a cryptologist for the French police, they flee the museum and begin solving the clues to find out who and what is behind the murder.

TDVC then becomes a chase-thriller, as the authorities try to apprehend Langdon and Neveu. While on the run the pair meets up with an expert on the Holy Grail, Sir Leigh Teabing. Teabing tells them what the readers have been led to expect all along: the clues lead to the famous Holy Grail. What may not be expected is the revelation that the Grail is not the literal cup that Jesus used for the Last Supper but is instead several huge chests of documents that prove that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene! Not only was Jesus married but He also had a child with Mary Magdalene and intended to set up a ruling dynasty with Mary to be the first head of the church. Why doesn't anyone know about this? Teabing tells Langdon and Neveu (and the audi-

ence) that the Catholic church has ruthlessly suppressed this information in its effort to oppress women and hold power. Teabing goes on to denounce the Bible as being the product of human compiling and announces how the Catholic church put it together. Emperor Constantine and the Catholic church even colluded to have Jesus *voted in* as deity. Thus, the New Testament is all a fabrication, and its view of Jesus is the greatest secret in human history. If the "Grail" is revealed it will destroy the Catholic Church and Christianity.

Ultimately, of course, Langdon and Neveu solve the clues and puzzles to figure out her grandfather's involvement in the secret society that protects the Grail. The bad guys get caught, the Catholic Church is further revealed as a completely hypocritical organization, and Langdon realizes where the curator hid the Holy Grail and

why it should remain hidden.

Some may dismiss *TDVC* as just a work of fiction (though on its very first page it claims to be presenting facts). However, Brown has launched a three-fold salvo at Christianity that when understood is seen for the pernicious and dangerous evil it is. First, Brown attacks the canonization of Scripture. This is something many Christians may not even properly understand. Second, *TDVC* lumps all Christians in with the Catholic church, thus forcing Christians to defend Catholicism or agree with *TDVC*! Thirdly, Brown pounds away at the theme that women are not treated fairly in Christianity. This is something more than just a few are ready to agree with.



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Blatant Errors in TDVC



By Rusty Miller and Mark Roberts

This page contains a list of some of the more blatant historical mistakes to be found in *The Da Vinci Code*. We will list the claim from the book (page numbers refer to the hardback version) in **bold**, followed by the truth. The point should be clear. If Brown cannot be trusted with simple historical facts, why should we trust him on important biblical matters?

Brown says the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in the 1950's (234). They were found in 1947. **He says they are among the earliest Christian records (234).** They don't mention Christianity.

The Aramaic term translated "companion" in the Gospel of Philip actually means lover or spouse (246). The Gospel of Philip was written in Coptic (Egyptian), and borrows the word translated "companion" from Greek. It contains no Aramaic, and the Greek word means "companion" and is commonly used of friends and associates.

The Gnostic gospels portray Jesus as a mere human, not divine (234). The opposite is true. Gnostic gospels were only concerned with Jesus' divine nature.

Early Christians honored the Jewish Sabbath. Constantine changed it to Sunday (232-233). The New Testament (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2), early Christian writers (Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus) and even pagans (the historian Pliny the Younger) all speak of Christians meeting on Sunday.

The name *Mona Lisa* is an anagram of *Amon L'isa*, signifying a reference to goddess worship (121). The painting was not even called *Mona Lisa* during the lifetime of Leonardo.

A key character is a monk in the Catholic order Opus Dei (278). Opus Dei has no monks.

Brown reports there are 666 panes in the glass pyramid at the Louvre (21). The architect of the pyramid (I.M. Pei) says there are 698.

The Olympics were held on an 8 year cycle to honor Venus (36). The Olympics were held on a 4-year cycle to honor Zeus.

Tarot cards were devised to pass along ideas banned by the Catholic church (92). The origins of tarot cards is unknown.

Leonardo's painting, *The Madonna of the Rocks* is a 5' tall canvas that a character threatens to destroy by pushing through the canvas

(133). In truth, *The Madonna of the Rocks* is 6' 6" and, like most of Da Vinci's paintings, is painted on a solid piece of wood, making it far too heavy for one person to take off the wall. It would also be impossible to destroy by tearing or pushing a knee through it.

The Church of Saint Sulpice in Paris is built over the ruins of an ancient temple to the Egyptian goddess, Isis. Not surprisingly, since Paris is a long way from Egypt, this is blatantly untrue.

The term *cryptex* refers to a puzzle that protects information written on the scroll contained inside. Another name for scroll is codex (199). A codex is distinctively different from a scroll. A codex is a book with pages.

Any gospels that described earthly aspects of Jesus' life had to be omitted from the Bible (244). The Gospels contain much of Jesus' earthly life and accent his humanity, including Him weeping (John 11:35) and that He had parents (Luke 2:51).

The Merovingians founded Paris (257). Actually, the city was settled by Gauls by the 3rd Century BC. The Merovingians did not rule in France until the 6th century AD, by which time Paris was at least 800 years old.

Early Jews believed the Holy of Holies housed not only God but His female equal, Shekinah (309). This is absolutely false and without any merit or supporting evidence of any kind. Shekinah means "glory" and refers to the glory of God that filled the Temple. There are no female deities in Jewish thought.

Brown reports that a SmartCar gets 100 kilometers per liter (138). In truth, the range is 17-24 kilometers per liter.

The Priory of Sion is a real organization, with Grand Masters that include Leonardo Da Vinci, Isaac Newton, Victor Hugo and Claude Debussy. Its presence was discovered among *Les Dossiers Secret* in the Bibliotheque Nationale de France (page 1). The Priory of Sion is neither ancient or real. Its founders, in the 1950's, admitted it was a fraud in court, under oath. None of the famous "Grand Masters" ever served as such because the Priory doesn't exist.

There are repeated anachronistic reference to the Vatican as the center of power in the early Catholic Church, including reference to "the Vatican" suppressing Gnostic writings in the 4th century. Until the early Renaissance, the papal palace was in many different locations, including France. It was not until the 15th century that the Vatican Hill began to exercise power. In the 4th century, the Vatican was little more than a church and cemetery by the side of the road. †

Quick Answers to the TDVC



By Mark Roberts, editor • robertsmark@sbcglobal.net

Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* (TDVC) introduces complex issues and raises serious questions about Christianity. It takes some time to work through it all, but here is a **quick summary** of what you need to know and why you shouldn't believe TDVC.

What is it about? TDVC is a suspense-thriller novel that has fictional characters pursuing the famed Holy Grail. Various religious symbols and coded messages aid their quest. The turning point of the story is when they discover that the Grail is not the cup Jesus used in the Last Supper, but is instead long-suppressed truths about Jesus and the New Testament. Jesus, it turns out, was married and was not divine! The Catholic church, in cooperation with Emperor Constantine, had Jesus "voted in" as Deity and also voted on what to include (and leave out) in the New Testament. All of this was done as a concerted effort to suppress the worship of Mother Nature and oppress women.

Is it true? Not a bit of it! In fact, while Brown asserts on the very first page of the book "all descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents and secret rituals in this novel are accurate" the novel is riddled with embarrassing misinformation, wrong terminology and factual mistakes. This is crucial because the book and film make so much out of small details, like how names are spelled, locations of museums, and the meaning of symbols. Thus, statements by Brown such as Jesus being mentioned in the Dead Sea Scrolls (p. 245), when Jesus is *never* mentioned in the Scrolls, is astonishing. If Brown can't get facts that should have been easily researched correct, what makes anyone think he got the rest of the story right?

Is it original? Not by a long shot! TDVC's claims and storyline are old news. They have been thoroughly dealt with and discredited more than twenty years ago. In 1982 a book was published titled *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* by Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh. That book set forth the main ideas used in TDVC. Dan Brown even acknowledged his dependence upon *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* by having one of key characters' name be an anagram of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail's* authors! TDVC is so close to *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* that its

authors sued Brown in British court for plagiarism. While they did not prevail in court, they did make a point: TDVC is just not very original. *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* did attract some attention when it was published, but its claims about a married Jesus and a surviving bloodline were examined then by historians and discarded. The book's premise was found to be completely lacking in real evidence and credibility. If *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* didn't impress scholars or historians as truthful or serious in 1982, what makes anyone think the *fictional* work based on it should be taken any more seriously today?

Does the book show evidence of anti-Christian agenda? Without question! The book and movie are a virtual parade of vehemently anti-Christian, anti-Bible characters who all seem to get their moment (or moments!) to deliver a diatribe on how wrong Christians are, how foolish it is to believe Scripture, and how warped Christianity really is. Those who are worshipers of Mother Nature are presented as kind and compassionate, as well as intelligent and thoughtful (of course). Meanwhile, the "Christians" in the book are wicked hypocrites who only care about money and power. All the scholars and experts make long speeches about how the Bible is a fraud, and whenever anyone says "I didn't know that!" they condescend to explain just how stupid people of faith really are. Interestingly, TDVC relentlessly condemns the Catholic Church for supposedly suppressing the truth about Jesus' marriage. But the book's story line is about another organization, the Priory of Sion (which does not really exist), and how the Priory has hidden the documents the Catholic Church seeks. But why doesn't the Priory reveal the documents? Why aren't they condemned in TDVC for aiding the Catholics in suppressing the truth? These clear biases remove TDVC from the realm of honest investigation and put it in the camp of those who are trying to destroy faith in God's Word.

Is TDVC worth all this fuss? With 40 million copies of the book sold, and now a movie in theaters, it is hard to believe that TDVC won't have a deep affect upon society's view of the Bible. Ultimately, that is the reason why TDVC should be rejected. It contradicts the Bible, the book that has been examined for centuries and proven to be correct again and again. For those looking for an excuse to dismiss the Bible it will probably provide one. For those who are genuinely seeking the truth it does not take long to see that the only truth about TDVC is where it is found in the bookstore: in the *fiction* section. †

The Code's Dangerous Agenda



By Randy Hohf • rshohf@sandpoint.net

Why has Dan Brown's mega-bestseller, *The Da Vinci Code*, an admittedly fictional work, generated such concern among Christian leaders, apologists and authors? Several books and hundreds of articles have been written to refute a work that is nothing more than make-believe entertainment. So what is all the fuss about? Believe it or not, this work of fiction may prove to be the most serious and influential attack against the Christian faith in modern times. The unprecedented popularity of *TDVC* (over 40 million sold) and its bold claims to the historical accuracy of the details around which the fictional story is written combine to make its blatant assault on the Bible and the Christian faith especially disturbing.

If *The Da Vinci Code* had been presented as pure fiction, there would be little to be concerned about. However, the book is prefaced on its first page with the word **FACT** in bold, upper case letters, followed by the claim that, among other things, "all descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate" (presumably including its descriptions of how we got the Bible). In November of 2003, the author declared on *Good Morning America* that if he had written it as nonfiction, he would not have changed a thing.

Many have believed him. The *New York Daily News* said that his research is impeccable. *Publisher's Weekly* called it "an exhaustively researched page-turner." *USA Today* stated, "Code's popularity shows that readers are clamoring for books which combine historic fact with a contemporary story line." The *Chicago Tribune* called it "A thundering, tantalizing, extremely smart fun ride transmitting several doctorates' worth of fascinating history and learned speculation; brain candy of the highest quality." The *Library Journal* calls it "a compelling blend of history and page-turning suspense." And to top it all off, *Time* magazine recently named Dan Brown one of the world's 100 most influential people, among the likes of President Bush and the Dalai Lama (Lisa Cockre, *The Da Vinci Code Intrigue*; Outreach Magazine).

In Canada, the National Geographic Channel commissioned a survey in 2005 in anticipation of a full day of programming inspired by *The Da Vinci Code*. It found that 32% of Canadians who have read the novel believe that the theories outlined in it are true (*ibid*).

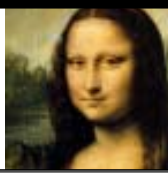
Part of what gives this novel apparent credibility is the fact that most of the attacks against the Bible come from the mouth of a royal British historian by the name of Leigh Teabing. Brown has cleverly written this fictional character to instill confidence in his wild assertions. And just what are the assertions? There are too many to list, but here are two examples:

On page 231, Professor Teabing boldly declares, "The Bible is the product of man, my dear. Not of God. The Bible did not fall magically from the clouds. Man created it as a historical record of tumultuous times, and it has evolved through countless translations, additions, and revisions. History has never had a definitive version of the book. More than eighty gospels were considered for the New Testament, and yet only a relative few were chosen for inclusion, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John among them. The Bible, as we know it today, was collated by the pagan Roman emperor Constantine the Great."

On page 234 he further says, "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. The [Dead Sea and Nag Hammadi] scrolls highlight glaring historical discrepancies and fabrications, clearly confirming that the modern Bible was compiled and edited by men who possessed a political agenda: to promote the divinity of the man Jesus Christ and use His influence to solidify their own power base." The true agenda of *The Da Vinci Code* goes beyond entertainment. Brown's intent is to rewrite history, discredit the Bible and destroy our faith in Christianity. Why? Brown's deeper purpose is to revive and popularize the ancient views of *Gnosticism*, a heretical sect that threatened the Christian faith in the first and second centuries. This in turn gets to the real motive of the book, which is to legitimize the sexual perversion that is tied to this ancient heresy.

Unfortunately, most people today are ill-equipped in ancient history. Thus, Brown's book gives non-believers a convenient excuse to reject the Bible and believers cause to question their faith. But perhaps Brown's agenda will backfire. *The Da Vinci Code's* attacks on the Bible are easily refuted by the facts. If the surprising and troubling claims of this book will bring about an honest dialogue about the historical basis of the Bible and the Christian faith, then the truth will be served. For truth has nothing to fear from open and honest investigation. †

Scholars Attack TDVC



An Interview with a Bible Critic about TDVC

[Dr. Bart Ehrman chairs the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is also an outspoken critic of the Bible. He does not believe the Bible to be the inerrant, literally inspired Word of God and writes regularly attacking the Bible. Because of that, *Abundant Life* wants to be very clear that we do not endorse Ehrman. We would disagree with much of what he teaches and believes. But it is interesting to see what a non-Bible believer says about *TDVC*. No one can claim his viewpoint is uninformed or biased by faith in Scripture! Deborah Caldwell of the website Belief.net interviewed Ehrman and we think his conclusions are very interesting. Space doesn't permit running the entire interview but here are its key points. —editor]

What did you think of “The Da Vinci Code”? I liked *The Da Vinci Code* as a work of fiction. But the thing that troubled me is that the fiction is allegedly based on historical fact. Dan Brown begins the book by laying out what he calls historical facts, and he includes the statement that all descriptions of art, architecture, sacred rituals, and documents are factual. The difficulty I had reading through “The Da Vinci Code” with that in mind was that most of the descriptions of ancient documents, in fact, are not factual—they're part of his fiction. But people reading the book aren't equipped to separate the fact from the fiction.

Can you outline the main points of departure between what we know historically and “The Da Vinci Code”? Well, there are big discrepancies and small discrepancies . . . Some of the big ones: It's not true that before Constantine, Christians understood Jesus to be human but not divine. That's absolutely false. Most people thought Jesus was divine centuries before Constantine. Second, it's not true that Constantine decided which books to include in the New Testament; he had nothing to do with it. And the Council of Nicea didn't have anything to do with which books to include in the New Testament.

In the novel, what does the character Teabing say that is wrong about this historical record? Teabing says that the council was called because Constantine wanted to declare Jesus divine, and that's what the council was about, deciding whether Jesus is divine or not. And that he used the council as a way of deciding which books would be included in the New Testament, and they just included the books that called Jesus divine and excluded all the others. That's wrong on every point. The books of the New Testament, in fact, don't go out of their way to call Jesus divine; and

the books that were excluded from the New Testament do call Jesus divine. So it's wrong all around.

What's another big historical inaccuracy in the novel? There are several gigantic points that have to do with Jesus' marriage to Mary Magdalene. Maybe the first thing to say is that it's absolutely false that as [the character] Robert Langdon says, it would have been highly unusual for Jesus not to be married because Jewish men were always married. That's false.

What do you make of the Gospel of Mary? Well, the Gospel of Mary is misportrayed in “The Da Vinci Code.” What Dan Brown has his character say is that Jesus entrusted the church to Mary, based on the Gospel of Mary. But in fact, the Gospel of Mary doesn't say that at all. The Gospel of Mary is about Jesus appearing to Mary after the resurrection and giving her a revelation, and there's a debate among the disciples about whether Jesus would actually reveal something this important to a woman.

What do you think of the debate about how important the Gnostic gospels are? I think that the Gospel of Thomas was written about 20 years after John; my opinion on this is the majority opinion; almost everybody who studies Thomas thinks of it as later than John with a few notable exceptions, including Elaine Pagels. She's the main one, but most people think Thomas was written in the early second century. And Mary was written some time after that. So I think these gospels are highly important for understanding how people were portraying Jesus, but they're not as useful for establishing what Jesus was really like, as the New Testament Gospels are.

So in a nutshell, what's the fallacy that “The Da Vinci Code” puts forth as it relates to these gospels? There are several fallacies—but in a nutshell, the fallacy is thinking that these gospels give a more historically accurate view of Jesus than the New Testament gospels. I'm saying this not out of any religious conviction, but strictly on historical grounds—that statement is not true.

What can we say, then, about the central theme of the book, which is the Holy Grail, the meaning of life, is the yin-yang of men and women. How does that actually relate to Christianity? Does it at all? That's an accurate description of some early Christian groups, including some groups of Gnostics. And it's a valuable point of view that people should consider when they're thinking theologically—but the difficulty I have with it is that it's not the view of Jesus or the earliest Christians. It may be a true view—you know, it may be right—but it simply isn't what Jesus himself thought or what his earliest followers thought. I think what Dan Brown has done is taken the zeitgeist, the spirit of the age, and he's fictionalized it by providing it with a fictional-historical foundation. †

Read the complete interview at http://www.beliefnet.com/story/167/story_16783_1.html

Who are the Gnostics?



By Ethan Longhenry • evangelist@norwalkchurch.org

In recent years a strong interest has arisen in “alternative” religions, and Gnosticism has received interest as an “alternative” to “orthodox Christianity”. The recent success of Dan Brown’s novel *The Da Vinci Code* has popularized this trend. The book speaks of “over eighty gospels” that were not chosen to be a part of the Bible (Brown, p. 231). It then makes other claims regarding the contents of these gospels, to lead the reader to believe that these texts lend credence to the idea that Jesus did not really die but married Mary Magdalene, had children, and maintained a secret bloodline. It finishes by charging that knowledge has been repressed by Catholic church. *The Da Vinci Code* makes for good fiction—unfortunately, its author tries to pass off its claims as reality. Furthermore, Mr. Brown takes his cue from current trends in modern scholasticism and from a previous book entitled *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, which makes many of these same claims as “fact”. Since there are so many who talk about this book and want to discuss its claims, let us spend some time looking at these “secret” Gospels and the people who wrote them.

The “secret” Gospels of which *The Da Vinci Code* speaks are books that were popular among the Gnostics. While we have known of their existence from the writings of their opponents, it was not until a discovery in Egypt in 1945 that we could read the texts themselves. It should be made clear that there were not “eighty gospels”; there were, at most, six “gospels” per se among these texts. The most often cited of these include the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Gospel of Philip*. To understand more about the nature of these “gospels”, we must first learn about their authors and readers—the Gnostics.

The term “Gnostic” comes from the Greek word *gnosis*, which means “knowledge”. The term was coined in the eighteenth century to refer to the diverse groups of people who did not hold to “orthodox” Christianity but put great emphasis on having secret “knowledge” of spiritual things. While the various Gnostic groups often disagreed amongst themselves, we can find a few common traits to these Gnostic groups.

The Gnostics believed that they had received secret knowledge that common, ordinary people

did not understand. Much of Gnostic belief represents a blend of Christian elements and Hellenistic philosophy popular in the day. The Gnostics all considered the God of the Old Testament to be an inferior, ignorant God, the “Demiurge”, who made an evil creation. While Gnostics internally disputed as to whether the body’s desires should be met or not, they all agreed that the body, as with all physical matter, was inherently evil, as its creator was evil. Those Gnostics who believed in Christ believed that He, the *Logos*, was one of the superior and more spiritual gods than the ignorant Demiurge. Gnostics did not accept the idea that Christ came to the earth in the flesh—to them, He was as a phantasm. They denied the physical death, believing that Simon or a “physical Jesus,” not the spiritual Christ, died on the cross.

Now that we have a better understanding of the Gnostics, we can return to the premise of *The Da Vinci Code*. It is important for us to remember that while we may live in a society that would rather pick and choose what they like out of competing religious theories, this was not the case in the ancient world. Christians and Gnostics did not get along very well; neither side would compromise with the other.

The Da Vinci Code, however, attempts to create a compromise religion that no one ever really believed. While the *Gnostic Gospel of Philip* does seem to record Jesus kissing Mary Magdalene (63:32-64:10), those who would believe such a book would not believe that Jesus was in the flesh nor that He would have been pleasing the flesh—the kiss is designed to teach a spiritual lesson, not present a love story. Likewise, those who would believe in Jesus as a physical man would deny the legitimacy of the *Gospel of Philip* and that Jesus was married and did not die on the cross.

The main premise, then, of *The Da Vinci Code* is entirely without merit in reality. Neither Gnostics nor Christians would ever accept the idea of Jesus being a man, not dying on the cross, marrying Mary Magdalene, and living in France. As to the Gnostics, we can read even in the New Testament how their doctrines were opposed (2 Timothy 2:16-18, 2 John 1:7-9). Their documents are all written later than the New Testament; they were never even considered for the canon, since their manifest error was apparent to all who accept the truth of God. Let us not be deceived by modern fads—let us hold to the truth of God present in the Scriptures. †

The Formation of the New Testament



By Steve Patton • sapatton@tampabay.rr.com

Dan Brown's theory about the formation of the Bible is expressed in *The Da Vinci Code* by the fictional character Leigh Teabing, an authority on the ancient documents in question. He argues the New Testament record is unreliable saying there was an alternate account of Jesus that was expunged by the church in the 4th century. The remaining documents were doctored by Constantine and powerful bishops in the 4th century to redefine Christ and His teaching and these are the books included in the canon set by the *Council of Nicea* in 325 AD. How did the New Testament come into being? What evidence do we have that the New Testament books were accepted by early Christians?

The Biblical Canon refers to the recognized list of authentic books that make up the Bible. *The Da Vinci Code* suggests this list was created in the fourth century at the Council of Nicea. This late date is necessary so that claims there were earlier gospels and teachings can be given plausibility. But there are major problems with saying the New Testament books as we know them were not accepted by the early disciples of Jesus. How can we determine what the early disciples believed and taught?

Listening to the Opposition

In the 2nd century Marcion (AD 96-160) from Pontus (modern Turkey) began to preach "another gospel." He holds the distinction of being regarded as the first great heretic of the early church. Expelled by his home church for adultery (where his own father served as a bishop) he began to develop his own form of "Christianity." He was later expelled from the church in Rome for doctrinal heresy as he denied the essentials of Christianity and created his own Bible.

Marcion's Bible consisted of the Gospel of Luke and ten of Paul's letters, all "cleansed" of Old Testament influences. The books Marcion rejected he nonetheless acknowledged as being accepted by the church as a whole and as being written by the original apostles and prophets. He just thought he

was right and they were wrong. The response to him was harsh. Polycarp (AD 69-155) who knew the apostle John personally, upon meeting Marcion, called him "the first-born of Satan".

Thus the issue of what writings were inspired and authentic was raised 150 years before the Council of Nicea. It indicates clearly there was already a general agreement on what books were accepted by Christians as being from God. Most scholars recognize that the canon of scripture was clearly set by the end of the 2nd century AD. Thus Dan Brown's 4th century date for the setting of the canon of scripture is out of the question.

Marcion is not the only one to refer to the books accepted by the early church. Other lists predating the Council of Nicea by over 100 years are known.

How was the canon of the NT decided upon? Actually there was no voting process involved. Nonetheless it is not difficult to understand how the Bible came into being and that we can trust that the 27 books in the New Testament were the books accepted by early Christians as being from God.

The Situation in the Early Years of the Church

The New Testament claims that the Apostles and prophets were speaking the Word of God with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Letters were written by Spirit guided men like Paul, Peter, James, etc. The four gospels were written the same way by men who either accompanied Jesus personally (Matthew and John) or by men who knew the eyewitnesses and recorded their words (Luke and Mark).

The early church knew who was inspired and who wasn't. They accepted the inspired writings from those recognized as apostles and prophets. However, it took time for all documents to circulate to all the world. But in time the acceptance of the 27 books was pretty much universal.

Evidence of the New Testament documents in their present form from the late 1st or 2nd century.

The Apostolic Fathers. Some early Christians' writings have survived to the present day. These so called "church fathers" were men who

please turn to page 9

Is the NT Reliable?



By Jarrod Drawbaugh • jarrod_drawbaugh@sbcglobal.net

Regarding the Bible, *The Da Vinci Code* claims "... it has evolved through countless translations, additions, and revisions. History has never had a definitive version of the book." (*TDVC*, 231) From this claim and others within the book, we see that Dan Brown would have us believe that the Bible is not God's word, is not historically accurate, is not factually true, and the original message has been lost and corrupted over time.

Is the New Testament reliable? Can we know with certainty that it is truth? The pursuit of truth, after all, is our goal, for it is truth that sanctifies us and sets us free (Jn.17:17; Jn.8:32). If we are going to use the New Testament as our guide, we need to know that it is God's truth, and that it is factually, historically, spiritually, and in all other areas, reliable.

This will be a brief analysis. We strongly encourage you to study the matter further. With so much to say I am going to be short and direct, and as pithy as possible with each point.

New Testament Claims

The very purpose Luke gives for writing his Gospel is to give an accurate account of the story of Jesus (Lk.1:1-4). Paul's teachings were from God (1 Thes.2:13). Paul's writings were inspired scripture (2 Pet.3:14-16). The word of the Lord endures forever (1 Pet.1:24-26). Jesus' words will never pass away (Mk.13:31).

Historical Facts

First century historian Josephus is one whom historians and archeologists have long regarded as being an accurate source for Jewish history. In his writings, he records a brief excerpt on the life of Jesus, his marvelous works, his trial under Pilate, his crucifixion, and his resurrection (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, p. 379). The story of Jesus is not fanciful fabrication, but historical fact.

Josephus also records other historical facts that correspond precisely with the New Testa-

ment, such as the death of John the Baptist (Josephus, 382), the famine in the reign of Claudius (Josephus, 416), and the martyrdom of James (Josephus, 423).

The Greek historian Thallus, writing in about 52 AD, writes of the darkness that occurred on the day Jesus was crucified. Those three hours of darkness when Jesus died (recorded in Mt.27:45, Mk.15:33, and Lk.23:44) are historical fact according to both Scripture and secular history.

The books of the N.T. were written within the lifetime of those who were eye witnesses to the life, works, death, and resurrection of Jesus. If the story the gospels tell is not true, these eye witnesses (especially the unbelieving Jews) would have pointed out the error. When the Gospels were written, many witnesses were still alive who saw and knew the facts written therein to be true. We can see this to be the case from both scripture and from secular history. While countless archeological discoveries confirm what we read in the N.T., "archeology has not produced anything that is unequivocally a contradiction to the Bible." (Strobel, *The Case For Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998, page 100). This is just a small sample of the wealth of data that shows the New Testament to be historically reliable.

Preservation of Scripture

We have far more copies of N.T. writings that were written closer to the date of the originals than there are for any other piece of literature that has come down to us from ancient times. Many of the copies we have date back to within a generation or two of the original date of composition, whereas with most other texts, centuries have elapsed between the original date of composition and the oldest surviving copies around today.

"In no other case is the interval of time between the composition of the book and the date of the earliest manuscripts so short as in that of the New Testament." (Strobel, 63)

In addition to copies of the text itself, we also have literally thousands of quotations and references in lectionaries (sermon notes, commentaries, etc.) from first second and third century Christians. (Strobel, 59). Over 5,000 ancient Greek

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N.T. manuscripts have been found and catalogued (Strobel, 60), something that can be said of none other. In second place is Homer's *The Iliad*, of which there are fewer than 650 Greek manuscripts around today, which were written nearly 1,000 years after its original date of writing (Strobel, 60). Yet no one questions its preservation and reliability.

While skeptics and critics like to call into question the reliability of the Bible, they never do so with other historical works that have far less evidence to back them up. For example, the two earliest biographies we have of Alexander the Great were written more than 400 years after his death (Strobel, 33). Yet historians consider them to be accurate and reliable. "If we compare the present state of the New Testament text with that of any other ancient writing, we must ... declare it to be marvelously correct. Such has been the care with which the New Testament has been copied-a care which has doubtless grown out of true reverence for its holy words...The New Testament is unrivaled among ancient writings in the purity of its text as actually transmitted and kept in use." (Strobel, 70)

Conclusion

After such examination, we conclude that the New Testament claims cited above certainly hold up. The New Testament is what it claims to be, as the evidence shows. The Christian faith has been tested and tried for nearly 2000 years, and for nearly 2000 years it has stood firm! It shall never pass away! After *The Da Vinci Code*, other false teachings will arise and sadly overthrow the faith of some, but the Christian faith and God's inspired Word will abide forever!

The reliability of the Bible has been called into question countless times, only to emerge triumphant time and time again. I believe Henry H. Halley said it best in his famous *Halley's Bible Handbook*, so I will close with a quote from him. "The dear old book has worn out many anvils, and long after the critics have been forgotten will go marching on loved and honored by unnumbered millions. Precious book!" (Halley, 747).



The Formation of the New Testament from page 7

lived in the late 1st to 3rd century A.D. They include Irenaeus, Polycarp (a personal friend of the apostle John), Clement of Alexandria and others. These extensive writings not only refer to all 27 books but quote from them extensively. In fact, it has been said if every copy of the New Testament was destroyed, it could be re-created from the quotations found in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers. The writings of the apostolic fathers refer to most of these books as scripture, i.e., from God. Their writings are almost universally accepted as authentic.

Since we essentially have the New Testament embedded in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, their testimony leaves no room to suggest the writings were changed at a later date.

All of this evidence points to one clear conclusion - the New Testament books we have today were known in the first century church and regarded as scripture. †

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Does the Bible Oppress Women?



By Rusty Miller • rmiller@gandlmechanical.com

Is the Bible misogynistic? That is, does the Bible (and particularly, the New Testament) suppress women?

That is certainly a key accusation that Dan Brown makes in *The Da Vinci Code*. Putting his argument succinctly, after the death of Jesus, two parties arose against each other. One, the “Mary” party, viewed Jesus as a great teacher, but not divine, and worshiped a female goddess as well as a male god. The other, the “Peter” party, supported the idea of a divine Jesus, and suppressed, not only the worship of the female goddess, but also women in general. With the help of Roman Emperor Constantine, the “Peter” party won out, and the teachings and writings of the “Mary” party were suppressed.

The divine nature of Jesus and the canon of scripture are dealt with in other articles in this issue, but what of Brown’s charge that the New Testament, and in particular the gospels, are misogynistic? There is only one way to find out, and that is to take out our Bibles and look for ourselves. First, let us focus on the writings of Luke, because he provides us with an account of the life of Jesus, plus a history of the early church.

From the very beginning, Luke writes things no one would write if a key interest were to suppress women. Consider that the first person in the New Testament to be “filled with the Holy Spirit” is a woman (Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, Lk. 1:41). Further, as Jesus begins His ministry, Luke records that it is women who help to support Him and the apostles (Lk. 8:1-3).

A great proof against Brown’s thesis is found in Luke chapter 10, when instead of praising Martha, who is seen doing “woman’s work,” Jesus praises Mary for sitting at His feet, learning what is truly necessary (vv. 38-42). And, as in all the gospels (Matt. 28:1-10; Mk. 16:9; Jn. 20:11-18), Luke records that women are the first to see the resurrected Jesus (Lk. 24:1-10).

The problems for Brown’s accusation continue in the early church. When the gospel spreads to

Europe, it is Lydia, a woman, who is the first convert there (Acts 16:11-15). And in the best example that the charge cannot stand, Luke actually records a woman, Priscilla, helping to correct a powerful, influential gospel preacher (Apollos) in Acts 18:24-28!

Luke is by no means alone. In addition to the resurrection passages noted above, Matthew 1 records the names of three women (besides Mary) in the genealogy of Jesus (Rahab, v. 3; Ruth, v. 5 and Bathsheba, v. 6). Mark has Jesus praising a poor woman for her sacrifice (Mk. 12: 41-44). John records a great teaching session by Jesus in which the only other person present is a Samaritan woman (John 4).

Besides the gospels and Acts, the epistles do not support Brown’s thesis either. For instance, Paul makes the following statement: “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise” (Gal. 3:27-29). While some have tried to make too much of this passage, this much is clear: in Jewish tradition, the three classes of people who could not receive an inheritance were Gentiles, slaves and women. Paul makes a point of including all of these among the descendants of Abraham and heirs of Christ.

In addition, Peter and Paul both make an argument regarding Christians being true descendants of Abraham, basing that argument in part on also being children of Sarah (Gal. 4:21-31; 1 Pet. 3:5-7). And it is Peter who cautions husbands that mistreatment of their wives will keep God from hearing their prayers (1 Pet. 3:7).

Rather than suppress women, the New Testament affords them great honor. They can be children of God without meeting any requirements that men aren’t required to meet. They will be rewarded on the basis of their faith in Jesus, just as men will be.

Brown’s accusation against the New Testament is silly. It cannot stand when placed against the truth of scripture. †

Is Jesus Divine?



By Mark Roberts, editor • robertsmark@sbcglobal.net

The Da Vinci Code alleges that Jesus is not deity, having received that “honor” only as the result of a voting scheme that took place nearly three hundred years after He lived. Christians maintain that Jesus is deity, and this is true because of who He is, not because He did well at the polls. How can we know Jesus is really divine?

The case for Jesus’ deity is based on two matters. First, the reliability of the New Testament documents must be established. Then we turn to see what those documents say about Jesus.

Are the New Testament documents reliable? People are always concerned that any book as old as the Bible might have become corrupted, or parts of it lost, during the many centuries since it was written. These concerns are valid and reasonable. No thinking person will blindly accept what the New Testament says about Jesus without being sure what we are reading today is the original Gospel message. While another writer deals more fully with questions about the New Testament’s authenticity (see pages 8-9), we need to be reminded here that eyewitnesses wrote it. Peter assures us, *“For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty”* (2 Peter 1:16). The writers of the New Testament knew the difference between truth and fairy tales. What they wrote bears the unmistakable mark of being the truth. For example, in John 4:46, 49, 51 the writer knows there is a big drop from Cana to Capernaum. John 10:22-23 references the seasons, showing the author’s understanding of the rainy weather in Israel in winter. That is just the testimony of John. Matthew, Mark and Luke brim with details (note Luke 3:1-2). Add to this the evidence of the archaeologist’s spade, finding manuscripts that date into the early 100’s, and we have certainly established that the original Gospels date into the first century. Think about it: that means four men wrote of Jesus’ life, teaching, miracles, death and resurrection within the lifetime of people who would have been in position to witness those events. It would be difficult to say the Dallas Cowboys never won a Super Bowl or that John Kerry beat George Bush for the Presi-

dency, wouldn’t it? There are too many witnesses to the truth. The very same principle applies to the Gospels. Now that our confidence in the New Testament is established, we turn our attention to see what it says about Jesus’ deity.

The New Testament teaches consistently and confidently that Jesus is more than a man and more than a prophet. The New Testament proclaims Him God. Jesus made this claim: *“Jesus said, ‘Most assuredly before Abraham was, I AM’”* (John 8:58). This is a deliberate taking of the sacred name of God, the I AM (Exodus 3:14). Notice that Jesus did miracles in support of this claim (Mark 2:9-11). Obviously, God would not have allowed His power to be used to confirm a lie. Further, Jesus accepted worship often (Matthew 9:18; John 9:35-38). Only God is worthy of worship (Luke 4:5-8). Jesus’ acceptance of worship shows He is God.

What did the apostles teach about Jesus? The apostles, men inspired by God, taught that Jesus is deity. Paul wrote, *“For in Him [Jesus] dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily”* (Col 2:9). John’s Gospel begins by saying, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us”* (John 1:1, 14). The Word is Jesus, and John says the Word is God.

Jesus’ teaching about His deity was not a secret or something He believed privately. Everyone understood Jesus to be teaching and claiming that He was deity. The Jewish religious leaders even attempted to stone Jesus because they knew He claimed to be God (John 8:59; 10:33). It is important to note here that if Jesus was just the “good man” *TDVC* claims, then why did anyone oppose Him or kill Him? Of course, Jesus’ resurrection from the dead is the paramount proof that He is indeed Deity. By this event He is *“declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead”* (Romans 1:4).

In summary, Jesus’ deity is the clear teaching of the Word of God. The evidence confirms that the Bible is God’s Word and we should believe it. If we believe the Bible therefore, we must believe in the deity of Christ. Further, if we want to go to heaven we must believe in Jesus’ deity: *“Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I AM, you will die in your sins”* (John 8:24). †

Destroy Faith from page 1

Perhaps this is why *TDVC* has become so popular. The book really isn't that well written, with wooden and stereotypical characters who are often rather dumb. So why are so many people flocking to the movie and buying the book? What has fueled its incredible success, I believe, is that *TDVC* reinforces and teaches what people really want to believe about Jesus and the Bible. The old bit about Jesus being just a good man, and a great teacher, is exactly what many are interested in. Who wants a divine Jesus who is nothing less than God and demands my obedience? Further, saying the Bible was put together by men to advance a certain ideology again plays right into what so many desire. That means the Bible is not authoritative. It does not need to be studied, understood, or obeyed. Adding a little bit of mysticism and secrecy, with secret societies and "unknown" gospels, just makes it all the more juicy and interesting. Finally, there is a clear bias against organized religion today and so an author that demonizes one of the largest organized religions in the world (Roman Catholicism), charging it with hypocrisy, greed, and suppressing women, is again going to find a ready audience. I will not and cannot defend

Catholicism, but Brown's unwillingness to distinguish Christianity from Catholicism just helps his readers apply his charges to whatever "version" of Christianity they wish to, unfortunately including even New Testament Christianity.

2 Thessalonians 2:11-12 tells us that those who don't want to believe the truth will be allowed to believe lies. *TDVC* confirms this as being absolutely so. Those who want to believe error have now found a best-selling book and blockbuster movie to prop up their preconceived notions and reasons for not believing. This issue of *Abundant Life* probably will not help folks who are determined not to believe the Bible. However, *TDVC* will cause many to talk about Jesus and to talk about the Scriptures. Christians need to be prepared and ready to speak intelligently in that conversation (1 Peter 3:15). Those who are truly seeking the truth (the movie's ironic slogan) need to be pointed in the right direction and given the opportunity to find the truth about Jesus and the Bible. Thus, this issue of *Abundant Life* is for genuine truth seekers and for those who would defend real faith. May it help us to seek, find, know, and obey the truth – truth not hidden in old paintings or coded messages but plainly found in God's Word. †

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