

Conspiracy and Disinformation: What Everyone Should Know About *The Da Vinci Code*

by Michael T. Panell

Introduction

By now most people have come to notice Dan Brown's book, *The Da Vinci Code*, and the movie of the same name. Some have read the book or viewed the movie; others have attended Bible study groups to discuss the book. Still others have formed an opinion based on second hand information. The book makes some shocking claims concerning the life of Jesus Christ, the Bible, and Christianity in general that many believers find offensive, insulting, and even blasphemous. However, this is not the first work of popular fiction to borrow Jesus as a character or to challenge the historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth as presented in the New Testament. So why all the fuss? After all, it *is* fiction. That is precisely the problem. Dan Brown's novel claims on the first page that "[a]ll descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate". Thus some Christians have questioned long-held beliefs and writers and scholars of all faiths have scrambled to sift through the claims of *The Da Vinci Code* to separate fact from fiction.

As mentioned above, there are a number of books available that examine the claims of *The Da Vinci Code* in detail. However, those who wish to do a serious study of the topic may benefit from a brief introductory discussion, and others may not be eager to spend the hours of research necessary for a thorough examination of the many and varied issues raised in the novel. Therefore, I will provide a condensed study of *The Da Vinci Code* as it pertains to Christians and Christianity, along with a thorough bibliography and suggested reading list, that will, I trust, satisfy the curiosity of the lay person and whet the appetite of the enthusiastic researcher.

What is *The Da Vinci Code* about?

The Da Vinci Code is a mystery novel that begins with the investigation of a murder. The protagonist, a Harvard professor and symbologist (symbology is the study of religious symbols, usually called iconography), has been summoned to the scene of the crime (in the Louvre museum in Paris) by the police. He thinks he is there to help with the investigation, but soon finds that he is the primary suspect. He makes his escape with the help of a police cryptologist (or code breaker-who happens to be the granddaughter of the victim) and the two of them follow a string of clues left by the dead man on what turns out to be a quest for the Holy Grail. The reader is gradually fed bits of information (much of which pertains to the life and works of Leonardo da Vinci) that lead the reader to conclude that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married, the Holy Grail is the bloodline of Jesus and Mary, and this information has been guarded for centuries by a secret society, despite attempts by the Vatican and early Christians to rewrite history and eliminate all knowledge of this holy bloodline.

By cleverly combining elements of truth with fiction, Dan Brown has created an imaginary world in which his version of history is undeniably true. By the end of the book the reader must also conclude that at least some of the fiction must be true in 'real life' as well. The only question that remains is where to draw the line between fact and fiction. Without doing some independent research, the reader may simply choose to accept the author's claim that "all descriptions...in this novel are accurate" and leave it at that. For the skeptics, the task of analyzing the claims of fact are made difficult by the vast number of claims made that have at least some element of truth. To dispute many of these claims seems like 'splitting hairs' and those who attempt the task inevitably come off as religious zealots trying desperately to defend a faith based on two thousand years of deception. Thus, despite the fact that the most logical approach would be to disregard the claims of a fictional work as fiction unless they are proven to have some historic validity, the reader is tempted to accept the entire work as fact, except where proven false.

Christians should not feel threatened in the face of such difficulties, however. While salvation is based on faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior, our understanding of the life of Jesus is grounded in history. Therefore it *is* possible to know the truth about the life of Jesus Christ with much certainty. Besides, the Bible teaches that we should "always be ready to give a defense" when we are asked why we believe what we believe (1 Peter 3:15) and the Bereans were commended because, although they "received the word with all readiness," they "searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether" what Paul and Silas had taught them was correct (Luke 17:11).

Methods

As mentioned above, this discussion will be limited primarily to issues concerning Christians and Christianity. A list of issues to be discussed will be presented with the corresponding page numbers in *The Da Vinci Code (DVC)* and the Illustrated Edition of *The Da Vinci Code (IDVC)*. Each item from the list will then be discussed in detail. Evidence from various books and other reference works will be presented in an attempt to determine: 1. the origin of each of the topics discussed (i.e. where Dan Brown got the idea from) and 2. the factual basis, if any, for each assertion. Although conclusions will be drawn based on the evidence presented, the reader is encouraged to keep an open mind and to examine the source material firsthand before reaching a determination.

Issues Raised in *The Da Vinci Code*

- Dan Brown's 'Fact:' statement (*DVC* 1; *IDVC* 1).
- The Priory of Sion and the Knights Templar as protectors of the secret bloodline of Jesus & Mary Magdalene (*DVC* 1, 113-114, 157-161, 204-207, 326-327; *IDVC* 1, 119-120, 166-170, 211-215, 332-333)
- The Holy Grail or 'San Greal' is really 'Sang Real' or 'Royal Blood' (*DVC* 249-250; *IDVC* 261)
- French legend of Mary Magdalene and her daughter Sarah (*DVC* 255; *IDVC* 265)
- Leonardo da Vinci's depiction of *The Last Supper* (*DVC* 243; *IDVC* 254)
- Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* (*DVC* 120-121; *IDVC* 128)
- Pagan Symbols (*DVC* 35-37, 445-446; *IDVC* 39-43, 445-446)

- The struggle between Pagans and Christians (DVC 232;IDVC 239)
- The sacred feminine (DVC 124-125;IDVC 131)
- Sexual intercourse in the Jewish Temple (DVC 309;IDVC 318)
- A goddess named Shekinah in the Holy of Holies (DVC 309, 446;IDVC 318, 446)
- The name of God (Yahweh) is a combination of male and female (DVC 309;IDVC 318)
- Jesus was first thought of as a mere human, made divine by a vote (DVC 233;IDVC 241)
- The life of Christ was recorded by thousands of people (DVC 231;IDVC 238)
- The *Dead Sea Scrolls* and the *Nag Hammadi Library* are the earliest surviving records of the life of Christ (DVC 234;IDVC 242-243)
- More than 80 gospels competed for inclusion in the Bible (DVC 231;IDVC 238)
- Constantine chose the books of the Bible (DVC 231;IDVC 238)
- The meaning of the word 'heretic' (DVC 234;IDVC 242)
- Jews were forbidden to remain single or be celibate (DVC 245;IDVC 255-256)
- The relationship between Mary Magdalene & Jesus (DVC 242-246;IDVC 252-256)
- The Gospels of Philip and Mary (DVC 246-247;IDVC 256-257)
- The royal bloodline of Mary Magdalene & Jesus (DVC 231, 248-249, 256-257;IDVC 238, 260, 266-267)
- Mary Magdalene was the target of a smear campaign (DVC 244;IDVC 252-253)

A Discussion of the Facts

The 'Fact' Statement

Despite the assurance of accuracy by the author, many of the descriptions in *The Da Vinci Code*, particularly descriptions of documents, are misconstrued or misrepresented to some degree. Most of these descriptions will be discussed in detail below, then a final determination as to the validity of this claim of accuracy can be made.

The Priory of Sion, Treasure of Rennes-le-Château, and Knights Templar

The 'Fact' statement on the first page of *The Da Vinci Code* begins with the following: "The Priory of Sion-a European secret society founded in 1099-is a real organization. In 1975 Paris's Bibliothèque Nationale discovered parchments known as *Les Dossiers Secrets*, identifying numerous members of the Priory of Sion, including Sir Isaac Newton, Botticelli, Victor Hugo, and Leonardo da Vinci" (Brown 1). Although fiction writers rarely cite sources, (because it is assumed that most of what they write is a product of the imagination), some books are named within the text and a partial bibliography is posted on Dan Brown's website. Based on this information and the descriptions found in the text, it is possible to determine the origin of some of the author's ideas. The description of the Priory of Sion, for example, closely matches the content of a pseudo-historical work written by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln entitled *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*. The authors of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* set out to learn more about a legend concerning a priest and a treasure in a small village in France named Rennes-le-Château. Their "research" relied heavily on information found in *Les Dossiers Secrets* and other related documents deposited in the Bibliothèque Nationale. Based on this information, and some quite imaginative speculation, they reached the conclusion that the Priory of Sion was

formed in 1099, founded the Knights Templar, still exists today, and protects the secret holy bloodline of Jesus and Mary Magdalene (Baigent 399).

There was a religious order formed in the twelfth century known as the "Order of Sion," but the authors of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* failed, after ten years of research, to find any medieval document that mentioned the Priory of Sion or linked the Order of Sion with the Priory of Sion (Putnam 128). The only link between these two is a single page in one of the documents deposited in the Bibliothèque National entitled the *Secret File of Henri Lobineau* or *Les Dossiers Secrets d'Henri Lobineau* in French (Putnam 127). The word Sion is most often spelled Zion in American English. The *Random House Webster's College Dictionary* defines Zion as "1. a hill in Jerusalem, on which the Temple was built: used to symbolize the city itself, esp. as a religious or spiritual center. 2. the Jewish people. 3. Palestine as the Jewish homeland and symbol of Judaism 4. heaven as the final gathering place of true believers."

Because the word 'Zion' or 'Sion' has so much meaning for Jews and Christians alike, there are many places and organizations that contain "Zion" or "Sion" somewhere in their name. A search on google.com using the word "zion" yields more than 28,500,000 hits for Elders of Zion, Yuppies of Zion, Zion Software, Zion Guitars, Mount Zion Bible Church, and Zion National Park to name a few. A search for "sion" comes up with 49,600,000 results including a Spanish internet service provider, a UK rock band, and Sion Software. The second page that comes up on this search is located at priory-of-sion.com and provides a great deal of detail, including excerpts from legal proceedings, exposing the *Dossiers Secrets* as a hoax created by Philippe de Chérisey and Pierre Plantard (the latter is listed as the most recent grand master of the Priory of Sion). These two men, along with a French writer named Gérard de Sède, are important figures in the story behind the writing of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*. The first page on the search results claims to be the official international website of the Knights Templar and can be found at ordotempli.org/priory_of_sion.htm. At the bottom of this page, under the heading "The Secret Behind the Codes", is the following:

"After their quarrel Plantard made it known that the parchments in de Sede's book were fakes. In 1971 I received a letter from Phillipe de Cherissy implying that he was the author of the two parchments published by Gerard de Sede."

"Plantard trusted me because I was writing a book about him and he gave me the original documents."

- Pierre Jarnac, author of *The Archives of the Treasure of Rennes-le-Château*

In a work that examines the legend of Rennes-le-Château in detail, Bill Putnam and John Edwin Wood find that the authors of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* reach erroneous conclusions by drawing conclusions where there is a lack of evidence, presenting evidence in a misleading way, taking coincidences to be evidence, and disregarding conflicting evidence (Putnam 184-187). As for Plantard and de Chérisey, Putnam and Wood conclude that, "[b]y intention or not, these two men carried out one of the most amazing historical deceptions that there has ever been" (Putnam 188).

As it turns out, there probably was no treasure in Rennes-le-Château to begin with, and the mysterious wealth of the priest, Bérenger Sauniere, is greatly exaggerated. It is true that he carried out restorations at the church that cost far more than his salary could afford. However, the records that survive, including his own journals, indicate that he "raised money by borrowing and was able to use his charming personality to bring in gifts, particularly from wealthy women" (Putnam 178). But when these resources were not enough to keep up the lavish life style he began to enjoy, and pay for the building project, "he succumbed to the temptation of dishonest and illegal methods" and "began systematic abuse of the system of saying Masses for the dead on an epic scale" (Putnam 178). The records indicate that Sauniere had difficulty paying the bills at times and had to be taken to court and forced to pay for some of his elderly mother's expenses because he claimed he "could not afford" it (Putnam 169). While it is possible that Sauniere "found and kept something valuable in his clearance of the church and churchyard, which amounted to tomb robbing," there is no record "of gold or antique objects being converted into cash" and he "died in poverty" (Putnam 178). The authors of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* and others have suggested that the décor of the church contains clues to a secret or a treasure, but "the architectural style and the decorative features are entirely in keeping with church style of the period. Most of the furnishings have parallels in other churches" and "there is no reason whatsoever to assume that they contain hidden messages" (Putnam 100).

It seems clear that the modern organization known as the Priory of Sion is simply part of an elaborate hoax created by Pierre Plantard and his friends. The only connection between this organization, which was formed in 1956, and the Order of Sion formed in the twelfth century is the coincidence of the word Sion found in both names (Putnam 128-129). Because the Priory of Sion is a hoax, the imagined connections between the Knights Templar, the legend of the treasure of Rennes-le-Château, and the Priory of Sion have no relevance in a discussion of the facts of the life of Jesus Christ or the history of Christianity.

San Greal, Sang Real and the French Legend of Mary Magdalene and Sarah

Although the Priory of Sion can be disregarded as a hoax, what about the idea of the holy bloodline? *The Da Vinci Code* makes the claim that the Grail is actually the bloodline of Jesus and Mary Magdalene and that Mary and her daughter Sarah ended up in France (Brown 250; 255). Here Dan Brown mentions *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* by name, along with a handful of other books including *The Woman With The Alabaster Jar* written by Margaret Starbird (Brown 253). Both of these books conclude that the term "San Greal" or "Holy Grail" is more correctly divided as "Sang Real" or "Royal Blood" and claim that Mary Magdalene carried this royal blood to France, either in the form of a daughter named Sarah, who must be the heir to the royal bloodline since her name means "princess," or an unborn child being the result of the union of Jesus and Mary Magdalene (Starbird 26, 59-62; Baigent 306, 309, 359, 400).

The relationship between Mary Magdalene and Jesus will be discussed in detail below. The aim of this section is an examination of the source material for the ideas that the Grail is actually a royal bloodline and that Mary Magdalene and a daughter named Sarah traveled to France. Margaret Starbird names *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* as an important source and the inspiration for her book (Starbird xix-xxiii, 26). The authors of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* site, Sir Thomas Malory's *La Morte d'Arthur* and "many of the earlier manuscripts" of the Grail legend as

evidence for their reinterpretation and division of the term "San Greal" (Baigent 286, 306). Margaret Starbird sites a legend in the French town of Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer and *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* in support of her assertion that Mary Magdalene and her daughter Sarah traveled to France. The authors of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* mention legends of Mary Magdalene bringing the Grail to France, but they do not list specific sources here.

As for the "Sang Real," Sir Thomas Malory's *La Morte d'Arthur*, published in 1485, is an English translation of the French Arthurian legends. Sometimes Malory translates the French term "le Saint Graal" as "the Holy Grayle" (Malory 521-522, 524, 592) while other times it appears in his work as "Sankgreall" which is sometimes spelled "Sankgreal" or "Sancgreal" (Malory 517, 519, 520, 522-523, 529, 531, 534, 537, 541, 543, 553-554, 557-558, 562, 564-565, 572-573, 589, 595-596, 598, 602-603, 605-608). It could be argued that these two different terms refer to different things. The "Holy Grayle" or "San Greal" may be the vessel and the "Sankgreall" or "Sang Real" the substance contained within the vessel. This notion, however, falls apart as the terms "Sankgreall" and "Holy Grayle" are both used interchangeably with "holy vessel" (Malory 517, 522). The descriptions of this "holy vessel" make it clear that the Grail is a physical object with mystical powers and not a bloodline. The first reference informs the reader that the "Sankgreall" is "called the holy vessell" (Malory 517). It is clearly a physical object that "shall be encheved," which means achieved or gained, and can be recovered or found (Malory 519, 558, 562). The "Sankgreall" is sometimes described as being in a chamber or on a table and people can draw near to it or be fed from it (Malory 520, 562, 564, 596, and 602). Malory's tales make no sense at all if the "Sankgreall" is a royal bloodline. It is also important to note here that, according to *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology*, the English word "royal" (which is identical to the modern French word) comes from the Old French word "roial" and there is no French word "real" meaning royal. In fact, the English word "real" comes from the Old French word "rèel" or "réal" which means true or real. While scholars are puzzled by Malory's translation of the French term "le saint graal" into two separate terms, this is usually attributed to his lack of skill as a translator. Sir Walter Scott described Malory's work as "extracted at hazard, and without much art or combination, from the various French prose folios" (Malory vii).

The earliest surviving account of the Grail is a poem by Chrétien de Troyes written around 1180 (Loomis 4). This poem, entitled *Perceval* or *Conte del Graal* (*Story of the Grail* in English), is an uncompleted work that, according to the author, comes from a book given to him by Philip of Alsace, Count of Flanders, to whom the poem is dedicated (Chrétien 1-4). No such book has ever been found and it is likely that Chrétien's romance is actually based on Celtic myths that "are slightly Christianized to suit the spirit of the age" (Chrétien xv). In his poem, Chrétien refers to the Grail as simply "the grail" which is spelled "graal" in French. Later continuations of this unfinished tale by other authors usually call the Grail a "Holy Grail" or "Saint Graal" in French. In Chrétien's poem the word clearly denotes some sort of serving dish. *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology* states that "Grail" is derived from the Old French word "graal" or cup, which comes from the Medieval Latin "gradalis" meaning a shallow serving vessel. Wolfram von Eschenbach, in his retelling and continuation of Chrétien's poem entitled *Parzival*, calls the Grail a stone, probably due to his shaky knowledge of French (Wolfram 8).

The first connection between the Grail and the blood of Jesus is found in Robert de Boron's *Joseph d'Arimathie*, written after Chrétien's poem in about 1199, which states that the Grail is

not only the Chalice of the Last Supper, but also the vessel that Joseph of Arimathea placed "beneath Christ's wounds; and blood from the wounds in His hands and His feet dripped into the vessel. After gathering the blood in the vessel Joseph set it to one side, and took the body of Jesus Christ and wrapped it in a sheet that he had bought for his own use, and covered it" (Robert 19). This connection between the "True Blood" of Jesus and the "Holy Grail" led later writers, some of them probably influenced by Malory's misinterpretation, to make use of "the pious pun 'San greal (Holy Grail): Sang real (True Blood)'" (Wolfram 8). However, even this version fails to mention a holy bloodline or Mary Magdalene and "scholars now have little doubt that there was no authentic tradition of the...Holy Grail" and that legends of the Grail are Celtic pagan myths "concealed under a thin coating of Christian reinterpretation" (Walker 90).

The arrival of Mary Magdalene and her daughter Sarah in France also comes from a misinterpreted legend. The original legend of Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, despite Margaret Starbird's assertion to the contrary, does not involve Mary Magdalene. According to the official website of the Office of Tourism in Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, found at www.saintesmaries.com, "at the dawn of Christendom, Marie Jacobé, Marie Salome and Sara their maidservant," who were fleeing persecution in Palestine, arrived in "a boat without a rudder." Also, Mary Magdalene is not included in the annual festival in which the statues of Mary Jacobé and Mary Salome are paraded to the sea and back. This legend of Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer first appeared in a 1521 handwritten manuscript by Vincent Philippon entitled *The Legend of the Saintes-Maries* and was expanded over time to add other passengers in the boat. These additional passengers included Lazarus from Bethany (whom Jesus raised from the dead in John 11:1-44) and his sisters Martha and Mary. The only connection between Mary Magdalene and the later exaggerated versions of the legend of Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer is the mistaken belief that Mary of Bethany is Mary Magdalene (this will be discussed later).

As for Sarah the princess, according to a website designed to help parents find suitable names for their children located at www.thinkbabynames.com, "Sarah is a very popular female first name, ranking 23 out of 4275 for females of all ages in the 1990 U.S. Census." It is unlikely that all of the women named Sarah are actually princesses. Similarly, it is unlikely that the "maidservant" described in a legend, which may or may not bear any resemblance to any historic event, is really a princess.

There is no connection between Sarah the maidservant from the legend of Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer and Mary Magdalene or Jesus Christ. Margaret Starbird and the authors of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* seem to be combining this legend with other French legends that claim that Mary Magdalene "evangelized Provence (now southeastern France) and spent her last 30 years in an Alpine cavern" ("Mary Magdalene, Saint" 697). Still other legends have her married to the apostle John and living out her years in Ephesus ("Mary Magdalene, Saint" 697). It is impossible for all of these conflicting legends to be true. It is unlikely that any of these unrelated medieval legends are historically accurate. More importantly, none of these legends support the claim that Mary Magdalene arrived in France with a daughter named Sarah.

The works of Leonardo da Vinci

If the Priory of Sion doesn't exist, Mary Magdalene didn't bring a daughter named Sarah to France, and the Grail is not the bloodline of Jesus and Mary Magdalene, what do the secret messages encoded in Leonardo's paintings mean? Since this article is concerned primarily with Christians and Christianity, a detailed discussion of art history and the artists of the Renaissance would not be appropriate. However, there are two works of Leonardo da Vinci that play important roles in *The Da Vinci Code* and should therefore be discussed. Although he doesn't mention any books on art or art history, Dan Brown does thank the Louvre Museum, the Department of Paintings Study and Documentation Service at the Louvre, and his wife, Blythe, who he describes as a painter and art historian. As for other sources used, the "Partial Bibliography for THE DA VINCI CODE" found on the "Official Website of Dan Brown" located at http://www.danbrown.com/novels/davinci_code/bibliography.html lists *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci* and *Prophecies*, both written by Leonardo himself, as well as *Leonardo da Vinci: Scientist, Inventor, Artist* and *Leonardo: The Artist and the Man*. It is difficult to establish which interpretations of the artwork described come from other sources and which belong solely to Dan Brown. Additionally, the interpretation of art is quite subjective, making it impossible to say with any certainty what the artist had in mind while he was working. Therefore, the best approach is to begin with what has been written about Leonardo da Vinci and his work, then examine the paintings with a critical eye and an open mind.

Leonardo da Vinci, like Chrétien de Troyes and Mary Magdalene, is identified by his name and the city in which he was born. Chrétien is from Troyes, Mary is from Magdala, and Leonardo is from Vinci. He was born in 1452, the illegitimate child of a prominent man who lived in Vinci and worked in Florence, and a peasant woman (Benton 310). In 1469 Leonardo became an apprentice to Andrea del Verrocchio (Benton 311). Being an architect, painter, engineer, sculptor, and designer of military weaponry, Leonardo is a prime example of the "Renaissance Man," meaning someone with an extraordinarily wide range of talents (Benton 311). Although the *Mona Lisa* is his most famous painting, *The Last Supper* is described as his greatest achievement during his time spent in Milan, where he chose to settle after being sent as an ambassador by Lorenzo the Magnificent in the early 1480's (Benton 311-312). Leonardo da Vinci later moved to Rome, then Cloux, near Amboise in France, where he died in 1519 ("Leonardo da Vinci." 229).

The *Da Vinci Code* makes a great deal of the androgynous faces (having both masculine and feminine characteristics) painted by Leonardo da Vinci. This is supposed to represent the union between male and female deities. To illustrate this, the protagonist in *The Da Vinci Code* claims that the *Mona Lisa* is named for the Egyptian god of fertility, Amon, and his female counterpart, the goddess Isis, resulting in "AMON L'ISIS" or "MONA LISA" (Brown 120-121). He says that "not only does the face of Mona Lisa look androgynous, but her name is an anagram of the divine union of male and female. And *that*, my friends, is Da Vinci's little secret, and the reason for Mona Lisa's knowing smile" (Brown 121). In the novel, it is *The Last Supper* that really makes the case for a marriage between Mary Magdalene and Jesus. The figure seated to the right of Jesus is examined and found to be "without a doubt . . . female" (Brown 243). The figure is described to the reader as having "flowing red hair, delicate folded hands, and the hint of a bosom" (Brown 243). The character revealing this information says that "it's no mistake. Leonardo was skilled at painting the difference between the sexes" (Brown 243). He goes on to state that this figure is Mary Magdalene and that "*The Last Supper* practically shouts at the

viewer that Jesus and Magdalene were a pair" (Brown 244). He supports this assertion by pointing out that Jesus and this figure "are clothed as mirror images," are both placed "in the center of the fresco," and at the focal point of the painting, where the two are leaning away from each other, a "V" or "chalice" shape is formed (the chalice being a symbol of the divine feminine) which is part of a larger "flawlessly formed letter M," which "stands for *Matrimonio* or *Mary Magdalene*. To be honest, nobody is certain" (Brown 244-245).

While it is true that *Mona Lisa* could be described as androgynous, the same is true of many of the faces found in the artwork produced during the Renaissance and other periods as well. Several examples are given below. As for the connection between the name of Leonardo's famous portrait and the Egyptian god Amon and goddess Isis, this is completely false. Leonardo never gave this painting a name. Because it is considered to be "a portrait of Lisa di Antonio Maria Gherardini, the twenty-four-year-old wife of a Florentine official, Francesco del Gioconda," this work is called *La Gioconda* or more often *Mona Lisa*, "mona" being a shortened version of "Madonna" or "my lady" (Benton 313).

There are two main issues regarding Leonardo's *The Last Supper*: the identification of the person to the right of Jesus and the composition, especially any obvious shapes or symbols. According to *Random House Webster's College Dictionary*, the right hand side is "a position of honor or special trust." In traditional depictions of the Last Supper this is the seat reserved for the Apostle John, believed to be the unnamed Apostle referred to as the "disciple whom Jesus loved" in the Gospel of John ("John the Apostle, Saint" 577). The figure to the right of Jesus in Leonardo's fresco is identified as John in the artist's own *Notebooks* as well. As discussed above, portraits produced during the Renaissance were often androgynous. Besides this, the portrayal of John as, "the young, beardless type...came to be preferred in the medieval West" ("John the Apostle, Saint" 577). Leonardo da Vinci was attracted to images of young men. He was accused of sodomy in 1476 and although this charge was not proven, "there can be little doubt of his homosexuality" ("Leonardo da Vinci" 229). Given this information, Leonardo's identification of the figure to the right of Jesus as the Apostle John, and the fact that *The Last Supper* portrays John in a traditional manner, it is clear that this figure is the Apostle John. Besides this, the painting would be one Apostle short if Mary Magdalene were numbered among the twelve people seated around Jesus.

Even if Leonardo's *The Last Supper* does not include Mary Magdalene, the composition of this magnificent work is worth discussing. Dan Brown's description is somewhat distorted. To influence the reader, the Illustrated Edition of *The Da Vinci Code* has a page division immediately to the right of Jesus and an enlarged image of the mural is cropped so that the Apostle John, incorrectly identified by Dan Brown as Mary Magdalene, is more central in the composition. In Leonardo's work Jesus is the center with the twelve Apostles arranged in groups of three, evenly divided on the left and right. When viewed in its entirety, the mural is "almost perfectly balanced symmetrically around the central figure of Jesus, whose arms are extended diagonally to the right and left in such a way that he himself forms an equilateral triangle" (Benton 312). Any number of shapes can be found by choosing combinations of lines and surfaces in the painting, but the "indisputable" chalice or "V" shape and the "flawlessly formed letter M" (Brown 244-245) are not quite so clear without the image being cropped or framed in a way that isolates them. Likewise, Jesus and the figure to his right are not *exactly* mirror images

of each other in the color of their clothing and it would take a great deal of imagination to find the "hint of a bosom" on the Apostle John.

Although the Apostle John is portrayed by Leonardo da Vinci in a way that seems unusual to modern viewers, his *The Last Supper* is consistent with the traditional portrayal of the Last Supper and the androgynous depictions of both John the Apostle and the *Mona Lisa* or *La Gioconda* are not unusual for Renaissance artwork. Any symbols or letters of the alphabet seen in the composition of *The Last Supper* are products of the viewers imagination, not the work of the artist and not secret codes. The composition of this mural is designed to draw the viewers attention to the central figure, Jesus Christ.

Leonardo's Work

Other Painters

Sculpture

"So Dark the Con of Man" (Brown 124)

If the Priory of Sion is a myth and the paintings of Leonardo da Vinci don't contain secret coded messages, there's still that other conspiracy-the propagation of lies by Constantine and "powerful men in the early Christian church...that devalued the female and tipped the scales in favor of the masculine" (Brown 124). *The Da Vinci Code* claims that "Constantine and his male successors successfully converted the world from matriarchal paganism to patriarchal Christianity by waging a campaign of propaganda that demonized the sacred feminine, obliterating the goddess from modern religion forever" (Brown 124). The Church is accused of waging a "brutal crusade to 'reeducate' the pagan and feminine-worshipping religions" which "spanned three centuries, employing methods as inspired as they were horrific" (Brown 125). The reader is told that not only were "[w]omen, once celebrated as an essential half of spiritual enlightenment...banished from temples of the world," but "the natural sexual union between man and woman through which each became spiritually whole" was "recast as a shameful act" and "[h]oly men who had once required sexual union with their female counterparts to commune with God now feared their natural sexual urges as the work of the devil" (Brown 125). To prove this point, the novel explains that Constantine and his cronies had a meeting and voted to make Jesus their new male deity. They then systematically destroyed any record of the mortal Jesus, the sacred feminine, the relationship between Mary Magdalene and Jesus, and Shekinah (the female counterpart to Jehovah, the male deity of the Jews) (Brown 124-125, 231-235, 308-310).

Christians, Pagans, and Symbols of the Sacred Feminine

The Da Vinci Code leaves the reader with the impression that prior to Christianity there was a universal form of "matriarchal paganism" (Brown 124). From the time of the crucifixion to Constantine's reign goddess worshipping pagans and Christians fought each other until Constantine backed the Christians for political reasons (Brown 124). Once they had the upper hand, Constantine and the Christians went about systematically doing away with "feminine-worshipping religions" and any record of their existence (Brown 125). Some of their symbols survived, however, such as the pentacle, which the Roman Catholic Church recast as evil (Brown 37).

The three main issues discussed in this section are: the existence of a universal form of matriarchal paganism, the struggle between pagans and Christians, and the evidence of goddess worship that remains in the form of symbols. The symbols most often mentioned are the pentacle, chalice, blade, and hexagram or Star of David formed when the blade, which Dan Brown depicts using a triangle pointing up, is combined with a chalice, depicted as a triangle pointing down. The novel does list some books that seem to be source material for these ideas. *The Woman With The Alabaster Jar* has already been discussed, but another book by Margaret Starbird entitled *The Goddess in the Gospels* is listed as well. Additionally, Dan Brown's bibliography page lists *Jesus and the Lost Goddess*, *When God Was A Woman*, *The Chalice and the Blade*.

The two books by Margaret Starbird along with *Jesus and the Lost Goddess* take information found in various books and fuse it together, along with a great deal of imagination and a clear agenda or bias, to form similar theories that interpret Christianity as a form of goddess worship that was corrupted by chauvinistic men, resulting in the worship of a male deity. These theories are based heavily on misinterpretation of scripture, including the belief that Mary Magdalene and Mary of Bethany are the same person (this will be discussed in detail below). The other books, *When God Was A Woman* and *The Chalice and the Blade*, are theories of social evolution that suggest that a universal form of goddess worship existed in prehistoric times, but later civilizations introduced the worship of male deities, resulting in the violent conflicts that have marred all of human history.

Riane Eisler describes her book, entitled *The Chalice and the Blade*, as "a holistic study of cultural evolution" which seeks to overthrow the "old view...of prehistory" which is "the story of 'man the hunter-warrior'" and replace it with a new view "that the foundations for social organization came from mothers and children sharing" (Eisler xxiii, 73). She states that once upon a time "humanity lived in peace and plenty...as Goddess-worshipping societies...before a male god decreed woman be forever subservient to a man" (Eisler 73). Merlin Stone's book entitled *When God Was A Woman*, claims that "The Great Goddess-The Divine Ancestress-had been worshiped from the beginning of the Neolithic periods of 7000 BC until the closing of the last Goddess temples, about AD 500" (Stone xii). She states that "members of the later male religions fought...to suppress that earlier worship" which she describes as "the vast female religion, which flourished for thousands of years before the advent of Judaism, Christianity and the Classical Age of Greece" (Stone xvi).

Both of these books show a monotheistic, feminist bias that ignores much of what we do know of the ancient cultures they describe as "Goddess-worshipping societies." They show a monotheistic bias in the fact that they sift through the many gods and goddesses worshiped by ancient cultures to choose one as *the* god or goddess worshiped by those cultures, ignoring the fact that polytheism, or "the belief in many gods...has characterized the majority of religions throughout history" ("Polytheism." 862). Their feminist bias is evident in the fact that they choose a goddess as their supreme being, despite the fact that the goddesses they describe are usually represented in ancient religious texts as the consort of some male deity. For example, both books state that the "Great Goddess" is known to the Canaanites as the goddess Astarte (Stone, 9, 22, 147, 160-161, 163-164, 167, 175; Eisler 7, 30, 87). But in the Canaanite religion, "[t]he principal god was El, but the jurisdiction over rainfall and fertility was delegated to Baal, or Hadad. Other important deities included Resheph, lord of plague and the nether world; Kothar, the divine craftsman; Asherah, consort of El; and Astarte, goddess of fertility" ("Ugarit." 1114). This could hardly be described as a "Goddess-worshipping" culture. Although they did worship goddesses, they also worshiped gods and the main deities were male.

Another problem with these books is that they attempt to draw connections where there are none. Although many of these ancient cultures had contact with each other and shared similarities in their religions, it is important to remember that each culture had its own distinct religious beliefs and practices. As Riane Eisler puts it, "what people in different cultures consider given...is not the same everywhere" (Eisler xiii). She rightly notes that the social sciences have usually been concerned with "quite literally 'the study of man'" while "information about women is primarily relegated to the intellectual ghetto of women's studies" (Eisler xviii). However, works such as hers and Merlin Stone's overcompensate by overstating the importance of the goddesses worshiped by ancient and prehistoric religions. The fact is, prior to, and since the advent of Judaism and Christianity many religions, usually polytheistic, have been practiced. These religions worship different gods and goddesses in different ways. There never has been a universal religion of goddess-worshippers.

Similarly, there is no universal religion of paganism. The word "pagan" means, according to the International Edition of the *Webster Comprehensive Dictionary*, "1 One who is neither a Christian, a Jew, nor a Moslem; a heathen. 2 In early Christian use, an idol-worshiper; a non-Christian. 3 An irreligious person. -*adj.* Pertaining to pagans; heathenish; idolatrous." This term, which comes from the Latin word *paganus*, meaning villager, is "often used as a synonym for 'primitive,' 'uncivilized,' or 'heathen.' It has been used primarily as a derogatory term and applied to those who followed polytheistic traditions rather than a monotheistic religion such as Judaism or Christianity" ("Pagan." 834). Contrary to the descriptions used by Dan Brown in *The Da Vinci Code*, the word pagan simply describes anyone who does not follow a monotheistic religion (which at the time of Constantine included most of the population-more on that below), not some unified religion or universal goddess worship.

But isn't the widespread use of various pagan symbols convincing evidence of the existence of a universal form of goddess worship? The problem is, these symbols mean different things to different people. "Symbolism is a slippery subject. Any one symbol may have hundreds of interpretations, according to the differing beliefs of people who have interpreted it. Any basic

symbol of worldwide distribution—such as the triangle, circle, cross, square, or star—can represent many disparate things in various times or places" (Walker ix).

The Da Vinci Code states that "the chalice...represents the feminine" (Brown 445). This is depicted with a "V" shape or an inverted triangle in its "closed" form. However, the symbol of a chalice can symbolize many different things. For example, a chalice or cup can represent abundance, immortality, fidelity, receptive, passive, feminine, contentment, healing, or victory and can represent the heart, the womb, or even Hercules (Matthews 53-54; Cooper 32, 48; Cirlot 40; Walker 90-91). The Old Testament mentions the "cup of salvation," the cup of the Lord's fury, the "cup of trembling," "cup of consolation," and the "cup of the Lord's right hand" (Psalms 116:13; Isaiah 51:17; Jeremiah 16:7; Habakkuk 2:19). In the New Testament there is a cup of the Lord's suffering, the communion cup which represents the New Covenant, the "cup of the Lord" and a "cup of demons," a cup of the Lord's indignation, and a "cup full of abominations" (Matthew 20:22; 26:39; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25; 10:21; Revelation 14:10; 17:4) "Drinking from a common cup or chalice in a community setting is a widespread sign in various cultures of participation in and allegiance to a commonly recognized idea, religion, etc." (Matthews 53-54).

Just as the chalice has many possible interpretations besides femininity, the blade can represent many things besides masculinity. A blade or knife can represent sacrifice, vengeance, death, severance, division, freeing, martyrdom, circumcision, masculinity, warding off evil, magic, and divination (Matthews 112; Cooper 49, 91-92; Walker 142). Knives have been thought to detect poison and were "characteristic of Celtic women" and were worn by brides in marriage ceremonies (Walker 142). The possible interpretations increase greatly when the sword is considered as a type of blade.

When you combine a triangle pointing up (which, according to Dan Brown, is a form of blade) and another triangle pointing down (Brown's depiction of a chalice) they form a Star of David (hexagram), also known as "*Solomon's Seal*" which marks "*the Holy of Holies, where the male and female deities-Yahweh and Shekinah-were thought to dwell*" (Brown 446). Dan Brown writes that the pentacle "is representative of the *female* half of all things—a concept religious historians call the 'sacred feminine' or the 'divine goddess'" in a pre-Christian world where "male and female were balanced" and "there was harmony in the world" (Brown 36). Yahweh and Shekinah will be discussed below. For now, let us explore the symbols of the pentacle and hexagram.

The hexagram (six-pointed star) and the pentacle or pentagram (five-pointed star), are even more complicated than the chalice and the blade. Not only are there many various interpretations, but the star, having multiple points, "very rarely carried a single meaning" and "nearly always alludes to multiplicity" (Cirlot 309). The hexagram has been used to represent the Jewish Kingdom, alchemy, the human soul, alcohol, the sun shedding its rays, the interpolation of visible and invisible worlds and "a sign of spiritual potential" (Matthews 99; Liungman 300-302; Cooper 83; Cirlot 281-282, 309-310; Walker 69). It also represents the phrase "as above so below" (Cooper 83).

The pentacle, also known as pentagram or pentalpha, can mean many different things. It can represent health, life, knowledge, the five wounds of Christ, human beings or the human microcosm, magic, paganism, devilry, Christian mysticism, the devil, favorable opportunities, parties, the spirit of togetherness, forts and fortresses, the five senses, earth, the five elements: spirit, air, fire, water, and earth (Matthews 148; Liungman 298-300; Cooper 128; Cirlot 198; Walker 7, 70, 72-73). Pentacles have also been used to ward off demonic powers and "female night spirits" (Matthews 148). A pentacle has been used to represent Venus, but "[a]fter the Sumerian epoch in the Euphrates-Tigris region, the Venus goddess" was represented by an eight-pointed star and pentagram as a symbol "fell out of use and did not appear" in that region for about 1,000 years (Liungman 299).

The point is, symbols have different meanings for different people. The fact that various religions, cultures, etc. have symbols in common does not necessarily indicate that they have common beliefs. Care should be taken when interpreting symbols. A symbol may not have the same meaning today that it had in the past. Also, a person reading a dictionary or encyclopedia of symbols will have access to a variety of meanings that ancient cultures may not have been aware of. This can easily lead to a misinterpretation of symbols, resulting in a false understanding of religious beliefs and practices, as is evident in *The Da Vinci Code*.

Judaism and the Sacred Feminine

Christianity is not the only religion attacked in *The Da Vinci Code*. Dan Brown writes that "early Jewish tradition involved ritualistic sex. *In the Temple, no less*. Early Jews believed that the Holy of Holies in Solomon's Temple housed not only God but also His powerful female equal, Shekinah" and "YHWH-the sacred name of God-in fact derived from Jehovah, an androgynous physical union between the masculine *Jah* and the pre-Hebraic name for Eve, *Havah*" (Brown 309).

There are three main issues in regards to Judaism and goddess worship: ritualistic sex as an accepted practice in Judaism, the meaning of the word "Shekinah," and the origin of the words "Yahweh" or "YHWH" and "Jehovah." It is not difficult to find the source material for these ideas. Both of Margaret Starbird's books, *The Goddess in the Gospels* and *The Woman with the Alabaster Jar*, make these same claims concerning "Shekinah" as the "divine consort of Yahweh" (Starbird "Goddess" 26, 150; Starbird "Alabaster Jar" 85-86, 165). Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy state in their book *Jesus and the Lost Goddess*, "At one time Israelites had worshiped the Goddess Asherah as the consort of the Jewish God Jehovah" (Freke 23). In *The Chalice & the Blade* Riane Eisler writes that a bronze serpent was worshiped in the Jewish temple "along with an image of his spouse...known there as the Asherah" (Eisler 88). A similar reference can be found in Joseph Campbell's text, *The Mythic Image*: "For as we are told in II Kings 18: there was a brazen serpent worshiped in the very temple of Jerusalem along with an image of his spouse, the mighty goddess, who was known there as the Asherah" (Campbell 294). In her book, *When God was a Woman*, Merlin Stone writes that "sexual customs" were "an aspect of the religious worship at the temple in Jerusalem" (Stone 161).

None of Dan Brown's named sources discuss the origin of the word "Jehovah," but the following quote from *The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols & Sacred Objects* seems an obvious source:

"Jewish mystical tradition viewed the original Jehovah as an androgyne, his/her name compounded of Jah (*jod*) and the pre-Hebraic name of Eve, Havah or Hawah, rendered *he-vau-he* in Hebrew letters. The four letters together made the sacred tetragrammation, YHWH, the secret name of God" (Walker 195-196).

The word "Shekinah"-also spelled "Shekhinah," "Shechina," or "Schechina"-means "Dwelling" or "Presence" in Hebrew, used in the Aramaic form "Shekinta" in the "interpretive Aramaic translations of the Old Testament known as Targums" as a substitute for the divine name of God and to describe the Spirit or Presence of God, but later "medieval theologians viewed the Shekhinah as a created entity distinct from God" ("Shekhinah." 993).

The word "Targum" means "Translation" or "Interpretation" in Aramaic and is used to describe the interpretations of the Hebrew scriptures into Aramaic since "the time after the Babylonian Exile when Aramaic had superseded Hebrew as the spoken language of the Jews in Palestine" ("Targum." 1077). The Targums "took on the character of paraphrase and commentary" and were part of the "tradition of oral translation and exposition" that "was recognized as authoritative" during the early centuries after the time of Christ and the earliest and best-known written Targum dates from the 3rd century AD ("Targum." 1078).

To understand exactly what "Shekinah" means it is necessary to examine the passages of the Old Testament in which this word was used and determine what was meant in the original Hebrew text. The word "Shekinah" is used most often in the Targums in phrases similar to "I will let My Shekinah dwell" in passages such as Exodus 25:8 (Patai 99). Here the Hebrew verb "shakan," which means "dwell" or "settle," is translated as "I [God] may dwell" in the King James Bible, the Masoretic Text or Jewish Bible, and the Dead Sea Scrolls and as "I [God] will appear" in the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. In this sense it is clear that "Shekinah" represents the Presence of God or Spirit of God. The word "Shekinah" is also used in place of the word "God" in some Targum passages such as Genesis 9:27. In this passage the Hebrew word "Elohim" is translated as "God" in the King James, Masoretic Text, and Septuagint (the *Dead Sea Scrolls Bible* is missing this passage). The "Presence" or "Face" of God ("panim" in Hebrew) is also translated in the Targums using "Shekinah" in passages such as Exodus 33:14. Here the King James, Masoretic Text, and Dead Sea Scrolls all read "My [God's] presence" and the Septuagint translates this as "I [God] Myself." All of these passages in the Hebrew, far from describing a goddess or the "consort of Jehovah," are simply references to the presence of God.

Dan Brown's claims concerning the history of the word "Jehovah" are inaccurate as well. This is the entry for the word "Jehovah" found in *Chamber's Dictionary of Etymology*:

Jehovah (jiho've) *n.* name of God in the Old Testament. 1530 *Iehoua*, in the Tyndale Bible; borrowing of New Latin. The New Latin form *Iehoua* was an erroneous transliteration of the Hebrew divine name *YHWH* (the 'tetragrammation') using the vowel points of Hebrew *adonai* my lord; these vowel points have been originally added to *YHWH* by the Hebrew scribes as a direction to the reader to substitute *adonai* for the 'ineffable name' (i.e., too sacred for utterance) and not as the vowels of the tetragrammation itself, which in the Jewish religion is unpronounceable, though scholars often represent and pronounce it as *Yahweh*. The name is generally assumed to be a formation on the Hebrew verb *hawah* to be, exist."

There are three important things to notice. First, the word "Jehovah" is derived from the word "Yahweh" or "YHWH" and not the other way around. Second, "Jehovah" is based on an "erroneous transliteration." Third, the tetragram (meaning "four letters") of "YHWH" is derived from the verb "to be." Basically, "the Jews refused to pronounce" the sacred name of God. To remind the reader to substitute "the Hebrew words Adonai or Elohim," the vowel signs of those words were added to the name of God which was represented by the consonants "YHWH" (Hebrew writing, like Arabic, consists of consonants with various markings added to indicate the vowel sounds). When the Hebrew Scriptures were translated, the name of God was mistakenly translated as the consonants for "YHWH" with the vowels for "Adonai" ("Jehovah." Merriam-Webster 262-263; "Jehovah." New International 527). In Latin this would be "Iehoua" and in English the resulting word is "Jehovah." This has nothing to do with goddess worship or androgyny.

As for the practice of sexual intercourse in the temple, this is another matter altogether. There is no doubt that pagan religious practices were carried out from time to time by the Israelite or Hebrew people. The question is, was this an accepted part of Judaism? The Hebrew people did transgress, or violate, the commandments of God. This often brought swift, harsh punishment. Merlin Stone, in her book *When God Was A Woman*, states that "sexual customs were quite typical of Canaanite temples and...women of Israel followed this practice *despite the condemnation of the Hebrew Leaders*" (emphasis added) and she goes on to write about the "antagonism of the Hebrews toward this custom" (Stone 160).

Although much has been written about the use of "temple prostitutes" in the religion of the Canaanites, not much is known for certain about their religious practices and some scholars choose to limit themselves "to what is known rather than to launch a frail boat of conjecture upon the treacherous seas of mythological plots and religious observance" (Albright 151). Even less certain is the extent to which these practices had infiltrated the Hebrew people. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* notes that there is "scant evidence" for the "belief in the existence of sacred prostitution in Israel and the ancient Near East" (Coogan "Hebrew Bible" 283).

However widespread the use of temple prostitutes may have been in the ancient Near East, this is a practice that was clearly forbidden by Jewish law. Before discussing the passages of scripture concerning temple prostitutes, some issues concerning translations of the Bible should be cleared up. Most translations don't contain the term "temple prostitute" because the Hebrew word "qadesh" or "qedesha" is generally translated as "prostitute." The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible does translate this term as "temple prostitute," however this translation also notes that "more likely 'qedesha' is a standard euphemism for the coarser term for prostitute" which is "zonah," meaning "whore" (Coogan "Hebrew Bible" 283). But for the sake of argument, and for the purpose of dispensing with the notion that Judaism condoned the use of "temple prostitutes," the New Revised Standard Version will be used for the Bible passages in this section.

Deuteronomy 23:17-18 says, "None of the daughters of Israel shall be a temple prostitute; none of the sons of Israel shall be a temple prostitute. You shall not bring the fee of a prostitute or the wages of a male prostitute into the house of the Lord your God in payment for any vow, for both of these are abhorrent to the Lord your God." God's anger where this practice is concerned is echoed in Michah 1:7. Deuteronomy 12:30-32 warns the Israelites not to be "snared into

imitating" the pagan practices of the people around them. They are told that "the Lord hates" what "they have done for their gods." They are instructed not to do the same, but "diligently observe everything" that God had commanded them to do and not to "add to it or take anything from it." Similar warnings are given in Deuteronomy 7:25 and 12:3.

In Numbers 25:2-5 these warnings had been ignored and "[t]he Lord said to Moses, 'Take all the chiefs of the people, and impale them in the sun before the Lord, in order that the fierce anger of the Lord may be turned away from Israel.'" Moses then instructed the judges to execute all of those who had "yoked themselves" to the god of the neighboring people by participating in their religious practices. In 1 Kings 15:12 Asa, king of Judah, "put away the male temple prostitutes out of the land, and removed all the idols that his ancestors had made" and even "removed his mother Maacah from being queen mother, because she had made an abominable image for Asherah" and destroyed the image (1 Kings 15:12-13). However, he failed to remove the "high places" or local sanctuaries "that had become focal points for idolatry" (1 Kings 15:14; Coogan "Hebrew Bible" 518, 562). Hezekiah, another king of Judah, "removed the high places, broke down the pillars, and cut down the sacred pole [Hebrew word "Asherah" meaning the idol or image of the goddess Asherah]. He broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it" (2 Kings 18:4-5). Because Hezekiah did away with these pagan traditions that had crept into Judaism, "[t]he Lord was with him; wherever he went, he prospered" (2 Kings 18:7).

Clearly Dan Brown has an inaccurate understanding of the words "Shekinah" and "Jehovah." He is not the first to make this mistake, resulting in the erroneous belief that "Shekinah" is a goddess and "Jehovah" is an androgynous name for God. Both of these beliefs are clearly false. There is some truth in the notion that occasionally some of the Israelites participated in pagan practices that may have involved sexual intercourse, but this was never an accepted practice in Judaism and Jewish law clearly forbade this practice as an abomination to God.

The Records of the Life of Jesus & Constantine's Role in the Early Christian Church

According to *The Da Vinci Code*, "Christians and pagans began warring and the conflict grew to such proportions that it threatened to rend Rome in two," so the Emperor Constantine "decided to unify Rome under a single religion. Christianity" (Brown 331-332). He "held a famous ecumenical gathering known as the Council of Nicea" to debate and vote on various aspects of Christianity and at this council Jesus' divinity was decided by "[a] relatively close vote." Thus, "the early Church literally *stole* Jesus from His original followers, hijacking His human message, shrouding it in an impenetrable cloak of divinity" (Brown 333).

Not only does Dan Brown credit Constantine with promoting Jesus to God, he claims that Constantine "collated" the Bible as well. In the novel, he states that the life of Jesus "was recorded by thousands of followers" and "[b]ecause Constantine upgraded Jesus' status almost four centuries *after* Jesus' death, thousands of documents already existed chronicling His life as a *mortal* man. To rewrite the history books, Constantine knew he would need a bold stroke. From this sprang the most profound moment in Christian history...Constantine commissioned and financed a new Bible, which omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ's *human* traits and embellished those gospels that made Him godlike. The earlier gospels were outlawed, gathered

up, and burned" (Brown 334). "More than *eighty* gospels were considered...yet only a relative few were chosen," however, "some of the gospels...managed to survive" (Brown 334). These surviving "gospels" included "[t]he Dead Sea Scrolls" and "the Coptic Scrolls...at Nag Hammadi. In addition to telling the true Grail story, these documents speak of Christ's ministry in very human terms" (Brown 334). He goes on to say, "Anyone who chose the forbidden gospels over Constantine's version was deemed a heretic. The word *heretic* derives from that moment in history. The Latin word *haereticus* means 'choice.' Those who 'chose' the original history of Christ were the world's first *heretics*" (Brown 334).

At issue are the following: the records of the life of Jesus, the "collation" of the Bible, the vote on the deity of Jesus, the destruction of heretical gospels and what is contained in those that survived. To begin with, "Jesus' life was decidedly *not* 'recorded by thousands of followers'" and "[a]lmost all his followers were most likely illiterate" (Ehrman xiv; 99). As for the "[m]ore than *eighty* gospels" considered for inclusion in the Bible, this is a gross exaggeration. Dan Brown's source on this matter is unclear. (Perhaps this number is based on the *Panarion* by Epiphanius of Salamis. This work, written sometime between 374-377 AD argues against eighty various heresies.) There were texts titled as "gospels," besides the four-Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—that were included in the New Testament, but the number of these apocryphal (meaning excluded from the Bible or of questionable authorship) gospels is unknown and we only have evidence of the existence of "a couple of dozen" or so (Ehrman 49). Besides this, "[t]he Gospels of the New Testament are our earliest surviving accounts of the life of Jesus" and "[t]he probability that any of the extra-biblical sources preserve accurate information, otherwise unknown, about the life and teaching of Jesus is very slight, apart from the possibility of a few unparalleled sayings surviving" (Ehrman 78; Blomberg 219). Many "make no pretense of overlapping with the gospel traditions of Jesus' earthly life" (Blomberg 208). Most of these tend to be "more legendary or mythological" in nature and some are "little more than an artificial framework for imparting" certain doctrines (Ehrman 70; Blomberg 208). Some of these surviving gospels will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

There may not have been thousands of records of the life of Jesus or eighty gospels competing for inclusion in the Bible, but there were certainly texts written about Jesus that were not included in the Bible. According to *The Da Vinci Code*, this is evidence that Constantine purposely collated a Bible that portrayed Jesus as God as part of his effort to end the struggle between Christians and pagans. Is there any truth to this account of Constantine's role in the "collation" of the Bible? This question involves three issues: the nature of the struggle between Christians and the pagans of the Roman Empire, the history of the belief in Jesus as divine, and the "collation" of the Bible. Things were certainly not peaceful between the Christians and the pagans in the Roman Empire. But it would be more accurate to say that the pagans, being the majority, wanted to rid themselves of the Christian minority and systematically persecuted them toward that end (Ehrman 6-8; Vidmar 26-27). This persecution increased from 303 until 311 AD when Galerius, Emperor of the East, "issued an edict...halting the persecution" (Vidmar 27). In 313 Constantine, who was Emperor of the West, and Licinius, who later controlled the East, issued the Edict of Milan which granted "full legal toleration for Christianity" (Douglas 255).

As for the deity of Jesus, this was not decided by Constantine. The earliest records of Christianity, found in the New Testament, portray Jesus as divine (Matthew 3:16-17; Mark 1:1;

John 1:1-3; 20:28; Philippians 5:5-7). But the Bible is not the only record of the belief in the divinity of Jesus. In the year 110 AD Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, describes Jesus Christ as "God-and-Man in One" (Ignatius, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, 7.2). Irenaeus writes in *Against Heresies* in 180 AD that "the Son of God...was made the Son of man" in Jesus Christ (Irenaeus 3.19). Pliny, Roman Consul in Bithynia and Pontus, writes to the Emperor Trajan in 112 that the Christians gather in honor of "Christ as if to a god" (Pliny 10:98). It is clear from these various sources that Jesus was worshiped as God by the early Christians, long before the time of Constantine. (For more information on the deity of Jesus read our article: "[How Do I Know That Jesus Was \(And Still Is\) God, Not Just A Prophet Or A Good Man?](#)")

What about the Council of Nicea and the "collation" of the Bible by Constantine? The real problem at the time of Constantine was explaining how it is possible for Jesus to be both God and man. Christians had agreed for centuries that Jesus was divine. "The only question was *how* he was divine" (Ehrman 23). Arius, presbyter of Alexandria, argued that if Jesus is the "only begotten Son" of God, then he must have been created and is not "coeternal with the Father" (Douglas 67). This runs counter to the statement at the beginning of John's gospel that "[i]n the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:1-2, 14). Others believed that "Jesus wasn't human but only seemed to be. He was fully God...Most Christians rejected the views of both...and insisted that in some sense Jesus was both human...and divine" (Ehrman 20).

To resolve this issue, Constantine called a Council of Christian leaders that met in the city of Nicea, now Isnik in modern Turkey, where approximately 300 delegates examined the charge of heresy against Arius (the terms "heresy" and "heretic" will be discussed below), then set about writing a statement that would express in no uncertain terms that Jesus is both God and Man (Douglas "Nicea, Council of" 706). They came up with the Nicene Creed which states, "We believe in one God, the Father...We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in Being with the Father...and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man..." ("Nicene Creed." 810). This creed was adopted by a "vast majority" of the delegates and "it was not a vote on Jesus' divinity" (Ehrman 23).

But what about Constantine's role in "collating" the Bible? Actually, this process is called the formation of the "canon." The word "canon" means "the list of books recognized as worthy to be included in the sacred writings of a worshipping community" (Bruce *Canon* 17). The process of forming the New Testament canon "began centuries before Constantine and was not completed until well after his death. He in fact had nothing to do with it" (Ehrman 24). The "criteria of canonicity" are: apostolic authority, antiquity, orthodoxy, catholicity or traditional use, and inspiration (Bruce *Canon* 255-269).

Apostolic authority is necessary because "Jesus himself left nothing in writing," therefore, "the most authoritative writings available to the church were those which came from his apostles" (Bruce *Canon* 256). This means that only the texts written by "an apostle-or at least by a companion of the apostles" could be considered (Ehrman 88). Antiquity is required because "[i]f a writing was the work of an apostle or of someone closely associated with an apostle, it must

belong to the apostolic age" (Bruce *Canon* 259). In other words, "[a] sacred authority had to date back to near the time of Jesus" and could not be "a recent production" (Ehrman 87). Orthodoxy means that the doctrines contained in the text must be consistent with "the faith set forth in the undoubted apostolic writings and maintained in the churches which had been founded by apostles" (Bruce *Canon* 260). Catholicity or "traditional use" means that a text must "have widespread acceptance among established churches to be accepted into the canon. In other words, they had to be 'catholic,' the Greek term for 'universal'" (Ehrman 88). As for the issue of inspiration, "[t]he work of the Holy Spirit is not discerned by means of the common tools of the historian's trade" so "at this stage inspiration is no longer a criterion of canonicity: it is a corollary of canonicity" (Bruce *Canon* 281; 268). This is to say that historians cannot determine whether a text is inspired by God, but inspiration can "serve theologians as an answer to the question: Why are these books different from all other books?" (Bruce *Canon* 268). Paul says, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16).

But is there any historical evidence of this process? Sometime around 180 AD Irenaeus writes of "the Gospels of the Apostles...which have been handed down to us from the apostles" and "these Gospels alone are true and reliable" (Irenaeus 3.9). He also writes that God "has given us the Gospel under four aspects, but bound together by one Spirit" (Irenaeus 3.8). These four gospels he speaks of are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. An eighth century list, which appears to be based on an earlier second century list, includes most of the modern New Testament plus the *Wisdom of Solomon* and the Apocalypse of Peter "noting some dissent" while excluding "Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, and one of the Johannine epistles" although it is not clear which one (Ehrman 87). Eusebius, the "Father of Church History," writes that "the New Testament writings" include "[t]he quartet of the gospels, followed by the Acts of the Apostles. The next place in the list goes to Paul's epistles, and after them we must recognize the epistle called 1 John; likewise 1 Peter. To these may be added, if it is thought proper, the Revelation of John" (Eusebius 3.25) He goes on to include "the epistles known as James, Jude, and 2 Peter, and those called 2 and 3 John" as "disputed, yet familiar to most" along with "the 'Gospel of Hebrews', a book which has a special appeal for those Hebrews who have accepted Christ" (Eusebius 3.25). The canon wasn't officially "closed" until 367 when Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, "wrote a letter to the churches of Egypt under his jurisdiction, in which he...included among his advice a list of books that he felt were appropriate to be read in church as the canonical scriptures. He listed our twenty-seven books of the New Testament" (Ehrman 93-94). (For more information on the Bible read our article: ["Is There Even One Mistake In The Bible?"](#))

What about the accounts of Jesus as a "mortal man" that survive in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi Library? To begin with, "[t]he Dead Sea Scrolls do not contain any Gospels, or in fact any documents that speak of Christ or Christianity at all; they are Jewish" (Ehrman 26). These scrolls are "a cache of ancient documents dating from the first century B.C. to the first century A.D." that were "found in eleven caves near the Qumran settlement on the northwest shore of the Dead Sea...in the spring of 1947" (Hoerth 150). They have "been of enormous value in the reassessment of Jewish sectarianism in the Second Temple period (which includes the time of the New Testament)...however, there is no evidence from Qumran that bears directly on either Jesus of Nazareth or the New Testament. The many outlandish claims of Christianity's

dependence on Qumran published by early sensationalists have, upon more mature investigation of the scrolls, been shown to be without foundation" (Hoerth 152-153).

The Nag Hammadi Library is a collection of religious texts discovered in 1945 near the village of Nag Hammadi along the Nile in Upper Egypt (Ehrman 37). The books or "codices" (plural of "codex") are leather bound and were written by hand in Coptic (an ancient Egyptian language using mainly Greek characters) sometime after 348 AD, although most are translations of Greek texts that may have been written as early as the second century AD (Ehrman 39-40).

Most of these documents are Gnostic in nature. The word "Gnostic" comes from "*gnosis*, a Greek word that means 'knowledge' but knowledge of a very specific kind—a direct inner experience of the divine. The closest equivalent in common parlance is probably *enlightenment* as described in a Hindu or Buddhist context" (Smoley 4). Although there were sects of heretical (a term that will be discussed below) Christians known as Gnostics, "Gnosticism seems not to have been in its essence just an alternate form of Christianity. Rather it was a radical trend...that swept through late antiquity and emerged within Christianity, Judaism, Neoplatonism, Hermetism, and the like" and though "the Nag Hammadi library seems to have been collected in terms of Christian Gnosticism, it is sometimes difficult to conceive of some of the texts...being used by persons who thought of themselves as Christian" (Robinson 10). There are some beliefs that were common among the various Gnostic groups. They believed in a physical world that is inherently evil and a spirit world that is good. The material world was not created by the true God, but an evil being. Sophia, a goddess whose name means "wisdom," exists in the material world within the bodies of humans. The humans who have this "spark of the divine" can escape the material world through the knowledge or "gnosis" of the origin of this "divine spark." This knowledge can only come from a "divine redeemer who brings the knowledge of salvation" (Ehrman 42-43). Some of the texts in the Nag Hammadi Library are "noncanonical Gospels that appear to represent a Gnostic perspective. Far from portraying Christ as human...these documents are more interested in his divine qualities" (Ehrman 45). The historical reliability of the accounts of the lives of Jesus and Mary Magdalene contained in the Nag Hammadi Library will be discussed below.

Dan Brown is not far off, however, in his definition of the word "heretic." According to *Chamber's Dictionary of Etymology*, "heretic" comes from the Latin word "haereticus" which comes from the Greek word "hairesis" meaning "able to choose." However, the use of this word in the sense of someone who chooses a belief that is contrary to the accepted or "orthodox" view predates Constantine and the Council of Nicea. This term is used in the New Testament by the Apostle Paul. He writes, "But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain. A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject, knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself" (Titus 3:10). The word "heresy" can be found in Acts 24:14, 1 Corinthians 11:19, Galatians 5:20 and 2 Peter 2:1 (not to mention Irenaeus who wrote *Against Heresies* in about 180 AD).

It should also be noted that *The Da Vinci Code* mentions "the legendary *Q' Document*" which Dan Brown describes as "a book of Jesus' teachings, possibly written in His own hand" (Brown 256). Also, Constantine is characterized as a "lifelong pagan who was baptized on his deathbed,

too weak to protest" (Brown 232). Although this description of Constantine is somewhat inaccurate, Christianity does not stand or fall on the validity of Constantine's conversion so this article will not delve into that matter. It should be said, however, that the Q document is only "a hypothetical document that scholars have posited as having been available to Matthew and Luke, principally a collection of the sayings of Jesus. Roman Catholic scholars think the same of it as non-Catholics; there's nothing secretive about it" (Ehrman xv). There is no historical evidence that such a document ever existed.

It has been shown that Constantine did not "collate" the Bible, Jesus was believed to be divine long before the Council of Nicea, and the records of the life of Jesus, other than the gospels included in the New Testament, were produced later and do not speak of Jesus as a mere human or provide historical accounts of the lives of Jesus and Mary Magdalene. But what can be known about the lives of Jesus and Mary Magdalene from reliable sources?

The Truth About Mary Magdalene and Jesus

To evaluate the sources, the following guidelines will be followed: 1) earlier sources will be considered more reliable than later sources, 2) accounts that are corroborated by other, independent accounts will be deemed accurate, 3) information that might be thought of as embarrassing or that runs counter to the message the writer intended to express are less likely to have been fabricated, and 3) events that don't make sense in the context of the time and place in which they are purported to have occurred (Ehrman 122-126; Barnett 9-15). Also, accounts that defy logic, such as a word-for-word account of a conversation to which the writer of the text was not privy and no plausible explanation can be found for its transmission from the parties involved to the author, will be considered inaccurate. Although Christians believe the Bible to be the inspired Word of God and therefore accurate and reliable, other religions, such as Gnostics, consider their sacred texts to be inspired as well. To avoid the theological debates that arise from such differences of opinion between religions, sources will be evaluated based on information that can be agreed upon without regard to religious belief. Therefore it will be necessary to view documents such as the gospels found in the New Testament from the viewpoint of the nonbeliever. This is done to establish common ground as a basis for discussion and in no way indicates that sources from the Bible that are excluded are inaccurate (for more information read our article: "[Is There Even One Mistake In The Bible?](#)").

The Life of Mary Magdalene

It may surprise some people to know that there is very little written in ancient sources about Mary Magdalene. She is only mentioned by name twelve times in the New Testament. Two of the Gnostic gospels found in the Nag Hammadi library discuss Mary Magdalene as well. She is also mentioned in the apocryphal "Gospel of Peter" (Ehrman 160-161). In addition, some of the early Christian leaders wrote about her. All of these sources, and some archaeological evidence, will be examined to extract any information on the life of Mary Magdalene. The goal is to find any biographical information such as birth, death, family, close personal relations, place of residence, marital status, offspring, and major life events. Besides this, any historical or geographical references that can place her within the context of specific time and location will be helpful. The sources will be examined using a set of guidelines that can be applied to all of them

and determine which can provide reliable information. Then the information extracted will be compiled to present the sum total of the historical information about the life of Mary Magdalene.

There are two surviving copies of the *Gospel of Mary*. The oldest is "only a single, fragmentary leaf written in Greek, dated to the early third century" and the other is part of a "fifth-century Coptic codex," missing "considerable portions of the text," which is part of the Papyrus Berolinensis 8502 also called the Berlin Gnostic Papyrus. Both are probably copies of a document "originally written in Greek sometime in the second century" (Robinson 524).

The Gospel of Mary "belongs to the genre of the gnostic dialogue" as it contains the account of a secret revelation of knowledge to Mary Magdalene, then a "confrontation of Mary with Peter" (Robinson 524). According to this account Mary Magdalene is loved by the Savior "more than the rest of women" and she "saw the Lord in a vision" (Robinson 525). After she has told the disciples of her conversation with the Lord, Andrew expresses doubt, saying, "I at least do not believe that the Savior said this. For certainly these teachings are strange ideas" and "Peter answered and spoke concerning these same things" (Robinson 526). Then Levi [also known as Matthew, See Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27, 29] comes to her defense saying, "But if the Savior made her worthy, who are you indeed to reject her...let us...preach the gospel, not laying down any other rule or other law beyond what the Savior said" (Robinson 527).

Peter and Andrew often "represent orthodox positions" in Gnostic literature (Robinson 524). This text seems to be an argument against orthodox Christianity and an attempt to dispel any concerns that orthodox believers might have concerning Gnostic teachings as "strange ideas." Because this text was written long after Mary Magdalene must have died, and it could be read as an allegory representing the relationship between orthodox Christianity and Gnosticism, this information is suspect to say the least. Besides this, the only information learned from the *Gospel of Mary* is that she was a close disciple of Jesus who understood his teachings more than the others.

The *Gospel of Philip* is "a Gnostic work, possibly of the early third century" that is part of the Nag Hammadi Library (Ehrman 177). This is a somewhat difficult text to understand, composed as "a compilation of statements pertaining primarily to the meaning and value of sacraments" and a "few sayings and stories" that are "not set in any kind of narrative framework" (Robinson 139). This document mentions that "[t]here were three who always walked with the lord: Mary his mother and her sister and Magdalene, the one who was called his companion. His sister and his mother and his companion were each a Mary" (Robinson 145).

The *Gospel of Philip* also contains another reference to Mary Magdalene that is often translated as: "And the companion of the Saviour is Mary Magdalene. Christ loved her more than all the disciples and used to kiss her often on her mouth" (Brown 246). The actual text is missing several fragments and reads: "And the companion of the [. . .] Mary Magdalene. [. . . loved] her more than [all] the disciples [and used to] kiss her [often] on her [. . .]" (Robinson 148). The brackets represent missing text or words that are "uncertain" from the fragments that do exist. The only thing that can be said with any certainty is that this text identifies Mary Magdalene as someone's companion and that she gets kissed on some part of the body. It should also be

mentioned that, according to *The Gospel of Philip*, Gnostics "kiss one another" to represent the passing of "the word" by which people are "nourished from the mouth" (Robinson 145).

This same passage from *The Gospel of Philip* is used in *The Da Vinci Code* to support the claim that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married. Dan Brown writes, "As any Aramaic scholar will tell you, the word *companion*, in those days, literally meant *spouse*" (Brown 246). There are a couple of problems with this statement. First, *The Gospel of Philip* is written in Coptic, not Aramaic, and is most likely a translation of an earlier Greek document. Second, the word used here is the Greek word "koinonos" which means "a partner, associate, comrade, companion" (Layton 171; Thayer 352; see Matthew 23:30; Luke 5:10; 1 Corinthians 10:18, 20; 2 Corinthians 1:7, 8:23; Hebrews 10:33; 1 Peter 5:1, 1:4). As with *The Gospel of Mary*, this document is written too late to be of much use in reconstructing the life of Mary Magdalene and only confirms that she was a follower of Jesus and suggests that she was the recipient of some sort of secret knowledge or gnosis from the Savior.

There are other accounts of a confrontation between Peter and Mary, probably allegory for the conflict between Gnostics and orthodox Christians, found in *The Gospel of Thomas* and *The Gospel of the Egyptians*, both part of the Nag Hammadi Library, and *Pistis Sophia* or *The Fall of Sophia*, another Gnostic text (Robinson 524). Besides the Gnostic texts and the New Testament documents, the only other ancient references to Mary Magdalene are written by Christian theologians centuries after the fact. Although theologians such as Origen (185-254 AD) recognized Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany (sister of Martha and Lazarus) and the penitent woman who anointed Jesus' feet in Luke 7:37-48 as three distinct people, Pope Gregory I (540-604 AD) identified them as the same woman in a sermon ("Mary Magdalene." 697). Thus the "Prayer of the Assembly" for the mass on her feast day, July 22, used to read: "May we be helped, Lord, by the prayers of blessed Mary Magdalene, for it was by them that you called back to life from the grave her brother Lazarus four days after his death..." and the text of the Gospel lesson was found in Luke 7:36-50 (St. Andrews 1375). This error was corrected "in 1969 with the reform of the Roman Missal and the Roman Calendar. Since then the gospel reading for Mary Magdalene's feast has been chapter 20, verses 1-2 and 11-18, of the Gospel of John" which "tell of her coming to Jesus' tomb early Sunday morning, finding it empty and...staying behind, weeping" ("Scholars seek").

This brings us to the Bible. The Gospel of Matthew does not name its author, but it is widely believed to be the work of the Apostle Matthew the tax collector, also known as Levi. The familiarity with Jewish history and customs suggests that the writer is a Palestinian Jew and a tax collector would have been literate. Also, the Gospel of Matthew contains many references to money and pays special attention to Capernum which was Matthew's hometown (Radmacher 1573). The writer of Gospel of Mark is also unnamed, but early Christian writers credit it to Mark, whose Jewish name was John, Peter's interpreter who accompanied Barnabus and Paul on their first missionary journey (Radmacher 1636). The Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts were written by the same unnamed author, but early Christian writers attribute it to Luke, a highly educated Gentile who accompanied Paul on some of his travels (Radmacher 1682). The Gospel of John doesn't name its author directly, but a conversation found in John 21:19-24 indicates that this text was written by "the disciple whom Jesus loved," otherwise known as John (Radmacher 1754).

Just as their authors are not named, these documents don't state exactly when they were written. The fact that the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD is not mentioned is strong evidence that the Gospel of Matthew was written sometime between 50 and 60 AD (Radmacher 1573). Similarly, the Gospel of Mark was probably written sometime after Peter's death in 64 or 65 and since there is no mention of the destruction of Jerusalem it is not unreasonable to date it before 70 AD. Because the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts have no mention the destruction of Jerusalem or the deaths of Peter and Paul. And Acts, which was written after the Gospel of Luke, records Paul's first Roman imprisonment in 62 AD it was likely written sometime between 62 and 70 AD (Radmacher 1682). The Gospel of John is usually dated sometime between 85 and 95 AD (Radmacher 1754).

These are considered conservative estimates that can easily be supported by the internal evidence, but more liberal scholars date the Gospel of Matthew between about 90-100, the Gospel of Mark between 66 and 70, the Gospel of Luke between 70 and 95, and the Gospel of John at about 80-90 (Coogan "New Testament" 8, 57, 94, 147). A majority of scholars date the Gospels as: Matthew 85-90, Mark 65, Luke 80-85, and John 90-100. Still others "date the first three Gospels rather earlier: Mark around AD 64 or 65, Luke shortly before 70, and Matthew shortly after 70" (Bruce *New Testament Documents* 7).

Clement, writing in about 96 AD refers Matthew, Mark and Luke, and Ignatius (about 108 AD) and Polycarp (around 110) quote from or refer to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John (Barnett 38-39). This external evidence indicates that Matthew, Mark, and Luke were written before 96 AD and the Gospel of John was written some time before 108 AD, making these the oldest records of the life of Mary Magdalene.

As for the number of surviving ancient manuscripts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John from which the original text may be reconstructed,

"We can appreciate how bountiful the attestation is for the New Testament if we compare the surviving textual materials of other ancient authors who wrote during the early centuries of Christianity. For example, the compendious *History of Rome*, written in Latin by Velleius Paterculus (Born c. 20 B.C.; died after A.D. 30), survived in only one incomplete manuscript, discovered in 1515...The surviving texts of the famous Latin historian Cornelius Tacitus (flor. c. 100 A.D.) reached the age of printing by three tenuous threads. Of the fourteen books of his *Histories*, only four and a half survive; of the sixteen books of his *Annals*, ten survive in full and two in parts...

"In contrast with these figures, the textual critic of the New Testament is embarrassed by the wealth of material. Furthermore, the work of many ancient authors has been preserved only in manuscripts that date from the Middle Ages (sometimes the late Middle Ages), far removed from the time at which they lived and wrote. On the contrary, the time between the composition of the books of the New Testament and the earliest extant copies is relatively brief. Instead of the lapse of a millennium or more, as is the case of not a few classical authors, several papyrus manuscripts of portions of the New Testament are extant that were copied within a century or so after the composition of the original documents (Metzger 50-51).

It is clear that the New Testament documents are the most reliable records of the life of Mary Magdalene, but what do they say? Matthew 27:55-56 says that "many women who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, were there [at the crucifixion] looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses [some texts read Joseph], and the mother of Zebedee's sons [James and John]. Matthew 27:61 states that "Mary Magdalene was there [at the burial], and the other Mary sitting opposite the tomb." And Matthew 28:1-8 says, "Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door..." and the angel tells the women that Jesus "is risen from the dead" and instructs them to tell the other disciples. Mary Magdalene is not mentioned by name after this point in the Gospel of Matthew, but 28:9-10 states that the women encountered Jesus and "held Him by the feet and worshiped Him," then Jesus told them to instruct the disciples to assemble in Galilee.

Mark 15:40-41 states, "There were also women looking on from afar [at the crucifixion], among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joses, and Salome, who also followed Him and ministered to Him when He was in Galilee, and many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem." Mark 15:47 says that "Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses observed where He was laid." The Gospel of Mark records the discovery of the empty tomb as such: "Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome brought spices that they might come and anoint Him...but when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away...And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe..." Then they are told that Jesus has risen and instructed to tell the disciples to assemble in Galilee (Mark 16:1-8). Some scholars question the authenticity of verses 9-20 because "[t]hey are lacking in Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, although nearly all other manuscripts of Mark contain them" (Radmacher 1680). (For more information read our article: "In Defense of Mark 16:9-20 and John 7:53-8:11") Mark 16:9-11 says, "Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons. She went and told those who had been with Him, as they mourned and wept. And when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe."

The Gospel of Luke says, "Now it came to pass, afterward, that He went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with Him, and certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities-Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons, and Johanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who provided for Him from their substance" (Luke 8:1-3). Mary Magdalene is not mentioned by name in Luke 23:48, 55-56: "But all His acquaintances, and the women who followed Him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things [the crucifixion]...And the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment." Luke 24:1-11 records the discovery of the empty tomb as follows: "Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb...found the stone rolled away...did not find the body of the Lord Jesus" Then two men "in shining garments...said to them, 'Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen!' ...It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with

them, who told these things to the apostles. And their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them."

The Gospel of John says, "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene" (John 19:25). John 20:1-2 also records the discovery of the empty tomb: "Now the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. Then she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him.'" And John 20:11-18 says that "Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb." She sees two angels who ask her why she is weeping. She says, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him." Just then she turns to find Jesus standing there, only she assumes it is the gardener and asks where the body has been taken to. Jesus calls her by name and she responds with "Rabboni!" which means "Teacher," then Jesus instructs her to tell the disciples and she does just that.

All four accounts indicate that Mary Magdalene was present at the crucifixion. Matthew and Mark name Mary Magdalene as a witness to the burial, and Luke implies the same by naming her among the women that had earlier observed where the body had been laid. All four state the Mary Magdalene went to the tomb on the first day of the week, found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty, encountered at least one figure dressed in white or shining robes and was instructed to tell the others. Matthew, John, and the disputed passage in Mark indicate that she encountered the resurrected Jesus personally. Luke and the disputed passage in Mark indicate that the other disciples did not believe the reports of the resurrection initially and Luke and John state that Peter went personally to verify these reports.

Besides these events, Matthew 27:55-56, Mark 15:40-41, and Luke 8:1-3, all mention Mary Magdalene as one of the women who provided for Jesus during the time He spent preaching in Galilee. Her name tells something about her as well. The word "Magdalene" means "a woman of Magdala" (Thayer 385). According to the Talmud, a collection of commentaries by Jewish scholars, Magdala was on the west side of the Sea of Galilee (Bauer 484). This is one of sixteen ancient harbors that has been excavated on the shores of the Galilee in recent years (Hoerth 160). This puts Mary Magdalene's hometown nearly 100 miles north of Jerusalem and its suburb of Bethany where Lazarus, Martha, and Mary lived. It is also interesting to note that Mary Magdalene is always named as the "woman of Magdala" and not as somebody's wife or sister, as is seen with most of the women named in the New Testament. This would suggest that she was unattached, meaning either single, divorced, or a widow. She must also have had sufficient resources to provide for Jesus during his ministry in Galilee.

To believe some portions of these accounts, such as the resurrection of Jesus, requires faith. Although the guidelines mentioned above require that those events be excluded in the reconstruction of the life of Mary Magdalene, this does not suggest that they did not occur, and all of the New Testament documents are in agreement that Jesus rose from the dead. However, there is absolutely no reason to doubt that Mary Magdalene and the other women *claimed* that

Jesus had risen from the dead. That these claims were made can be counted as history, even if some may question the validity of such claims.

From these few references it is clear that Mary Magdalene was an inhabitant of the town of Magdala on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. She was a follower of Jesus and provided for him, along with several other women, from her resources. She was present at the crucifixion along with some of these other women and witnessed the burial as well. Knowing the location of the tomb, she went with the other women on the first day of the week, after the Sabbath, intending to anoint Jesus' body. She later reported to the disciples that the tomb was empty, the stone was rolled away, and Jesus had risen. Some of the sources indicate that Mary Magdalene claimed to have had a conversation with Jesus after the resurrection. The disciples were reluctant to believe her story so they went to the tomb to see for themselves.

What these sources, from the Bible and the Gnostic texts, *do not* indicate is that Mary Magdalene was married to anyone, Jesus included. There is not a single reference to a pregnancy in any of the sources. She is clearly *not* Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, and there is no indication that she is the penitent sinner who anointed Jesus' feet. No "elaborate genealogy" exists that places her in "the House of Benjamin" either (Brown 248).

There may be some truth to the claim that Mary Magdalene was the victim of a "smear campaign" since she was wrongly accused of prostitution by Pope Gregory I and other misinformed theologians, but this seems to be an honest mistake due to the difficulty involved in keeping the various women named Mary straight. Even the writer of the Gnostic *Gospel of Philip* felt the need to clarify that there are other women named Mary. Besides, Pope Gregory's sermon certainly didn't make her less popular with Christians. "Her popularity in England is reflected in the 187 ancient dedications of churches and in her universal appearance in medieval calendars" (Farmer 358). Catholics celebrate the feast day of St. Mary Magdalene every 22nd of July and she "is considered more important for her role in telling the Apostles about Christ's Resurrection" (Farmer 357-358).

The life of Jesus

There has been much written about the life of Jesus so this article will concentrate on specific claims made in *The Da Vinci Code*. (For more information on the life of Jesus see our articles: "[Four In One Gospel \(Part One\)-The Crucifixion](#)," "[Four In One Gospel \(Part Two\)The Resurrection](#)," "[Four In One Gospel \(Part Three\)Birth of Our Lord](#)," "[How Do I Know That Jesus Is God?](#)," and "[I dare you to disprove the resurrection of Jesus Christ!](#)")

The Da Vinci Code claims that "the marriage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene is part of the historical record" and that "the social decorum during that time virtually forbid a Jewish man to be unmarried" and "celibacy was condemned" by Jewish custom (Brown 245). It has already been shown that none of the ancient historical accounts of Jesus, including the Gnostic texts found in the Nag Hammadi Library, mention a marriage or a wife (Ehrman 153). This disproves the claim that such a marriage "is part of the historical record." But what about the condemnation of celibacy? Actually historians "do know of Jewish men from the time and place of Jesus who were single, and it is quite clear that they were not 'condemned' for it" (Ehrman

155). As a matter of fact, ancient records indicate that the Essenes, who are thought to have produced the Dead Sea Scrolls, "shunned marriage" and "renounced sex" (Ehrman 156). It is known that "some branches of the Essenes eschewed marriage, and to keep up their number adopted other people's children" (Allegro 158). Also, Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth, "But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion" (1 Corinthians 7:8).

What is most amazing is that the unsubstantiated claims of *The Da Vinci Code* are not the first of their kind and are by no means the most outlandish. One of Dan Brown's sources, *Jesus and the Lost Goddess*, goes so far as to say, "Was there an 'historical' Jesus? The evidence suggests there was not" (Freke 57). Is there any evidence of the existence of Jesus besides what the early Christians and sects such as the Gnostics wrote? Accounts of the beliefs of early Christians from pagan sources have already been discussed, but there are ancient historical records that are evidence that Jesus did in fact exist. The Jewish historian Josephus, writing sometime in the early nineties, said that James, "the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ" was brought before the Sanhedrin, an assembly of judges (*Antiquities* 20:200). Besides this, Tacitus, in his *Annals of Imperial Rome* mentions "the notoriously depraved Christians (as they were popularly called)" and "[t]heir originator, Christ" who "had been executed in Tiberius' reign by the governor of Judaea, Pontius Pilatus" and he goes on to describe some of the persecutions of the Christians (*Annals* 15:44).

Conclusion

Much has been written about the life of Jesus, some based on historical evidence and some pure speculation. It is clear that *The Da Vinci Code* falls in the latter category. Although Dan Brown seems to have done a great deal of research, he is guilty of misrepresenting the facts, either unknowingly (by not choosing his sources carefully) or intentionally. In either case, it is clear that there is little truth to the "Fact" statement found on page one of his book. It has been shown that the descriptions of artwork and documents are not accurate and there is no truth to the notion that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married. Although it takes faith to believe that Jesus is the Son of God who came to the earth, died for the forgiveness of sins, and was raised from the dead, the biographical information about Jesus that is found in the New Testament is a matter of history. Historical evidence shows that Jesus existed and was crucified, even though some people have attempted to eliminate God's plan of salvation by rewriting history. This is the true conspiracy and these fiction writers and pseudo-scholars are the propagators of half-truths and sources of disinformation.

Suggested Reading

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