

So What About that Book...

## **“The Davinci Code”?**

**By Dr. Calvin P. Habig**

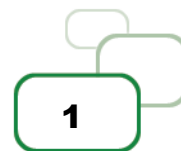


Pacesetter Press  
12899 SW Bradley Lane  
Portland, OR 97224

[cal.habig@gmail.com](mailto:cal.habig@gmail.com)

t:503/968-9839

f: 503/9689-9110



I very seldom make editorial comments on books that are “making the rounds.” On the one hand I think that informed believers need to make up their own minds—I refused to be the guru who tells people what they should read or not read or what they should think about what they read. In addition, the number of books that people ask me about is far greater than I could ever read! If I give people the impression that I can read everything that they want to pass on to me, I will have committed to an impossible task!

On the other hand, I have had a remarkable number of people at TCC comment on *The Davinci Code* by Dan Brown and ask what I think. Different ones have offered to loan me their copies on the condition they can talk with me about it. The fact that it has remained on the NY Times bestseller list for ten months, still stands as the number one book on that list, is the number one selling book at Amazon.com, has provoked cover stories on both Time and Life and has produced at least one television special speaks to the widespread influence the book is having on our culture. The furor over the book does not seem destined to subside anytime soon with reports that director Ron Howard is going to direct a movie version of the book.

More seriously, the book (if accepted as in anyway reality) has caused many to question the historical basis of their faith. One man wrote this:

"Honestly, [reading the book] shook my whole faith. I realize that the book is fiction, but much of what he wrote about seemed like it was based on historical facts aside from the characters. Since I am not a Christian scholar I don't even know where to begin to refute these claims. As the Catholic Church holds much of the evidence that would refute the drivel in *The Davinci Code*, I was wondering if you could point me in the right direction to a scholarly non-Christian book that might help me make better sense of the whole historical chain of events. If Christianity is nothing more than a big accommodation, it becomes relegated to a lifestyle choice and not a religion, which I do not want to believe."

Providentially, I came across a copy of *The Davinci Code* for \$.75 at a local bookstore. While I was not willing to spend the \$24.95 cover price, \$.75 seemed too good a deal to pass up! Over the Christmas holidays, I was finally able to finish the book. On the level of a thriller/mystery, it is a fairly easy read (along the lines of a John Grisham novel). As a light novel, it is entertaining and little that is offensive in terms of language or gratuitous sex. The first warning, however, is that the book is blatantly anti-Catholic. While I obviously have doctrinal differences with the Catholic Church, (or else I would be a Catholic!) the put-downs and unfounded accusations were simply too much for me.

The other caveat is that *The Davinci Code* is a novel. It is a novel that is based on a few historical facts/situations. The greatest problem with *The Davinci Code* is exactly at this point. It is a novel BASED ON historical facts and situations. But Dan Brown does not differentiate historical facts and situations from creative facts and incidents (which

he makes up or twists to fit his plot). In presenting them all as facts, he tells a good story, but causes great confusion to people who do not know the historical facts to be able to separate fact from fiction. For me, even I don't know all of the historical situations which he describes. But the fact that I DO KNOW the reality of some of them and see how he has twisted those facts makes me suspicious of other "facts" that he presents.

*(Note: a number of comments I make below are derived from a helpful article in ChristianityToday.com entitled "Breaking the Davinci Code". The web address can be found below.)*

The greatest of these dubious facts is his thesis that the early church saw Jesus Christ as a great, moral, but totally human, teacher. He posits that Roman emperor Constantine called together a meeting of bishops in 325 A.D. at the city of Nicaea (in modern-day Turkey) and pressured them to declare Jesus divine, to gather together a canon of books that supported that theory (what we call the New Testament) and call all other books which described Jesus as simply a wonderful human teacher as heretical. If books proposed to be included in the New Testament were not strong enough on the divinity of Jesus, then they were edited so that they were.

Typical statements of the theory (dialog from the book):

*"My dear....until that moment in history, Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet....a great and powerful man, but a man nevertheless. A mortal.'*

*'Not the Son of God?'*

*'Right.' Teabing said. 'Jesus' establishment as 'the Son of God' was officially proposed and voted on by the Council of Nicaea.'*

*'Hold on. You're saying Jesus' divinity was the result of a **vote**?'*

One purpose to this supposed conspiracy was to hide the "fact" that Jesus had married Mary Magdalene, had sired a child and that Mary (as his wife and co-equal) was the primary apostle after his death. The lineage of Jesus and Mary supposedly continues down to the current day and the worship of the "sacred feminine" and the hunt for the descendents of Jesus and Mary is what is called the "Search for the Holy Grail." (Why it is described with that term that is too complicated to describe here).

Several problems arise, and most of them deal with the reliability of scripture and the divinity of Jesus. A quick look at biblical history quickly shows Brown's fallacies. He is correct about the fact that Constantine did call a council at Nicaea in 325 A.D. And it did have to do with the divinity of Jesus. A teacher named Arius had arisen who questioned the divinity of Jesus. But opposite to how Brown presents it, it was because the church overwhelmingly ACCEPTED the divinity of Jesus and Arius challenged that, that the council was called.

Nor was the purpose of the Nicaean council to determine a canon (list of books which were considered inspired by God and thus should be in the New Testament). The process of deciding on a list of books to be considered "inspired by God" had been in process for two hundred years prior to Nicaea and was pretty much complete. At the Council of Nicaea the only debates about what books should be in the Christian scriptures had to do with the books of Hebrews and Revelation, both of which because it was uncertain who had written them.

In 144 A.D. in reaction to an anti-Semite named Marcion who created his own list of "divinely inspired books" church leaders began in earnest to study which books should be included in a Christian canon. The major criterion was whether or not the book was written by an apostle or a close associate of an apostle. By 190 A.D. this process was mostly complete. There were a couple of books that were later removed, but the list looks much like the New Testament list we have today.

The second charge that the books were edited to reflect this "newly adopted" theory of Jesus' divinity is easily dismissed. Archaeology and the study of ancient manuscripts of the Bible shows that the doctrines found in today's New Testament are the same as the doctrines taught in the documents used by the early church. The continuing work of examining early copies of the New Testament has been going on for several hundred years. We have fragments of copies of the original New Testament books going back into the first century. (The earliest have been carbon-dated to show they come from within 30-40 years of the time of Jesus.) It can be stated conclusively that the text of the New Testament as we have it today is amazingly the same as the early copies and fragments that we find archaeologically. There is simply NO evidence of tampering with the doctrines found in the New Testament books. While there are "textual differences" they consist almost entirely of switched words, misspellings, words left out, or homonyms. (The early texts were copied by scribes while one person read the text. It sometimes happened that the reader would read one word and the scribe would write down a homonym or a word that sounded very much like the word read.) These "textual differences" are easily identified. It can be conclusively stated that NONE of these differences affect one basic doctrine taught by the church.

Brown shows his lack of research in declaring that certain original New Testament books were found in the Dead Sea scrolls that showed the lie the church had been promulgating. (The Dead Sea scrolls were a large library of ancient scrolls that were found hidden in eleven caves in the area of Khirbet Qumran on the shores of the Dead Sea shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans). The Dead Sea Scrolls are a huge find archaeologically, but mostly because they back up the accuracy of the Bible we have. All of the canonical books of the Old Testament are found in the Dead Sea Scrolls (except the book of Esther), and they validate that the text of the Old Testament that we use today is accurate. A quick look at any description of the Dead

Sea scrolls show that they all pre-date Jesus' birth and are all Jewish documents. No Christian documents were in this library. It was the library of a Jewish sect and all of the documents are in Hebrew or Aramaic. None of the New Testament documents were originally written in those two languages.

The last issue I will discuss (but not the final doctrinal objection) is the idea that the church has been suppressing the worship of the "sacred feminine" since the Council of Nicaea.

"The Grail is literally the ancient symbol for womanhood, and the Holy Grail represents the sacred feminine and the goddess, which of course has now been lost, virtually eliminated by the Church. The power of the female and her ability to produce life was once very sacred, but it posed a threat to the rise of the predominantly male Church, and so the sacred feminine was demonized and called unclean. It was man, not God, who created the concept of 'original sin,' whereby Eve tasted of the apple and caused the downfall of the human race. Woman, once the sacred giver of life, was now the enemy" (p. 238).

Brown continues by stating that the Catholic Church "had subjugated women, banished the Goddess, burned nonbelievers, and forbidden the pagan reverence for the sacred feminine" (p. 239) and that "the marriage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene is part of the historical record" (p. 245).

The last statement of the historicity of a marriage (or ANY personal relationship) between Jesus and Mary is ludicrous. Not only is it not "a part of the historical record", but not one shred of evidence exists for it.

While it is a fact that the church has not always been fair to women, the worship of either masculinity or femininity would be idolatrous. The God of the Bible is a-sexual. He is described by both masculine and feminine terms. He is to be worshipped for who he is. The church has struggled with this for most of its life. The Catholic Church's answer has been to elevate Mary to near divinity status. (This would not seem to be denying the feminine side of the faith!) This idea of the "sacred feminine" side of Christianity is attractive to feminists today, but is not based on the historical record.

So what is my conclusion? The Davinci Code is a fun read if you understand that the doctrinal assertions made by Brown are mostly fabricated and misrepresentation of truth. This is Brown's third book asserting these doctrines (previous books: *Angels & Demons* and *Digital Fortress*) and there have been others through the years (ex: *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* by Michael Baigent) who have spun similar tales of conspiracy. Accept it for what it is—a novel—and you will have few problems. Try to take the positions of the book and compare them with reality, and you will quickly see that it fails the truth test.

## So What About... "The DaVinci Code?"

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Helpful articles on the web:

Collin Hansen "Breaking The Davinci Code (or So the divine Jesus and infallible Word emerged out of a fourth-century power-play? Get real.)"

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/144/52.0.html>

Chris Armstrong, "Thanks Davinci Code"

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/145/52.0.html>

Margaret Mitchell, "Cracking the Davinci Code", The University of Chicago:

[http://marty-center.uchicago.edu/sightings/archive\\_2003/0924.shtml](http://marty-center.uchicago.edu/sightings/archive_2003/0924.shtml)

Carl E. Olson, with Sandra Miesel "Cracking the Anti-Catholic Code"

<http://www.envoymagazine.com/planetenvoy/Review-DaVinci-Part1.htm>