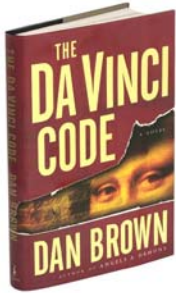


The Da Vinci Code and The Bible

Lesson 1

What's It All About?

Steve Patton



Few novels in history have exceeded the popularity of Dan Brown's The Da Vinci Code. Over 25 million copies have been sold worldwide. A constant presence on the New York Times bestseller list has led to a movie starring Tom Hanks that will be released in May 2006. Several television specials about the book have been produced by The

Discovery Channel, The History Channel, A&E Network, National Geographic Channel, ABC and NBC News. Dan Brown has appeared on the cover of countless magazines and been interviewed by almost every major television news and talk show. Why is this book so popular? Why is it having a significant effect on our cultural landscape?

On the surface the book is a cliffhanging tale about solving the murder of the Curator of the Louvre Museum in Paris. Robert Langdon, a renowned expert in ancient symbols who was in Paris for a lecture, becomes deeply involved in the case which leads to the discovery of a supposedly long hidden secret involving the Holy Grail. The book is a real page turner and Brown is a master of suspense, leaving you hanging at the end of every chapter.

Under the surface there is so much more to this book. The tale involves the discovery of "facts" that would undermine the very foundation of Christianity, calling into question all we think we know about Jesus and his early disciples. Brown weaves into his story elements about the humanity of Jesus and the supposed distortions of His teaching by Christians in the centuries following Him. He clearly implies these elements are true.

By the time you have finished the book you may believe that Dan Brown has solidly destroyed the Biblical account of Jesus and all He taught. You will also see that he has presented an argument for a superior "spirituality" involving what is called the

"sacred feminine" and actually involves the practices of paganism that preceded Jesus.

By his own admission, Dan Brown intended this novel to be more than just a fun fictional tale. He was asked by Matt Lauer on NBC's Today Show, "How much of this is based on reality in terms of things that actually occurred?" He replied, "Absolutely all of it. Obviously, Robert Langdon is fictional, but all of the art, architecture, secret rituals, secret societies - all of that is historical." (Today Show, NBC, June 9, 2003). He believes he is correcting the inaccuracies of history. But does historical research support his theories?

In this novel Brown is mounting a vigorous attack upon New Testament Christianity. He believes that Christianity in its later manifestations, especially in the Roman Catholic Church, has been a powerfully destructive force that is, to use his word, "irrelevant" to modern culture.

Our Reason for the Study

1. Many who have read this book have sincere questions about whether his accusations about Christianity are true. Many who claim to follow Christ have had their faith shaken. Others have readily accepted Brown's ideas without really examining the evidence.
2. Forces are fighting a Culture War that clearly wants to totally remove God and the Bible from the public square. Books such as The Da Vinci Code help fuel the anti-Christian sentiment that grows daily in our culture.
3. We need to know if what is presented by Brown in this book and other books by him is historically defensible. We need to know if He has accurately represented history, or played fast and loose with the facts. We also need to know if his criticisms of Christianity are valid.
4. It is also important that we understand the kind of religion he is obviously advancing in his writings. The kind of "spirituality" he suggests is diametrically opposed to the

spirituality discussed in scripture. His ideas, though not original with him, are becoming extremely popular in our culture. You can see these popular ideas about spirituality everywhere - from the college campus to Oprah. We need to understand these ideas and compare them to what the Bible says.

Our Plan

1. We will briefly synopsise the book so all are familiar with the plot.
2. We will examine the documentary basis Brown uses for his novel.
3. We will discuss the main theories Brown advances.
4. We will examine the reliability of the New Testament record. We will see whether or not it can be trusted.
5. We will discuss the “new” kind of spirituality proposed by Brown and those like him and the Culture War in which we are engaged.

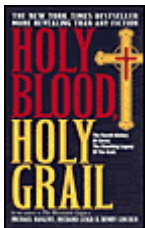
The Story

The accompanying synopsis summarizes the storyline. Times limits us from getting into the details of the plotline. If you have read the book it will greatly aid you in understanding how strongly Brown presents his case for his theories.

The Documents Upon Which Dan Brown Bases The Da Vinci Code:

Dan Brown claims that his book is based on historical fact. The only way to know if that is true is to examine his sources. I believe this is a good place to start as it will help understand if what is being told is substantiated by historical fact.

Holy Blood, Holy Grail. This book, published in 1982, contains much of the material upon which Brown based The Da Vinci Code. Brown has often given credit to the book publicly. In fact, one of the main character’s names, Leigh Teabing, is an anagram of the two of the author’s names (Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh). In it’s pages evidence is offered for a living lineage of Jesus through Mary Magdalene. These secrets were supposedly guarded by the Knights Templar of the Crusades, who discovered these documents buried under the Temple in Jerusalem in 1099. The Priory of Sion is a secret society charged by the Knights to guard the secret of the “Holy Grail.” Leonardo Da



Vinci, as well as several other well known people, supposedly served as Grand Master of the Priory.

The main documents upon which this book is based were provided to the authors by Pierre Plantard, an anti-semitic Frenchman who spent time in jail in 1953 for fraud. Plantard and 3 other men started a social club in 1954 called the Priory of Sion, taking the name from a nearby mountain. Their club’s “cause” was the call for more low-cost housing in France. The club dissolved in 1957, but Plantard held on to the name.

Throughout the 1960’s and 1970’s, Plantard created a series of documents “proving” the existence of a bloodline descended from Jesus and Mary Magdalene, through the kings of France, down to the present day. It included (surprise!) Pierre Plantard. He began using the name Plantard de Saint-Clair, saying the Saint-Clairs were direct descendants of the line of Jesus and Mary Magdalene.

In 1993, Plantard’s name came up in light of a political scandal involving a close friend of then French president Francois Mitterand. Plantard had, in one of his documented lists of the Priory of Sion, listed Roger-Patrice Pelat as a Grand Master of the Priory. When called before the court to testify, Plantard, under oath, admitted he made up the whole Priory scheme. The court ordered a search of Plantard’s house, which revealed further documents that proclaimed Plantard to be the true king of France. The judge gave Plantard a stern warning and dismissed him as a harmless crank. (See more information at: <http://priory-of-sion.com>).

Numerous books and articles have been written exposing Plantard’s hoax but none are as exciting as a conspiracy thriller like Dan Brown’s novel. It is sometimes amazing how readily people will ignore the truth when they don’t want to believe it. It is true that Dan Brown can say there was a Priory of Sion and there were Knights Templar. But the facts regarding these things are far different than the tale Brown weaves in his novel.

The Gnostic Gospels and the “Q” Document.

Brown’s view of what he believes is the true story of Jesus is also based on some writings that have come to be called the Gnostic Gospels. Another source involved in his interpretation of Jesus is a theoretical ancient document that is referred to as the “Q Document.” We will examine his claims regarding these writings to see if they substantiate his assertions regarding Jesus and Mary Magdalene.

Brown believes that Jesus and his original disciples had radically different beliefs from those presented as His teachings today. The school of thought, of which Brown is a part, believes that Jesus and His church was hijacked by the church of the 4th and 5th centuries and radically changed. We will examine later what Brown and others believe was the church's motivation for this. But for now we need to examine the documents which "prove" that the true story of Jesus is far different from the New Testament Jesus.

The Q Document

Biblical scholars have long observed that there are sections of the Gospel of Luke that are virtually identical to sections of the Gospel of Matthew. Liberal literary scholars began to explain this by saying there was another document from which both Matthew and Luke copied when writing their gospels. They also observed that these similar sections contained no miracles of Jesus or any of His claims of deity. They began to speculate that this undiscovered ancient document represented a more accurate picture of the true Jesus.

This school of thought has led to extensive reexamination of the gospels to find, what these scholars believe, are sections that agree with the picture of Jesus they think they see in the "Q" document. This fabled document has become almost a cause celebre` among liberal theologians. They are so convinced that there was a "Q" document that they now reject almost every part of the gospels or New Testament. Any part of the Gospels that doesn't reflect what they believe is the Jesus pictured in the Q Document is rejected.

More recent efforts to support such ideas about Jesus have led to events such as The Jesus Seminar, a series of meetings held by some of the most liberal theologians in the world, in which they examined gospels and voted up or down on which sections were authentic and which were not. Not surprisingly they threw out the vast majority of the gospel records including over 90% of the Gospel of John. *None of their findings were based on historical documentation but on literary theory.*

Was there a "Q" document?

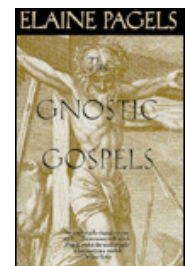
There has never been even the slightest hint in history that such a document existed. No copy of it has been found. No reference to it by other writers of early times has ever turned up. None. It is all literary theory developed by those who did not accept the authenticity of the Gospels from the first. The most logical and obvious reason for the similar sections in Matthew and Luke is that Luke copied from Matthew.

Luke says in the introduction to his gospel that he is writing down what he had learned from the eyewitnesses and Matthew would certainly qualify. (See Luke 1:1-4). But that idea does not discredit the divinity of Jesus and so would not be accepted by the liberal theologians of our day. The Q Document does not exist. Apparently it never has. The four gospels give us an accurate picture of Jesus of Nazareth and it has not been discredited.

The Gnostic Gospels

In December, 1945, near the Egyptian town of Nag Hammadi, a peasant came across a number of ancient scrolls and texts, about 52 in all. The documents, dating back to the fourth century, include poems, myths, mysticism, and what some scholars call "secret gospels." These include a Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Philip, Gospel of Truth, Gospel to the Egyptians, Apocalypse of Peter, Apocalypse of Paul, Letter of Peter to Philip, The Thunder - Perfect Mind, and Testimony of Truth. (It is in this last document we read of the first temptation from the Serpent's point of view. God is presented as a jealous, raging man while the serpent is a speaker of divine wisdom.)

Academic circles read these texts for decades but in 1971 one of these scholars, Elaine Pagels, published The Gnostic Gospels. Writing with the skill of a novelist she removed these texts from the ivory tower of the university and put them into the public square. She made the writers of these gnostic documents likeable. She pictured them as the victims and heroes of a class war waged by politically powerful bishops. She envisioned Gnosticism as an alternate expression of early Christianity that emphasized the gnostic goal of self-knowledge and deep spiritual experience.



A handful of radical, even extremist, New Testament scholars associated with the previously mentioned Jesus Seminar have sought to totally rewrite early Christian history mainly using these texts. Feminists have also become enamored with them as they give a different role to some biblical women and to women in general. In it they find a reflection of what pagan religions call the "sacred feminine" a belief in the superiority of a matriarchal order that they believe is the natural order of things.

Do these documents completely undermine the New Testament? Do they affirm, as The Da Vinci Code claims:

1. That more than 80 gospels were considered for the New Testament but were turned down by the church and destroyed?
2. That they show glaring discrepancies and fabrications of the modern Bible?
3. That these scrolls are actually the earliest records of Christianity?
4. That they confirm the theory that the early church stole the real Jesus from His original followers and rewrote His history and only then claimed He was Divine.
5. That these documents confirm the Jesus found in the elusive “Q” document.

That is a lot to claim and Dan Brown believes it all. He has almost singlehandedly brought into the mainstream these esoteric ideas that have no foundation in truth despite what some claim.

Are these texts from the early first century, predating the New Testament gospels? The first to study these texts never believed that. One of these scholars, writing in 1961 said, “[The gospel of Thomas’s] character is so far removed from the four canonical Gospels that it cannot be put on a par with them” (Bertil Gartner, The Theology of the Gospel According to Thomas; 1961; p. 11). It is only with the novel suggestion of the existence of that “Q” document that some believe they can date these writings as much earlier. Most scholars find this ludicrous. The very earliest that most believe any of them could have been written would be about 150 AD and later and only a couple of them could possibly have originated that early. Liberal theologians want an early date for the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Philip particularly. But there is no evidence they existed until gnosticism began to rise in Christianity in the mid 2nd century AD. The historical evidence strongly contradicts the theories of these gnostic loving theologians. The honest mind knows that these gnostic texts and ideas did not predate 1st century Christianity and the evidence is overwhelming we have accurate records of 1st century Christianity in the New Testament texts.

Other ideas found in the gnostic texts include:

- The Genesis account of creation is false
- The God of the Old Testament is mocked as a blind fool. He is the first and mightiest of all oppressive patriarchs. He is a blustering macho

brute who thinks he knows everything because he is a male.

- The texts despise all created things, especially sexual distinctions, marriage, and motherhood. The true believer must be set free from all earthly constraints.
- The texts teach the Gnostic is free from any law, an invention of foolish Jahweh. The Fall, in Genesis 3 is actually a liberation and the serpent speaks the true wisdom.
- These texts claim to bring the true knowledge, or *gnosis*, that will free us from ignorance and teach us who really are - divine beings.

Gnosticism then presents a way of life in which matriarchy rules, there is complete personal freedom, sexual distinctions do not exist, true spirituality is found through self-experimentation that looks inward to discover your true self. There is no god above you and no hell below. You can achieve a level of knowledge that will put you above all others. Anyone who would believe in the God of the Old Testament is a fool and needs to be enlightened.

Does any of this sound familiar to you? Can it be that the popularity of the ideas in The Da Vinci Code has nothing to do with historically verifiable facts but with an agenda to mankind essentially as his own god? This cannot be done, of course, without overthrowing the laws and the ideas of the God of the Bible. The more the evidence is considered the more you see that the ideas expressed in The Da Vinci Code are not rooted in fact at all. But they sure appeal to a mindset that seeks freedom from God and a mandate to follow His Ways.

Conclusion

We shall see the appeal of Dan Brown’s “theology” is to ideas as old as paganism itself. Christianity came as a breath of fresh air in a pagan world that had learned the emptiness of pagan religions and stands in stark contrast to them. But to be fair we must also examine the historical basis of Christianity just as we have examined the foundational documents that are the basis of ideas found in The Da Vinci Code. That will be the next lesson.

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