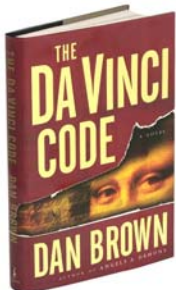


The Da Vinci Code and The Bible

Lesson 3

The Da Vinci Subplot - A New Spirituality

Steve Patton



The Da Vinci Code remains the decade's best selling book. By the time the movie comes out in May over 30 million copies will be in print. In our first lesson we examined the primary source documents upon which Brown bases his theories. Their unreliability as sources is plain to any honest observer. In the second lesson we examined the New Testament documents to see if they are as old as claimed and if they are trustworthy and reliable. We found the evidence to be compelling for their first century authenticity.

In this lesson we want to examine what appears to be an underlying motive behind the book. On the surface the book is a fast paced thriller that is hard to put down. As the main characters work to stay just ahead of their pursuers they work to solve a mystery they believe will shake the very foundations of the Christian religion - namely that the story of the real Jesus has been hidden for 2000 years. They supposedly find out that Jesus never claimed to be God and that he was married and had a child. They believe that powerful 4th century religious and political figures rewrote the New Testament to make Jesus divine and to make Christianity a male-dominated patriarchal religion. As you read the book you begin to see that Brown is not only seeking to undermine the basic facts of Christianity but to also espouse a return to ancient religious forms he believes are more relevant to modern society.

We have examined the house of cards upon which Brown advanced his theories. But we also need to examine this "new" religion his novel's characters embrace. We will see it is not new at all.

What is the new religion in The Da Vinci Code?

As the book ends Professor Langdon is kneeling at a location in the Louvre in Paris which he now thinks is the location he has sought throughout the book. As he realizes his "discovery" the hair stands up on the back of his neck. The last line of the book reads, "*For a*

moment, he thought he heard a woman's voice...the wisdom of the ages...whispering up from the chasms of the earth."

Deeply rooted in the themes of the book is the idea that long ago the ancients understood the true religion: The Divine Circle that included all things - all of existence - with which all sought to be one. All of Nature was part of this divine circle and Nature itself was worshipped in the form of The Goddess. In her was found the ultimate truth, the ultimate expression of our existence, the ultimate connection to all other things. It is in this one world religion of Nature that all of humankind will find true peace, contentment and happiness.

Author Dan Brown weaves a tale in which this perfect ancient religion was once the dominant religion. In fact, the real Jesus even embraced it. But these ancient truths were suppressed by Christianity and the church. But now the time has come when the ancient religion will re-emerge as Christianity becomes more outdated and irrelevant. Now The Goddess will be seen as the true way to meet all of humankind's needs.

Is this true? Has Christianity suppressed the true religion of the ages? Are his accusations against Christianity accurate? Let's examine his tale of supposed Christian suppression and see if his charges are true. We also want to examine what the Bible really teaches about the subjects he discusses in the book.

Dan Brown's Religion of The Goddess

I do not think that Brown would deny that the religion of The Goddess is simply a form of ancient paganism. The Goddess stands as a representation of the powers of Nature. A phrase often used in the book is the "sacred feminine." This phrase essentially means the reign of Mother Nature. Nature and its forces determine everything. The sacred feminine assures us that everything in Nature, including our inner self, is divine. There is no power outside of Nature and we are a part of that divine power. Clearly there is no room in this religion for a being existing outside this universe or the "Divine Circle" - like the God of the Bible. There is nothing outside this universe.

In this religion people seek to be one with Nature and worship Nature and its forces. They see the fulfillment of the natural sexual urges of the body as a means of achieving oneness with the universe. This is why ancient sexual rites are such a part of paganism. In The Da Vinci Code one of the main characters was discovered by his niece participating in an ancient sexual rite called *hieros gamos*. He wanted to explain to her that what he was doing was spiritual and a means of achieving *gnosis* - that is ultimate knowledge.

The practice of such paganistic rites certainly does precede Christianity (but not worship of Jehovah of the Bible). And in almost all of them the feminine goddess plays a major role. In Egypt the worship of Isis, the goddess of witchcraft and magic, goes back to about 3000 B.C. The pagan religion of ancient Ugarit (ca. 2500 B. C.) worshipped the goddess Anat, who restored Baal to life. The goddess Istar, a spiritual force around 1800 B. C. in ancient Babylon, supposedly bridged the gap between the living and the dead with her secret power. In ancient Canaan, the goddess Asherah, resembling Istar and Anat, was the consort of Baal. The Syrian goddess Cybele or Atargatis had all the qualities of Anat. Often known as the Great Mother, the Goddess under many names communicated the powers of death in the unseen spirit world.



Asherah

Christianity vs. Paganism

It is this ancient religion that The Da Vinci Code accuses Christianity of suppressing. Dan Brown pictures the early followers of Jesus as being believers in the ancient ways - an idea which they believe is manifested in the gnostic texts found at Nag Hammadi, Egypt, especially the so-called Gnostic Gospels. In these documents references to the heightened role of Mary Magdalene, as well as other pagan practices, they believe confirm what original Christianity was all about. But in the fourth century the emperor Constantine, seeing the influence of Christianity as a means to greater power, hijacked the Christian religion, turned Jesus into a deity, suppressed the dominant role of the female and transformed it into a male dominated religion. Having successfully taken over the Christian religion he had all copies of the "original" gnostic texts destroyed throughout the empire. From that time

forward Christianity has dominated western culture with continued efforts made along the way to suppress "the old ways."

Did Christianity try to combat ancient paganism? Of course it did. But in the beginning it had nothing to do with political motivations. There were clear theological reasons for rejecting pagan religions. The Bible opposed such pagan practices throughout. This is what the Bible is talking about when it speaks of sorcery, witchcraft, making children pass through the fire, the gross morality of the pagans, and many other such practices condemned in both the Old and New Testaments.

It is unfortunate that Dan Brown twists the historical truth almost beyond recognition. He creates a classic conspiracy theory, which, like most such theories, have little basis in fact.

Answering the Charges

The misrepresentations in The Da Vinci Code regarding ancient paganism are too numerous to cover here but we will look at some of the major ones.

Ancient Matriarchal Cultures

Dan Brown charges that Christianity changed the role of women in society by suppressing them and giving the male the dominant role. Before Christianity he believes most ancient societies were matriarchal or female dominated. The Goddess was honored in them and the woman played the dominant role in the culture. Christianity perverted this original and natural order. They then persecuted, tortured and executed those who practiced ancient pagan religions. Is this true?

It is clear from his writings that Dan Brown is a strong feminist. His agenda includes establishing a rationale for believing that a female-led society was the accepted practice before Christianity and its anti-feminine woman-hating practices came on the scene. This is the "dark con of man" Brown writes about in the novel. But again, Brown is wrong on all these counts.

Regarding matriarchal societies the facts are pretty clear. Historically cultures have been male-led, not female-led. Although there are examples of famous women leaders in both secular and biblical history, the vast majority of leaders has been men. Historians, sociologists and anthropologists recognize this pretty obvious fact. Regarding the issue of former

matriarchal societies, Steven Goldberg, chairman of the Dept. of Sociology at City College, City University of New York, wrote:

The point is that authority and leadership are, and always have been, associated with the male in every society, and I refer to this when I say that patriarchy is universal and that there has never been a matriarchy... Theories that hypothesized a matriarchal form of society at “an earlier stage of history” made a certain, if tortuous sense, until the finding of the past 50 years failed to include a single shred of evidence that such matriarchies had ever existed and demonstrated the inability of all such theories to deal with reality. [Of the] hundreds of societies we have studied in this century... Without exception [they] have been patriarchal... [Margaret] Mead acknowledged that ‘It is true... That all the claims so glibly made about societies ruled by women are nonsense. We have no reason to believe that they ever existed.’ Mead also said men ‘everywhere have been in charge of running the show.’” (Steven Goldberg, Why Men Rule: a Theory of Male Dominance; Chicago: Open Court, 1993; p. 14,18,35).

You cannot get much clearer than that. Two highly-regarded scholars saying unequivocally there has never been a matriarchal society. Thus, one of Brown’s main theories is proven totally false.

Persecuting the Pagans

But what about Christendom’s persecution of pagans? Brown’s character, Robert Langdon explains to Sophie Neveu in the novel about the horrific persecutions of women by the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages. He pictures this as an attempt to wipe out the old pagan ways. He writes, “Those deemed ‘witches’ by the Church included all female scholars, priestesses, gypsies, mystics, nature lovers, herb gatherers, and any women ‘suspiciously attuned to the natural world.’ ...during three hundred years of witch hunts, *the Church burned at the stake an astounding five million women.*” (p. 125)



Let me first say I have no desire to defend anything the Catholic church may have done in the Middle Ages, or at any other time in history, that is not in harmony with what the scriptures teach. The New Testament clearly forbade the practice of witchcraft and sorcery but it nowhere said Christians were to kill such people. However, Brown does need to get his facts straight, again. Here is the truth about what happened.

During an era in the Middle Ages known as the “Great Hunt” or, simply, “The Burning” the courts, fueled by a publication titled Malleus Maleficarum, or The Witches Hammer, began a crusade against women practicing the pagan arts. Brown says the book was an official Church publication but in actuality the church reacted to the book by rejecting the legal procedures suggested by the authors, and censoring them a few years later. It was actually the secular courts, not the church, that relied on Malleus Maleficarum. Secular courts handed down the majority of capital sentences. Those the Catholic Church found guilty were usually given nonlethal penalties, such as excommunication, or fasting on bread and water for a year. Despite Dan Brown’s attempt to picture this period as the Catholic Church’s attempt to stamp out their main rival religion with a “brutal crusade to ‘reeducate’ the pagan and feminine worshipping religions,” (p. 125) the truth is far different.

Let’s listen to a practicing modern pagan discuss this era in history. Jenny Gibbons is a neopagan who has written about this topic in a scholarly manner. Her paper on this topic can be read on the internet - www.pangaia.com/Issue/pg21/pg21t25-34.html.

She writes:

“Today, we know that there is absolutely no evidence to support this theory. When the Catholic church was at the height of its power (11th to 14th centuries) very few witches died. Persecutions did not reach major proportions until the Reformation, when the Catholic church had lost its position as Europe’s indisputable moral authority.” She goes on to point out that it was Christian missionaries who actually encouraged kingdoms and courts to pass laws protecting men and women from charges of witchcraft. (See above article).

Robin Briggs, an Oxford University scholar addresses the estimates of the number of witches executed during those time. She says pagan literature usually estimates that anywhere from five to nine million women were burned at the stake. She denies these numbers saying reasonable modern estimates suggest perhaps as many as 100,000 trials took place between 1450 and 1750, with something between 40,000 and 50,000 executions, of which 20 to 25 percent were men. (Robin Briggs, Witches and Neighbors; New York: Penguin, 1998).

I will be the first to say that is 40,000 to 50,000 too many executions. What was done was inexcusable

and sinful. I make no defense of such ungodliness. Such bloodshed in the name of religion, whether its executing witches or offering babies on burning altars to the goddess Asherah, is without justification.

But we must say that to picture these actions of the middle ages as an attempt by the Catholic Church to stamp out its greatest rival religion and to keep women “in their place” is absurd. Again, the facts do not support the statements found in The Da Vinci Code.

Christianity and the Role of Women

In truth, the spread of Christianity actually improved the position of women in the first and following centuries. Despite charges made by modern feminists the Bible exalts women and pictures her as an equal of man before God. There were as many women in the early church as men. That had to do with Christianity’s recognition of woman as being made in the likeness of God just as was man.

The plight of a woman in the first century Roman world was not one of power and equality. Just the opposite was true. Wives were no more than chattel property of their husbands. She was primarily for the purpose of producing offspring. Mistresses had more rights than wives. It was more common for a Roman man to be seen in public with his mistress than with his wife. Rights of a wife were very limited. In many places she was to even speak in public without permission.

Into this world came Jesus who taught a gospel in which woman was honored and revered. A wife was to be loved as one loved his own body. He was to nourish and cherish her as Christ did His church (Ephesians 5:28-29). She had always been pictured as being of the same nature as man and being in the image of God as was man (Genesis 1:27; 5:1,2). One cannot read a passage like Proverbs 31 about a good woman and not appreciate the exalted position God gives to her. In truth, wherever the gospel has gone the plight of women has improved. Alvin Schmidt’s excellent book Under the Influence: How Christianity Transformed Civilization, documents the lowly plight of women throughout the ancient world and how the arrival of Christianity lifted women up and improved their position. Even ancient Roman pagan scholars agree that Christianity was the turning point for the freedom and dignity of women. (See Alvin J. Schmidt, Under the Influence; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001; p. 98).

Dan Brown’s Agenda

The Da Vinci Code is written from a particular religious ideological viewpoint. It is not a neutral fictional tale that adds a few historical facts for a ring of truth. It is a propaganda piece for a religious worldview. Readers of Dan Brown’s novel need to realize that his commitment to Neo-Pagan religious ideas also color his choice of “facts” and everything he affirms through his characters. The Da Vinci Code is an ideological call to arms. Because Brown has adopted the pagan worldview, he is not content to shoot a few BBs at the facts of church history. He wants to blow a hole in the foundations of the worldview of the Bible. This is what makes it so dangerous. If it is not read critically it will have a tremendous influence on the thinking of the people who read it. And that is exactly what is happening to many. Thirty million copies will be in print within a few weeks. The blockbuster movie will only serve to further influence unsuspecting minds to question the truth of Christianity. We must not allow its attacks and lies to go unchallenged. It is only the beginning of a very public attack upon the foundations of Christianity and a plea to re-examine the ancient pagan ways.

But what we must do is what flashes on the screen at the end of the movie’s promotional trailer - “Seek the Truth.” Anyone who will do that will learn it and will understand the “dark con of man” is actually the con that Dan Brown and those like them are trying to foist upon an unsuspecting world.

Real New Testament Christianity

Few people have really seen true Christianity in our day. What is represented as Christianity has been so watered down, adapted and weakened that it does not even resemble what is found in the Bible. Even so-called Bible believing churches that make noise about following the scriptures often make little attempt to truly follow its teachings. And little needs to be said about the perverted gospel presented by most televangelists.

If you are a truth seeker I challenge you re-examine what New Testament Christianity is all about. See the solid foundations upon which its teachings rest. Discover what a true and meaningful relationship with Jesus is all about. And find joy and peace with a people of God who really do want to live their lives in harmony with the revealed teachings of Jesus. You may discover something you have never seen before. It is worth investigating. I promise you won’t be disappointed.

Steve Patton (813.748.1963; sapatton47@hotmail.com)