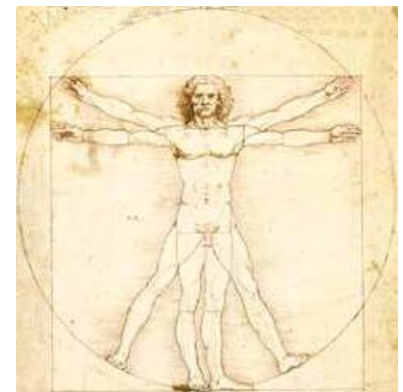


Dan Brown's 'Da Vinci Code' is billed as fiction, but it makes some extraordinary claims about Jesus that may sound convincing, particularly for people that are not familiar with Christian history and writings. **It's a great 'whodunit'—shame the facts are so wrong!** An outline of the book, its claims and the actual historic facts, and some discussion ideas follow. The book and film do present a great opportunity to explore the claims of the real Jesus.



What is The Da Vinci Code?

The Da Vinci Code is the best-selling thriller and film in which an American academic and a French cryptologist police-woman search for the 'Holy Grail'.

As the investigation unfolds, the Holy Grail turns out to be not a legendary chalice or bowl originally used by Jesus, but a secret, a set of documents, and an earthly blood line of Jesus that continues to the present day.

Jesus is claimed to have married and had a child by one of

his first followers, Mary Magdalene. Mary Magdalene fled to France, where the holy bloodline has since included, among others, the Merovingian kings who ruled France from the 5th to 8th centuries AD.

The Grail is claimed to have been maintained by an organisation called the Priory of Sion, a 'real organisation founded in 1099' and headed over time by such luminaries as Leonardo da Vinci and Sir Isaac Newton.

The Knights Templar are the Priory's strongmen that helped

to find and guard the Grail. Da Vinci's paintings, the Saint Sulpice church in Paris, and the Rosslyn Chapel in Scotland 'built by' the Templars, are all found to hold clues to the Grail.

The Catholic church over the centuries has actively suppressed this secret of Mary Magdalene and the 'divine feminine' it represents, beginning with Emperor Constantine's edicts that Jesus was God and his insistence that only the new testament books were valid.

Organisations like the secretive

Opus Dei group help the church to perpetuate a revisionist, sexist, arch-conservative version of Christianity, by bribery and violence if necessary.

While billed as fiction, the author does claim that the art, architecture, documents and secret rituals are factual. Many of the ideas about Jesus' marriage to Mary Magdalene were based on the 1982 book *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln.

Assumptions that colour the debate

Certain world-view assumptions let people reach conclusions like those found in *The Da Vinci Code*, even where there are no historical or documentary facts to support such conclusions:

- **Confusion of facts and fiction.** Facts are not viewed as objective, but relative, self-interested or irrelevant.
- **The appeal of conspiracy theories.** Conspiracies are seen as more likely to be real than historical documents or fact.
- **Mistrust of authority.** The church is seen to have a motive to perpetuate fraud—it is portrayed as sexist, repressionist, dogmatic, exclusionary.
- **Personal reality.** Personal experience is sometimes viewed as the *only* guide to religion, where faith on its own and not the underlying facts are viewed as relevant.
- **Alternative reality.** Alternative spiritual 'truth'—in fact a modern form of 'Gnosticism'—is accepted without examination as equally valid or more valid. Sometimes, anything *but* Christianity is acceptable.

What does the book say about Jesus and Christianity?

While the book and film are an exciting thriller, they do marshal a range of 'facts' that some might think are convincing, in support of three points about Jesus and the Christian faith:

- 1 The traditional gospel of Jesus is a lie.**
- 2 Jesus is not God.**
- 3 The Christian Bible is not trustworthy.**

However, the supporting 'facts' and the history and documentation behind them are almost entirely incorrect, as summarised in the chart overleaf. (For what it's worth, many other 'facts' about history, geography and art in the book are wrong too!) If the facts underlying an argument are wrong, the conclusions are simply invalid.

Does the book promote discussion of the gospel?

The gospel that Jesus announced and that Christians have followed for 2,000 years—many on pain of death—is much more vibrant and real than any depiction of the gospel in *The Da Vinci Code*!

The book and film do have people talking about the Christian faith, which is an opportunity for open discussion about what is true about the gospel.

The following questions may be useful in discussing what the

Christian faith really means:

Have you or will you read the *Da Vinci Code* book or see the film?

Does the book affect your views about religion or trouble you in any way?

What do you think about the religious elements of the film?

Which parts of the book do you think are true, and which fiction?

Which historical facts do you think back up or refute *The Da*

Vinci Code?

Does it matter if the book's historical and geographical facts are wrong?

Is it true or relevant that Jesus was married?

What do you know or think about the Gnostic writings?

Who was Mary Magdalene and what role does she have?

What further information would you find interesting or helpful?

Separating fiction from fact in the Da Vinci Code

Da Vinci Code fiction

Historical fact

1 The traditional gospel.

Claim: The gospel is actually a 'secret truth'—Jesus founded an earthly dynasty through marriage to Mary Magdalene and having a child by her.

The holy grail is real.	The grail appeared first in the 12th century romantic poem <i>Percival</i> by Chrétien de Troyes, which fuelled a variety of medieval stories about special cups or bowls related to Christ. The legend is no older than that.
The true Holy Grail was a secret kept hidden by the secret organisation Priory of Sion.	French nationalist Pierre Plantard founded this Priory of Sion in 1956. He and his colleagues created in 1967 and planted in the Paris national library a fake <i>Dossiers Secrets</i> of the Priory's history. Plantard admitted to French Judge Thierry Jean-Pierre in September 1993 that the Priory was a hoax.
The Knights Templar found and protected this secret, and were killed for doing so.	The Knights Templar were protectors and bankers to the medieval crusaders. They were subsequently rounded up, falsely accused and killed by Philip IV in 1310 for their land and wealth.
Da Vinci, one head of the Priory of Sion, hinted at this secret by painting Mary Magdalene in the Last Supper.	The sole reference to Da Vinci as presiding over the Priory is in the fake <i>Dossiers Secrets</i> . The Last Supper is a painting of Jesus and the 12 disciples, not 11 disciples and Mary Magdalene. The youthful (even delicate looking) disciple at Jesus' right hand is John, the disciple whom Jesus loved.
The most ancient reference to the holy grail was 'holy blood' in French— <i>sang real</i> , not <i>san greal</i> .	The first references (12th c.) called it the 'grail' or 'greal'; 'holy' was added later. The French kept the 'grail' usage. 15th c. English writer Henry Lovelich added the 'holy blood' twist, i.e. Christ's blood was in the cup.
A priory in southern France became wealthy because it was paid to hush up this secret.	The priest Bérenger Saunière (1852-1917) in Rennes-le-Château, France, became wealthy by selling masses to his parishioners. He was suspended by his bishop in 1911.
The Saint Sulpice church in Paris holds evidence of the Priory of Sion.	Most facts about the church in the book are simply wrong. A sign in the church explains: 'Please also note that the letters P and S in the small round windows at both ends of the transept refer to Peter and Sulpice, the patron saints of the church, and not an imaginary Priory of Sion.'
Rosslyn chapel in Scotland holds evidence of this Grail.	The Rosslyn grail myth dates to 1962, when an Edinburgh schoolmaster put forward the idea that the Apprentice Pillar in the chapel contained a lead casket containing the holy cup.
The Gnostic gospels say that Mary Magdalene married Jesus.	This theory is no older than the 1982 book <i>Holy Blood, Holy Grail</i> . The Gnostic gospels, circa 200 AD (long after Jesus' life and the original gospels) do not say this. They say Jesus kissed Mary Magdalene (a common early Christian greeting), who was a companion of Jesus (a word also used for his other disciples) and had understanding and teaching ability. They also say that a woman 'must become male' to enter the Kingdom of God.
It would have been odd for any rabbi not to have been married in Jesus time.	It was not unheard-of. The historians Josephus, Pliny and Philo all agree, for example, that the strict Jewish sect of Jesus' time known as the Essenes themselves practiced celibacy. St. Paul was not married.
Legend says that a boat carrying Mary Magdalene and a child came to Southern France.	The legend is that Mary Jacobe ('Virgin Mary's sister') and Mary Salome ('mother of James and John')—not Mary Magdalene—came to Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, France, with their gypsy servant girl Sarah. <i>Holy Blood, Holy Grail</i> author Baigent admitted in an interview there is no evidence that Jesus had a child.

2 Jesus as God's Son

Claim: The truth about Jesus being merely a good mortal and the true 'sacred feminine' have been covered up by the Catholic church.

Christians never believed that Jesus was divine before 325 AD.	Virtually every New Testament book (e.g. Mt. 3:16-17, Jn. 1:1, Ro. 10:9, Phil. 2:11) calls Jesus God or God's Son, making him equal to God. All were written before AD 100. The vast majority of Christian writings between the New Testament books and 325 AD use the same formulation.
The Emperor Constantine declared by a narrow vote at the Council of Nicea in 325 AD that Jesus was God.	Constantine called to order the Council of Nicea, where 250 or more church bishops debated the Arian controversy, a teaching that Jesus essentially was a created demi-god. All but two bishops condemned this teaching. Constantine, who in fact sympathised with Arius, did not influence the bishops' decisions.
The secretive religious order Opus Dei has enforced the anti-Mary Magdalene, anti-feminist cult to this day.	Opus Dei is a relatively modern Catholic organisation, founded in 1928 by a Spanish priest to integrate traditional Catholic faith with work and everyday life. It has men and women members, 98% of whom are not priests. It is not a religious order and has no police powers.

3 The Christian Bible

Claim: The New Testament is unrepresentative of Jesus' and early Christian teaching.

The New Testament was compiled by a set of chauvinist bishops, enforced by Constantine in 325 AD.	Consensus developed much earlier in different parts of the church as to which books were sufficiently close in time to Jesus and bore sufficient hallmarks of authenticity to be considered authoritative. The earliest list found (Muratorian Canon, c.170-200 AD), is similar to our bible; it contains no Gnostic writings. Church councils did not consider this question formally until 391 AD, more than 50 years after Constantine died.
There were 80 other gospels and thousands of other documents chronicling Jesus' life and considered for the New Testament.	A few non-standard 'gospels' and many other Christian and pseudo-Christian documents appeared in the 2d and 3d centuries—a few read in churches, some disputed, and many called 'spurious'. Although claiming authenticity, the late gospels, Gnostic writings and most apocalypses never had widespread support as close enough in time or teaching to Jesus or his apostles to be treated as genuine or authoritative. Some are laughable.
The Gnostic gospels and similar books represented early Christian views and were banned for their 'divine feminine' views	Gnosticism, a hodge-podge of beliefs followed by few Christians, focussed on shunning the physical and obtaining secret knowledge for enlightenment. Gnosticism did not treat Jesus as mere mortal, as <i>Da Vinci Code</i> claims, but rather as ethereal and often not physically real. It was feminist in the sense that masculine and feminine traits were to be shunned. The Christian gospel itself affirmed the importance of women.
Constantine commissioned a new bible and gathered up and burned other gospels.	Constantine's edict of 325 ordered Arius's books burned. He did commission the printing of 50 bibles for use around the empire. Later edicts banned some other authors' work as inconsistent with Christian teaching. Many non-biblical writings were not banned or have otherwise survived, including Gnostic materials.
The Dead Sea Scrolls also support this alternate view of early Christian teaching.	The Dead Sea Scrolls are the library of a conservative Jewish 1st century group. They do not contain any Christian or Gnostic writings, and contain no 'divine feminine' ideas.