

Series: DON'T CHECK YOUR BRAIN... May 21, 2006

JESUS AND THE DA VINCI CODE

John 1:1-3, 14

1. Several weeks ago, I read *The Da Vinci Code* for the first time—all 489 pages of it (I read the cheap version—paperback!) I really enjoyed the story line, for the most part. I mean, every chapter kinda leaves you hanging—and anxious to see how it ends.
 - a. This novel has become one of the best-selling novels of all time—if not **THE** best-selling. Last count on sales was close to 50 million copies! That's a lot of trees! And that's a lot of money. Dan Brown has done really well on this one. I'm thinking he'll be able to retire from his job as a school-teacher.
 - b. The great thing about this novel is that it's a fun read and has a **lot** of people talking about Jesus, about Christianity, about the Bible—and asking questions. That's a good thing—and I'm hoping that we will be able to answer some of those questions, both today and on June 8 when we will devote a whole evening to discussion with Jim Beverley..
 - c. The question some people would have—maybe some of you—is **why would you be discussing a novel in a church service. Hello! It's FICTION!**
 -I'll tell you why it's important to discuss this. Dan Brown claims at the beginning of his book that all he says is based on historical fact—that only the characters and story line is fictional.
 And he mixes fact and fantasy in such a clever way that many readers don't realize where fact starts and make-believe begins.
 -And it's had a very interesting effect on people. Did you know that a recent survey shows that one out of every 3 Canadians who have read this book now believe that there are descendents of Jesus Christ walking among us today? In a study done by George Barna, 53% of the of the Americans who have read this book say that it has been helpful in their personal spiritual growth and understanding.

 -Even the media has bought in: **USA Today** says that this book consists of "historical fact with a contemporary story line." In some cases, it's had a destructive effect. One man said, "I will never set foot in a church again in my life because I've read The Da Vinci Code and now I know the truth."
 - d. There's a reason why this guy said that. This book presents that church as hungry for power and willing to lie, kill—do whatever it takes to protect that power. Let me put it this way: If the historical claims in this book are true, Christianity is a fraud. It's built on lies and deceit, and I wouldn't want to have anything to do with it, much less represent it. But if the historical claims in this book are false, then this book is spiritual snake oil.
 - e. I'll tell you why this is important. Christianity claims to be grounded in historical reality; that Jesus lived at a specific time and place, that He claimed to be the Son of God, that he was crucified, and that He rose from the dead at a specific time and specific place.

And then He appeared to real people. You've maybe seen the movie trailer that says, **Seek The Truth!** Well, this morning, that's exactly what we're going to spend some times doing.

f. So, what I want to do this morning is ask and hopefully answer at least some initial questions that come out of the book—and I'm borrowing these directly from some of the research I've done:

- 1) Are there ancient documents about Jesus besides what we have in the N.T.—and are they reliable?
- 2) Do we know why the N.T. contains the books it does?
- 3) Was Jesus married?
- 4) Was his wife Mary Magdalene
- 5) Did they have a child?
- 6) Was Leonardo Da Vinci part of a real secret organization that knew about this?
- 7) Was Jesus human or divine?
- 8) What was the Holy Grail, really? And how much time will it take us to sort this out?

-There are answers to these questions: Yes. No. No. No. No. No. Both. Who knows? And about 25 minutes. Let's pray.

-Actually, let's dive in and see what we find. After the service, if you're interested in discussing this further, go get a cup of coffee or tea—and then come back and we'll spend some time talking together.

2. Now, some of you haven't read the novel, read any of the publicity, or seen the film. I don't want you to feel left out. Let me nutshell the story for you.

The story begins in Paris, France where Robert Langdon, the noted **symbolologist** from Harvard University has been visiting as a guest lecturer. If you're thinking, "Hmmm. I've never met a *symbolologist* before—that's because there never has been one before Dan Brown created Robert Langdon. Small detail. Langdon is disturbed in the middle of the night at his hotel room by the French Police who take him to the Louvre to assist in a murder investigation.

-Apparently the head curator at the museum, Jacques Sauniere, has been brutally murdered. However, before he dies, Sauniere leaves a variety of clues around the gallery he has locked himself into to try to escape his killer.

-What Langdon, the hero, doesn't know is that he is actually the prime suspect in the murder, and only escapes with the help of the beautiful police cryptographer, Sophie Neveu. Langdon finds out that not only is Sauniere Sophie's estranged grandfather, he is the Grand Master of the Priory of Sion. The Priory of Sion is a 1000 year old secret society entrusted with a secret that would totally destroy the Christian church if it was ever discovered.

-Their quest for clues to break the Da Vinci Code leads them to Langdon's friend, Leigh Teabing, a former British Royal Historian, who is one of the foremost authorities on the Holy Grail. Their ensuing journey takes them across France, across the English Channel

on an illicit flight—just staying one step ahead of the police, an albino monk killer and the “teacher”—a mystery man who seems to be orchestrating the entire story.

-It’s in their meeting with Teabing in his estate—and then in their flight together that Teabing and Langdon are able to lecture Sophie about the myths about Jesus’ identity, the fallacies of Christianity and the Bible, as well as the evil cover-up by the church. Dan Brown, the author, says that this information and the documentation given for it is all fact.

3. Now, listen to what Dan Brown says right at the front of the paperback version under the caption: ***FACT! The Priory of Sion—a European secret society founded in 1099—is a real organization. In 1975 Paris’s Bibliotheque Nationale discovered parchments known as Les Dossiers Secret, identifying numerous members of the Priory of Sion, including Sir Isaac Newton, Botticelli, Victor Hugo, and Leonardo Da Vinci (p.1 PB).***

-In a follow up statement, Dan Brown makes this profound claim: ***All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate.*** So, first, let’s **seek the truth** about what he’s claiming here.

-You need to know that every claim Dan Brown makes in his book hinges on the **Priory of Sion**. It’s what links Leonardo Da Vinci to the whole thing—and gives the book the title. But is what Dan Brown says about this **true?** Well, let’s check it out.

SLIDE 1—Priory of Sion

On screen you can see the actual registration papers in France that created the Priory of Sion. Notice the year and date—and the stamps by the French Government. The Priory of Sion was not created in the year 1099; it was formed on May 7, 1956. That’s a big difference.

In fact, it’s not even **close**. It was an organization founded as a campaign for low-income housing in France.

SLIDE 2—Priory of Sion

Notice who it was filed and signed by: Pierre Plantard, who signed the papers as the Secretary General of the Priory of Sion.

Now, who is this Pierre Plantard guy? Well, you can check the records for yourself—and you will find that he has a very checkered past. Documents show that he was a con man who was convicted of fraud and embezzlement and served 6 months in prison in 1953. Records also show that in WW2 he was a Nazi sympathizer and vocal in his hatred for the Jewish people..

This is the most incredible part. It turns out that this guy, Pierre Plantard, actually counterfeited several fraudulent documents in order to create a phony history for this organization, the Priory of Sion. Among the documents he counterfeited is the very document that Dan Brown refers to in his book as being historically reliable. Plantard took these documents and planted them in the French National Library.

In 1975, someone discovered these forged, planted documents—planted there by Pierre Plantard—and they appeared to be ancient parchment papers—***Les Dossiers Secret--*** that told about an ancient organization founded in 1099 that involved Leonardo da Vinci and all these other famous people! Now, just take a wild guess at who these documents claimed is not only a descendent of Jesus Christ but the rightful heir to the French throne. Pierre Plantard!

Who was checking the facts at Doubleday Publishers on the day this manuscript was turned in?

You need to know, this information is not some big secret. This is a well-known scheme. Not only did several French books expose it, the BBC did a full documentary on it a decade ago, and Pierre Plantard confessed to forging and planting these documents before he died in 2000. French authorities said, “We considered him an eccentric old crank.”

-When you seek the truth, you find that Plantard made all this stuff up and tried to fool people into thinking it was true. Yet Dan Brown uses this bogus material as the foundation of his book. If there is no Priory of Sion, there is no connection to Leonardo da Vinci, and there’s no reason to keep speculating about hidden meanings in his paintings. Dan Brown has based his whole book on the credibility of the Priory of Sion!

4. Now, Dan Brown raises another question in his book to back up his claims about Mary Magdalene. He asks, “Are there more reliable Gospels than the ones we have in our Bible that were never included?” The two Gospels he mentions are the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Philip. In fact the main authority in this story, Sir Leigh Teabing, says that there were originally more than 80 Gospels—but Emperor Constantine had them all destroyed in 325 A.D. Then Constantine funded a new Bible that he put together that would downplay Christ’s humanity and highlight his divinity. More on that later.

a. What Dan Brown is suggesting is that, to retain power, the church has covered up the facts on how the Bible came to be as we know it—and that other better ancient records about Jesus weren’t included. The truth is that the earliest writings about Jesus life, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were written within 20 to 60 years of Jesus’ death.

They were so widely known and accepted that an early Christian writer, Ireneus, in 150 A.D. called them the fourfold Gospel—and the only authentic witness.

-The other books Dan Brown talks about were written much later—as many as 2 centuries later. The church had set the criteria, or the **canon**, meaning **standard** or **rule**--for the documents that would be considered accepted and used by the church:

*The first standard or canon: **Was it written by an apostle, or someone directly connected with an apostle of Jesus.** All of the N.T. books fit that criteria. These books written much later were given fictitious, misleading names to pretend that they were among Jesus original followers, like the Gospel of Thomas, or the Gospel of Philip, or the Gospel of Mary. In fact, they were written long after these followers of Jesus had died.

*Another standard was, **Were the contents of the book consistent with what Jesus taught?** There’s a quote from one of the older of these other Gospels, the Gospel of Thomas. Let me read it for you and see what **you** think:
Simon Peter said, “Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life.” Jesus said, “I myself shall lead her in order to make her male so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven.” (GoT 114).

-How many of you think that sounds like something Jesus taught? Aren’t you glad that’s not in our Bible? Jesus teaching was very distinctive.

*A third criterion was, **Did this writing have widespread influence and acceptance in all the churches—Israel, Asia Minor, and Rome—and was this influence and use continuous from the earliest days.** The current books of the NT were—the Gnostic gospels were not.

- b. It's important to understand that there is **absolutely no historical basis—ANYWHERE**—for Dan Brown's claims about Constantine and these other Gospels. The history of what happened at the Council of Nicea in 325 was carefully recorded—and what's stated in this novel doesn't even resemble the truth.

-Ironically, the later gospels Dan Brown is suggesting we should pay more attention to don't present Jesus as more human; they present a highly spiritualized Jesus. Some of the stories are actually quite bizarre. For example, Jesus is presented as a child creating clay birds and bringing them to life. At the resurrection account, one gospel presents Jesus as coming out of the tomb—but as a huge Paul Bunyan figure, who is followed by talking cross. John Ortberg comments on this and says, "It sounds like a bad Disney movie."

- c. There's a reason why these Gnostic gospels are different. The Bible teaches that we are saved by Jesus going to the cross in our place—and the Spirit coming to live in us and transform us. The Gnostics believed a person was saved by receiving higher and higher forms of knowledge.

-What Dan Brown as done is totally rewrite history as it's been recorded from a whole bunch of sources—and he's done this to support his Priory of Sion conspiracy theory.

5. The whole plot of **The Da Vinci Code** story brings up another question: **Was Jesus married—and was he married to Mary Magdalene—and did they have a child?**

-You need to know that there is **absolutely no evidence** for this theory in the Bible, in any of the other later writings he quotes, or in any of the secular historical records that talk about Jesus.

- a. Mary Magdalene was one of Jesus' close followers. She first appears in the book of Luke. Let me read what it says about her:
After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means (Luke 8:1-3 NIV).
- b. Now, listen to what Dan Brown says through his history expert, Leigh Teabing. ***One particularly troubling theme kept recurring in the gospels. Mary Magdalene...More specifically, her marriage to Jesus Christ (p. 244 HC).*** I find it fascinating that he calls "Mary Magdalene's marriage to Jesus Christ" a recurring theme. Again, there is not a **single** reference in any of the ancient writings that refers to Jesus being married to her. Nada. Zip. The Gospel of Philip talks about Mary Magdalene as Jesus' friend and companion and Brown

says, “As any Aramaic scholar will tell you, the word *companion* in those days literally meant *spouse*.”

*First, the passage he’s referring to was written in Coptic, not Aramaic. Second, it’s simply not true. *Companion* means **friend**. There are many words for wife, and the author didn’t use them. Finally, the Gospel of Philip was not written by an eyewitness—it was written almost 2 centuries later and given a fake name to make it sound authentic.

-When Jesus is dying on the cross, he doesn’t say a word to Mary; he only speaks to John about caring for his mother. Paul says nothing about Jesus being married—and there are a couple of instances when it would’ve been very helpful to do so. Not a single historian or scholar—ancient or current—agrees with what Dan Brown says here.

- c. Brown makes another incredible statement in his book: ***The royal bloodline of Jesus Christ has been chronicled in exhaustive detail by scores of historians (p. 253 HC).***

-Where’s he getting this stuff? Well, he took it directly from a 1982 book entitled ***Holy Blood, Holy Grail***.

Guess where the authors of that book got their information? From Pierre Plantard—the creator of the Piory of Sion hoax!

6. There’s one more very important question ***The Da Vinci Code*** raises. ***Was Christianity, as presented in the New Testament, an attempt by men to gain control over women?***

-The irony of this question is that one of the most radical things about Jesus as He’s seen in the New Testament is the seriousness with which he took women. In that culture, there was a daily prayer prayed by most rabbis: ***Blessed art Thou, O God, who did not make me a woman.***

-Imagine Jesus as the best known teacher in Israel inviting women to travel with his group as his followers. As I already mentioned, the women who followed Jesus apparently paid most of the bills for the group. It was three women, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary, mother of James who first witnessed the resurrection. In the early church, this celebration of women was even more profound. Paul, the apostle, makes the statement: ***There is now neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for your all are one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28 NIV).***

-In fact, women flocked to the early church. Apparently an early church site was seized during the Roman persecution, and in the list of things seized, they listed 16 male tunics. Compare that with 38 veils—worn by women—82 female tunics, 47 pairs of female slippers, and 7 copies of ***Vogue*** magazine and a whole stash of chocolate and Diet Coke. Actually, I made up the magazine and chocolate and Coke thing—but the point is that women clearly outnumbered men.

-The tragedy is not that Mary Magdalene wasn’t Mrs. Jesus—the tragedy is that in this distorted view of history, the huge role of Mary, mother of Jesus, and the extraordinary role of Mary Magdalene and others like her has been totally missed.

7. So, is ***The Da Vinci Code*** good history? In other words, is historical Christianity really on shaky ground—and now we know what ***really*** happened?

-Let me give a short answer to that. "***The Da Vinci Code*** is a work of fiction and should be enjoyed as such (John Ortberg)." It's a fun read, it makes for an exciting movie, and the good thing is that it's gotten a lot of people talking about Jesus. That's good.

-But a novel is way different than history, because the author is accountable to no one. That's why a blunder as huge and obvious as the Priory of Sion thing can happen. When a person, like Dan Brown, writes a novel, there are no footnotes to tell you where he or she has gotten their information—and there's no bibliography to tell you what they've read—or ***hasn't*** read. And the author doesn't have to face the review of his or her claims by peers and experts in the historical and archaeological fields they typically blow through. A novel is fiction for the sake of entertainment. Period.

-This book, as history, has a ***lot*** of problems. Not 5 or 10—***hundreds***. Let me just give one quote as an example:

"Fortunately for historians, some of the gospels Constantine attempted to eradicate (like the Gnostic gospels) managed to survive. The Dead Sea Scrolls were found in the 1950's hidden in a cave near Qumran in the Judean desert."

-It would be hard to concentrate more mistakes into a shorter space than Dan Brown does in this single quote.

1) Constantine had nothing to do with eradicating books;

2) the Dead Sea Scrolls were found in 1947—not the 50's; 3) they were found by the Dead Sea, not in the Judean desert.

4) There's nothing about Jesus in them; most of them were written and stored before Jesus was even born. And these documents are friendly to Christianity because they confirm the accuracy of the Bible.

-So, enjoy the story—but don't start re-writing history.

8. One more question—and this is a very important one. The author of ***The Da Vinci Code*** has this quote: ***Until that moment in history [325 AD], Jesus was viewed by his followers as a great mortal prophet...a great and powerful man, but a man nonetheless. A mortal (p.253 PB).***

-The author goes on to state that Jesus was not considered to be the Son of God until this council—and that only happened by a relatively close vote of the bishops. Now, for the record you need to note that the vote wasn't on Jesus' divinity—but on a view being promoted by a guy named Arius. The issue was not whether Jesus was the Son of God, but on his pre-existence and equality with God. Out of over 300 Bishops, there were only 2 who voted "no." The vote between Gore and Bush was close. 300 to 2 is not close.

- a. Now, I'm going to be dealing with this much more extensively next week in a message called, ***Jesus and the Wannabes***. What you need to know is that all through his ministry, even though his humanity was very clear, Jesus claimed to be the Son of God.

He claimed the attributes of God, he did things only God could do, and accepted worship as God. He also said that He was "I AM"—the sacred name God had revealed to Moses. He said the final proof of who he claimed to be would be whether he rose from the dead or not. It's clear from history that he did.

-To say that Jesus wasn't viewed as God until 300 years after his death absolutely doesn't fit with the facts. The Apostle Paul, who wrote all of his works within 30

years of Jesus' death said, ***He is the image of the invisible God...For by him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together...For in Christ all the fullness of God lives in bodily form (Col. 1:15-17; 2:9 NIV)***. It's Paul who is very clear about the resurrection of Jesus from the dead—saying that there were still over 500 witnesses alive who had seen him after the resurrection.

-In fact, 200 years before Constantine, secular historians report that Christians were accused of worshipping Jesus Christ as God.

- b. Know what the main problem is? If Jesus had never claimed to be God, he never would've been crucified in the first place. Jesus **and** Mary Magdalene could've stayed right there in Israel, had Sarah and other children, and lived happily ever after, making a good living as a great teacher.
-But that's not what happened. When Jesus was being questioned before the Jewish High Priest, he applied a passage from the book of Daniel to himself that applied to God—and they instantly recognized it and condemned him and took him to Pilate to have him executed.
- c. This is my bottom line. ***Don't check your brain at the door...especially for a novel based on a well-known hoax.*** A novel is intended to entertain—and this one does. But that's all. Dan Brown is a good writer of conspiracy theory novels—not an historian.

- 9. The final scene in the book has the main character coming to the final resting place of the bones of Mary Magdalene, the Holy Grail—and then this: ***Like the murmurs of spirits in the darkness, forgotten words echoed. The quest for the Holy Grail is the quest to kneel before the bones of Mary Magdalene. A journey to pray at the feet of the outcast one (p. 489 SC)***. And then the main character falls on his knees.

- a. As I read those words, I wondered what Mary Magdalene would've thought of it? We aren't told much about Mary—except that she was from the town of Magdala and that, at one point, she'd been possessed by seven demons.

-I don't know how much you've read or how much you know about demon possession—but it is an awful thing. A demon is an incredibly evil, super-powerful being that takes over a man or woman's personality, creates unbelievable spiritual and emotional confusion and does a lot of damage.

Mary was possessed, not by one, but **seven** evil spirits. She experienced a kind of inner torment we can't imagine.

-But one day she somehow met Jesus. We aren't told how or where or what she was doing. All we know is that she was suddenly set totally and completely free. And she apparently left everything and started following Jesus. She followed him right to the cross, watched him die, watched him wrapped and put in a tomb—and was the very first one to see him resurrected from the dead.

- b. If she was actually there for this scene in the book—or in the movie—she would grab this guy by the shoulders and say, "What are you **doing!** I'm a human being like you. Someone who has failed and sinned—someone who needed grace,

someone to set me free. Jesus was the **Only One** who could. Don't bow before me, bow before **Him!**"

- c. I'm always fascinated when someone takes a little known character like Mary Magdalene, believes everything a con man says about her, and nothing that eyewitnesses and historians say about Jesus—and rewrites history to reject Jesus as “just a man”—then worships her as the sacred feminine.

10. The only reason I am up here this morning is because of Jesus. The best, most solid history I know of tells me that our problem as humans wasn't that we didn't have a good source of wisdom, or get a chance to experience the sacred feminine in some sexual ritual—and find the “god” in ourselves. Our problem was something called **sin**.

-I think one of the reasons why what this book says is so attractive to people is because of some of the stuff they've seen recently in religion—priests that abuse children; Televangelists that scam the elderly. And I would be the first to admit that this is the abuse of power at its very worst.

-I you're suspicious of religion; you have a right to be. So was Jesus. He was **anything** but a friend of religion—and He didn't come to establish another religion with pomp and ritual and a hierarchy of power. What got Jesus killed was an expose of the religious system in his day that had substituted itself for God. Jesus simply offered his life so that sinners like me could be redeemed and found.

-What **The Da Vinci Code** offers is simply another religion—a form of goddess worship. It was written, not to help people, but to make money. Dan Brown has already made a ton of money from it—as will Ron Howard, Tom Hanks and all the other actors.

-The problem with religion is that it is a manmade way of trying to get closer to God and be more impressed with ourselves. It usually includes secrets and rituals that will help us a little better, a little wiser, a little closer to God. But **no** religion can give us what we need most. Forgiveness, grace, and hope.

-We couldn't find our way to God—we got lost in the maze of religion. The Bible says that God loved us enough to come to us. He became one of us—and offered Himself to us. What he wants is not for us to get in touch with the sacred feminine, or with our inner child, or with our past, or with some form of hidden knowledge.

He wants us to come into a relationship of love and forgiveness and grace with Him—paid for with the blood of His Only Son, Jesus Christ.

-And that forgiveness is real. It's the only reason I can even remotely feel that I have a clean heart this morning. That simple message has at times gotten encrusted with all kinds of religious junk, with steeples, rituals, religious professionals and politics. And that is so **unbelievably** sad. But the truth has always been there, it's changed the world. While some people were amassing power and building impressive cathedrals and fighting crusades, the true followers of Jesus were living simply and truthfully and honestly as redeemed people—loving and caring for the outcasts—just like Jesus did.

And that could be true of you. Jesus is still in the business of changing people who will humble themselves and come to Him. God offers you grace and hope and forgiveness no matter where you've been or what you've done. It's not fiction; it's not a mystery novel. It's true. You can stake your eternity on it.