

# Confronting *The Da Vinci Code*

*[B]ut in your hearts  
honor Christ the Lord as holy,  
always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you  
for a reason for the hope that is in you;  
yet do it with gentleness and respect, (1 Peter 3:15, ESV)*

## Chapter 1: Books, Movies and Controversies

"Have you read *The Da Vinci Code*?" "Are you going to see the movie?"

Normally, you may not pay attention to things like the New York Times bestseller list. But no one can ignore these statistics: topping that list at number one or two for well over a year, seven million copies in print with new editions and spin-offs also now in print and on the way. It is being translated into some 40 languages. And the movie version is being filmed this year.

It has not even been a year since *The Passion of the Christ* hit the movie theaters. Christians everywhere welcomed the release enthusiastically, bought tickets in bulk, rented entire movie houses for select showings, and bussed in their friends. Except for the remaining sales of the DVD in time for Christmas, the hype and excitement is all but gone. (Mel Gibson is appreciative, I'm sure, for a profit of over 600 million dollars, some of which helped him buy a nice, private, island getaway.) But now, the same is about to happen again - people are going to flock to movie theaters, bring their friends and be absolutely entranced and educated with yet another version of events. But this time, the focus and influence will be in the opposite direction: a direct and insidious attack on history and on truth, persuading audiences that "history and truth" is actually a big sham and deception.

Now, books and movies all come and go. And if you have been unaware or unimpressed with all the attention of the book, *The Da Vinci Code*, and upcoming release of the movie version, you might just think that it, too, is just a fad that will pass as well. Perhaps. But I keep envisioning that last wave that occurs in the movie, *The Perfect Storm*. Some waves just cause a stir in culture and society for a moment and are gone. Others change forever the landscape upon which they crash.

This time, the movie in question will, indeed, have great impact. And it will contribute, in an amazingly effective way, to the formulation of worldview of all who look to entertainment for their theology, their grasp and knowledge of history, their priorities and way of life. And more and more people fit that mold.

I feel I can be so confident about the movie's effectiveness because I have already seen how effective the book has been. Some public schools and colleges make it required reading. Religious and secular book groups alike have been reading it and discussing it - many times without counsel or objective information. The historical sites mentioned in the book are

inundated with tourists and visitors looking for the signs and symbols that “point the way” and “decode the mystery”.

To put it in the words of historian James Hitchcock: “People who do not read serious books are reading *The Da Vinci Code*, and for many it is the closest to a ‘real’ book they will ever come.” I think it is worse than that. I think people who do read serious books are also reading *The Da Vinci Code*. Sharp, intellectual minds who cannot be easily fooled on subjects like politics, the sciences, and economics are taking the arguments and innuendos of Mr. Brown on face value. And by it they are being absolutely confirmed in their suspicion and criticism of the Christian faith and are convinced this not only closes the case for them but also adds fuel to the fire of their aim to overthrow the remaining influences of Christianity on Western Civilization. And they are teaching their doctrine – directly and indirectly - in classrooms all over America to those who “do not read serious books”.

Should you read *The Da Vinci Code*? I don’t think it is for everyone. But that is just the problem – many people you know, that you work with, go to school with, perhaps even worship with are reading it and are being persuaded into the skepticism and denial it persuades you to embrace. Mature Christians should read it\*. They need to be able to engage others with it. But whether or not you read it, you should and can be prepared to respond concerning it.

To help you prepare for such opportunities of dialogue, I will, Lord willing, be presenting monthly articles this year on some of the historical and theological points of which you need to have a decent grasp. If you know only these things with confidence, you will be much more able to represent the true Christ in your life and in your defense of him to others.

-----  
If you do decide to read it, my suggestion is that you not buy it. Don’t contribute monetarily to Mr. Brown’s efforts. Borrow a copy, or buy it used.

## Chapter 2: History Is Always Interpreted by Sinners

*“[H]istory is always written by winners. ...  
As Napoleon once said, ‘What is history, but a fable agreed upon?’”  
(Prof. Teabing in *The Da Vinci Code*, p. 256)*

Can there be such a thing as an objective history? To answer that question you must wrestle to define two words: “objective” and “history”. On one hand, “objectivity” is defined as a conscious self-denial of bias, a commitment to impartiality. But objectivity must be defined. A judge, for instance, cannot be objective if he does not know or comply with the laws of the land in matters of any given trial. Even objectivity requires a world-view, a value system, an impetus that compels the historian to write down or report what he sees because he recognizes it is important.

“History” is the other word in need of definition. It is not enough to talk about dates and dead people. It requires organization, structure, motive and purpose to compose a history. Why study history, or for that matter, why deny it, if it has no meaning anyway? if it has no order, if it is forever mysterious, unknowable and, therefore, meaningless? History also requires a world-view, an approach, even a focal point upon which everything else is prioritized.

For many of the most ancient of civilizations, early history was based on events. When the worldwide flood occurred it lodged itself in the memories and folktales and artwork of most of the civilizations which emanated from it around the world in one form or another. To many, recalling the event itself was clear enough. But none of those cultural histories could resist also attempting to attach some kind of meaning to the event. It is not enough to simply report events. Events must have meaning. Therein lies the issue of objectivity. Whenever meaning is assigned to an event, purpose is understood.

So when a man or a culture assigns merely his own meaning to events, myth is born. What meaning does the existence and travel of the sun mean? Is it a god traveling in a chariot? Where is he going? What is he doing? Why does he repeat the travel every single day? All of man's own interpretation of known events carry with them such imagination and invention. But to truly understand events, we need more than mere creativity.

In later times and civilizations, history began to be recorded according to the reigns of kings. Like the deities of any given nation, the annals of her kings was for her own sense of glory and protection. That was seen as the purpose for history. As sons succeeded fathers on the throne, the strength of the nation began to be seen in the heritage of their combined reigns and that was recorded. For thousands of years in China, this was the meaning assigned to history - dynasty meant strength, permanence, identity. In Egypt, even though the technological "know-how" to build the Great Pyramids was already lost by the time Moses was born, the kings were still be buried in glorious splendor and the line of her ancient kings was kept intact.

But with the coming of Moses, our understanding of history was changed forever. Moses wrote history in a radically different way: linearly, candidly, objectively. How did he come by this? He was not writing according to his own design or creativity but by the revealed Word that came from God. Yahweh gave Moses his perspective, his meaning. What God revealed to Moses was that history was not about man, it was about God. It doesn't boast myth, it makes assertions about true meaning as coming from the Creator, and it calls us to believe what it says in order to interpret our world with true meaning. And as the Israelites were so central to what God was doing in history, we see that people spoken of in the Scriptures not as they wanted people to remember them but as they really were. They did not always win, did not always look good. But the history of this insignificant, little band of homeless people endured in a world of passing empires - "winners" by man's standard - because the true Winner who wrote this history was not man at all. It was God.

And it is God's meaning and perspective that teaches us about ourselves. God's history tells us man is not endlessly evolving or cycling repeatedly through existential space. Man has been made in the image of God. God's word tells us there is a beginning of all things and there will be an end of all things. And that there is also a purpose for all things - a purpose which even includes man sinning against God, being fallen by nature and being cursed for it by God. But the true meaning of history also tells us that it is a story. It is a story about a Messiah and a redemption of God's people and of the world he created. And the story has an ending - a day when all history will come to an end.

Literally, all of Western Civilization has been constructed and has prospered on this understanding of history, this meaning of existence. It effects our view of ourselves, our culture, our burden to educate and instruct our children, our appreciation for the arts, the cause, endeavor and opportunity of the sciences. It effects our social order and government, our sense of right and wrong, our duty of compassion and our eagerness to see that same foundation spread throughout the world.

And that means there really is a “darkness” in the history of nations, cultures and civilizations that do not understand/embrace that meaning – that have been constructed without the Creator’s explanation but on the imaginations of men. Those thousands of years of Chinese dynasties were to be remembered for their own glory but were really marked by a culture of inhumanity, a lack of progress and a meaningless worship of ancestors as idols. Egypt, even with its development and early construction of the Great Pyramids, was not advancing but deteriorating as a culture by the time of Moses. The meanings of their existence did not inspire or direct them to progress. And the only reason we know today about all these other nations and cultures is not because they have provided us with their own carefully recorded histories – there were no such things – but because Western Civilization has been compelled to explore the world, study what it finds through the sciences of sociology and archeology and write their history for them.

One recent example of this contrast took place in March of 2001. The Islamic Taliban was in the process of destroying 1500 year old Buddhist monuments carved into the mountains of Afghanistan. The worldview of Islam has always been so: do not heighten awareness of the world or of history or of other cultures but destroy them. Bury the past, erase it from memory.

Today, as represented in the portrayals in Mr. Brown’s book, riding the present “anti-Western Civilization” ground swell that we witness on college and university campuses today, there is an attack on objective history. “History,” we’re told, “can’t be truly known. It is written and re-written to suit whoever is in power and whoever is on top at the time. We simply cannot know the past.” But in truth, history has always been a science for Western Civilization and not merely a tool for propaganda. And that fact cannot be so simply and flippantly denied and dismissed unless, that is, it is to be intentionally suppressed.

Dan Brown demonstrates this clearly in his book. On one hand, the history of the Christian Church is not to be believed. ‘It is all a sham, written by winners who have long suppressed the truth.’ But in its place, he proposes conspiracy. He says there is credible evidence which reveals an “alternative” history, and that, at long last, we can know the real truth. Think about what he is asking you to believe! First, he hides behind the lie that history cannot be trusted or known, and then he gives us what he wants us to trust and to know in its place as history!

This fallacy will crumble of its own weight. History can be known by the study of it, which often means going back to original documents and evidence, and which purges itself continually of corruption rather than depending upon it. And because the science of history is true, that which is put forth as history, according to the creativity of man, cannot stand the test of such scrutiny when it is not.

The real question is: what “objective” shall we hold to in our own study of history? To whom shall we listen to and by which we will interpret and understand our world and our own place in it? To embrace the foundation of Western Civilization is to continue to progress toward learning and light. To reject it as mere Christian religiosity is to abandon all meaning to life and turn our faces to the darkness.

## Chapter 3: Heroes not to be Forgotten

*"[U]ntil that moment in history {the Council of Nicaea}, Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet ... a great and powerful man, but a man nonetheless. A mortal."  
(Prof. Teabing in The Da Vinci Code, p. 233)*

The witness of Christ's divinity begins with the inspired texts and the first century. Peter stood up and preached on Pentecost to the skeptical gathering of faithful and orthodox Jewish pilgrims and preached the clear message of Jesus crucified and risen again. But it is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that so many would come to believe then and in the days following, and then return to their homelands with the good news in such a powerful way that the church began to grow even before the apostles were spread out into the world. James, the half-brother of Jesus, led the true mother church in Jerusalem. But north, in Antioch, another great, Gentile, and mission-sending church grew. Their eagerness and fervency for the Great Commission gave them the new name "Christian". And it was from that church in Antioch that Paul launched out on his remarkably successful missionary tours. The other disciples also went out into the world. The biblical record is silent on much of their work and so we can only imagine how they and many others did the same. And why was Paul so eager? There is simply no other explanation possible for his conversion, his sacrificial zeal and the doctrine emanating from his missionary letters than the truth that Jesus is Lord!

But the growth and transition in the church of Christ from the first to the second century is no less spectacular and amazing than the years of its origin. True, the signs and wonders had begun to fade and the inspired texts were now in the hands of uninspired but still Spirit-filled men of conviction and zeal. To speak in general terms, the church virtually doubled in number during this century. And her leaders, her pastors and teachers, are referred to today as *Apostolic Fathers*. We know of them, their message, their ministries, and we behold their witness in the growth, the establishment and the legacy of the early church.

To many Christians, these men are usually only known to be martyrs. In fact, most often, when ancient church history is taught even to seminary students, that is all you are likely to learn. Polycarp was martyred. Clement was martyred. Ignatius was martyred. But the real question is this: what in the world was it about those men – their ministries and their message – that led to their deaths? In a world such as Rome provided, which tolerated most anything, what could possibly motivate that government so much as to pursue, arrest, transport over a long distance, bring to trial, and then execute a stubborn 86 year old man? Why bother?

Clearly the answer to the question about their deaths is found in asking who these men were in life. Here are church leaders who did not come with their four spiritual laws, their evangelism programs, their sports ministry, their worship wars or their seeker-friendly services. Here are preachers who declared the one, true gospel, who called and moved people to change their thinking – to reject the idolatry of their traditions and families, to reject, at great, supposed risk, their superstitions about crop-growth, fertility, even of national safety, to reject their selfish lifestyles, even to forsake their family members as those family members were forsaking them. And for what? Some higher truth of peace and love found in reaching inward for a vision of a risen Jesus and trying to be "just like him"? No, my friends. John Lennon had it terribly wrong. Peace and love in this world have never ever been that desirable. No, something much greater was stirring in the souls of men, something bigger than themselves.

Clement of Rome was one of the greatest pastors of the church in Rome. He called his people to repentance and faith in the risen Lord and to true fellowship with a radical hospitality

and the development of real community which could affect culture. Ignatius of Antioch was absolutely devoted to Christ and pastored that great mission-sending church. He was an example of gospel integrity, claiming that he was “allergic to sin”. He was exuberant for the glory of the gospel and his preaching was dramatic, passionate and inspiring. Hermas, a pastor in Rome, was completely devoted to building up the Kingdom of God. He ministered to the poor and composed a Christian guide called The Shepherd, which directs the faithful in the practice of the orthodox Christian faith. And Polycarp was that 86 year old man, having been a disciple of John. He was trained and was sent out to do missionary preaching and whose many years of ministry and preaching, influence and reputation was so effective that finally it could be tolerated no longer by the Roman government. He was arrested in his home in Smyrna, transported to Rome and tried. When he was asked to simply deny Jesus as Lord for his freedom, he said “Fourscore and six years have I served Him, and he has done me no harm. How then can I curse my King that saved me.” For that simple response, he was burned at the stake and stabbed to death.

In the following centuries, other church leaders would take their places: Justin, Tertullian, Irenaeus, Cyprian, Melito, Athenagoras, all who preached and taught with a zeal for the gospel that refused to be watered down, altered or stifled, even under threat of persecution and death. Such leaders are the bridges between the witness of the apostles and the church of Christ as she continues today. They were not pleading for acceptance, they were not minding their own business. They were demanding change – conversion, repentance, faith in Jesus Christ risen, obedience in life and trust through death with firm expectation of reception into glory. They were inspiring younger men to rise up with them and take their own place and answer their own calling to lead and shepherd and pastor the church. They did not just serve in their office or put in their time until retirement. They considered the gospel and the Kingdom of Christ to be bigger than they were themselves. They believed in the torch that had been handed down to them from the apostles themselves and that their duty, their job, their calling, even their very lives were given for the singular objective of passing that torch on to those who would follow them in the next generation.

Such men could not have been so inspired and driven by believing Jesus was just another man with just another philosophy. They believed, preached, lived – gloriously - and died - mercilessly - holding up Jesus as the God-man and the only name under heaven given to men by which they must be saved.

## Chapter 4: Villains Ancient and Modern

*“Orthodoxy tends to distrust our capacity to make such distinctions [about good and evil, truth and falsehood] and insists on making them for us. ... Many of us, wishing to be spared hard work, gladly accept what tradition teaches.”*

*Elaine Pagels, Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas, p. 184*

One of the myths of the ancient church age that is being widely proclaimed today, especially in light of the attention it is given because of The Da Vinci Code, is that the doctrines of traditional, orthodox Christianity slowly evolved and developed from the simple, moral teachings of Jesus into the rather fantastic claims currently held by orthodoxy of Jesus being divine, the resurrected Messiah, the way, the truth and the light. In other words, doctrine is

believed to have slowly grown and become codified right along with the growth of the political institution that the Christian church became, even as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

But if you really know ancient church history and have read the documents of the early church fathers you know that what is known today as traditional, orthodox Christianity was, from the very beginning, radical. It was understood and practiced, and was clearly proclaimed, taught, believed. And it was a message for which they were willing to die. Literally from the time of Christ forward, the church declared him to the world and demanded that the world change – to repent and believe the good news.

Meanwhile, as time progressed, it was heresy that, like weeds in the field, grew up, evolved, developed and fought against the truth both theologically and politically. But this pressure forced the hands of the church's apologists to approach, recognize, confront and refute the mistakes. And as they did so, their ability to cogently argue and defend the faith became more and more precise and exacting. By the providence of God, such refutation allowed the church to better define its terms and defend the gospel.

Gnosticism, which has expressed itself in many varied forms of thought and schools, is just one of those ancient, man-centered and slippery mysticisms that was, at its core, anti-Christian. Whereas the word "agnostic" means "unknown", the word "nostic" means "known". Gnosticism touted its disciples as superior because they were said to hold a secret knowledge that is, itself, superior. A Gnostic today is one who is constantly searching for truth in his mind. He is a serious student seeking the reward of deeper insight. As such, the farther a student progresses, the more secret his understanding becomes. Gnosticism prides itself in its mystery, its secrets, puzzles and games. It is, inherently a man-centered world view, an over-evaluation of the value of knowledge and the coinciding, depreciation of faith.

Ancient forms of Gnosticism can be seen in various schools of Greek philosophy including Plato. In Judaism, it is called Cabbala and the Syrian version is Zoroastrianism. During the time of the ancient church, the most popular version, running from about 170-240 AD was Mithraism. As Gnosticism began to find its way into Christian doctrine, an emphasis and enticing of true knowledge grew. Various teachers, like Basilides, Valentinus and even Marcion to an extent, embraced what they liked about the Christian message but rejected what did not suit them. Gnosticism's essentially dualistic worldview changed the Scripture's depiction of Jehovah into a demiurge. It separated Jesus, the man, from the Christ and the Holy Spirit, and eliminated the need for Jesus' sacrificial atonement from the gospel message, replacing it with the call to find your own salvation (re: transcendence) through the continual study of "secret" knowledge which the seeker alone may find.

Gnosticism was not only dangerous because it decimated the gospel while portraying itself to be its friend, the implications of Gnostic teaching carry its followers in very predictable directions. Gnostics were antinomian (no need for law or obedience) and were given to sensuality and debauchery (the body is, by its nature, evil and is separate from one's spirit).

But the clear and present danger of Gnosticism was seen by the early church even before the time that the gospels were being written. John, whose gospel is accepted the most readily by the Gnostic camp, is the apostle who most clearly warns us against them. Irenaeus, in 180 AD, recognized Gnosticism as a vicious, anti-Christian lie and wrote against it in his book Against Heresies:

*Inasmuch as certain men have set the truth aside, and bring in lying words and vain genealogies, which, as the apostle says, 'minister questions rather than godly edifying which is in faith,' and by means of their craftily-constructed plausibilities draw away the minds of the inexperienced and take them captive, [I have felt constrained, my dear friend, to compose the following treatise in order to expose and counteract their*

*machinations.] These men falsify the oracles of God, and prove themselves evil interpreters of the good word of revelation. They also overthrow the faith of many, by drawing them away, under a pretence of [superior] knowledge, from Him who rounded and adorned the universe; as if, forsooth, they had something more excellent and sublime to reveal, than that God who created the heaven and the earth, and all things that are therein. By means of specious and plausible words, they cunningly allure the simple-minded to inquire into their system; but they nevertheless clumsily destroy them, while they initiate them into their blasphemous and impious opinions respecting the Demiurge; and these simple ones are unable, even in such a matter, to distinguish falsehood from truth.*

Tertullian (197-220), likewise, wrote clearly and concisely as well in his Prescription of Heretics, and Against Praxis. Also, Justin Martyr (150-160) in Against Heresies and Against Marcion:

*If He had no need of the flesh, why did He heal it? And what is most forcible of all, He raised the dead. Why? Was it not to show what the resurrection should be? How then did He raise the dead? Their souls or their bodies? Manifestly both. If the resurrection were only spiritual, it was requisite that He, in raising the dead, should show the body lying apart by itself, and the soul living apart by itself. But now He did not do so, but raised the body, confirming in it the promise of life. Why did He rise in the flesh in which He suffered, unless to show the resurrection of the flesh? And wishing to confirm this, when His disciples did not know whether to believe He had truly risen in the body, and were looking upon Him and doubting, He said to them, "Ye have not yet faith, see that it is I;" and He let them handle Him, and showed them the prints of the nails in His hands. And when they were by every kind of proof persuaded that it was Himself, and in the body, they asked Him to eat with them, that they might thus still more accurately ascertain that He had in verity risen bodily; and He did eat honey-comb and fish. And when He had thus shown them that there is truly a resurrection of the flesh, wishing to show them this also, that it is not impossible for flesh to ascend into heaven (as He had said that our dwelling-place is in heaven), "He was taken up into heaven while they beheld," as He was in the flesh. If, therefore, after all that has been said, any one demand demonstration of the resurrection, he is in no respect different from the Sadducees, since the resurrection of the flesh is the power of God, and, being above all reasoning, is established by faith, and seen in works.*

These apologists of the true Christian faith recognized that all of these Gnostic schools and views rejected the truth. The Gnostics did not want to be accepted alongside the truth of the gospel, they wanted to replace it.

Today, those who advocate modern-day Gnosticism also cry for tolerance of different views. Yet their goal is merely the same: to replace the gospel. But do we hear the voices of others today who defend the true faith? Those who wrote against the Gnostics then and defended the true faith did not see it as their Christian duty to be tolerant and accepting. Instead, they sounded the alarm when lies infested the church and when wolves invaded the sheepfold.

Today, Christians often talk of continuing to change the world. But too often they are not willing to be and live in such a convicted and radical way as those in the ancient church did. Many vainly hope that by simply maintaining the status quo, voting in right way at political elections, try to stay moral in their own lives, going and giving to the church on a fairly regular basis, and simply living a good, Christian life, that the world will slowly evolve back into the world with a Christian worldview. Sadly, that will not happen.

Christianity will not happen by evolution. Gnosticism, on other hand, grows like a weed every day. Truth is the doctrine Christ brings into the world. Error and darkness is what the sinful heart of man creates on his own. That weed must be pulled. That darkness must be dispelled. That will always take boldness, clarity, conviction and sacrifice. 'Tolerance' for lies is the cry of unbelief. Grace, mercy and truth must continue to be the declaration of the church.



## Chapter 5: Has Mary Magdalene been Stifled? The Gospels vs. the Gnostics

*“And the companion of the Saviour is Mary Magdalene.  
Christ loved her more than all the disciples and used to kiss her often on her mouth.”  
(from “The Gospel of Philip” as quoted in The Da Vinci Code, p. 2460)*

Mary Magdalene is the real story that is being told by Dan Brown in The Da Vinci Code. As calculated and energetic is his effort to deny Jesus’ divinity, there is a much more shrewd and cunning determination to virtually lift Mary Magdalene to that very status instead. At the end of the book, the character, Robert Langdon, has a spiritual experience at the supposed grave of Mary which moves him to reverence and makes him fall to his knees, after which he thinks he hears a woman’s voice speaking to him. How impressive is that?

What we really know of this Mary comes from the most ancient of testimonies - the gospels themselves. She is always known by her link with the ancient community of Magdala. This is significant because the other Marys we read of in the gospels are all described and identified by their relationship to a male, as was the common Jewish reference point for women in that day.

We know more about Mary Magdalene than we do most of the apostles. Sometime before the events of Lk. 8:2, Jesus met her and drove out seven demons from her. Since that moment, the gospels liberally mention and describe her as one of the several female companions and supporters of the apostolic band. She was there at the crucifixion, standing apart and at a distance with the other women and not up close to the cross where Mary, Jesus’ mother and the apostle John stood. She witnessed the burial of the Lord, again from a distance, and with another of the women. With other women, she went to the tomb to pay the body of Jesus honor on the morning of that first Lord’s Day. Then, she and the other women carried the news of the angels to the apostles. The last mention of her is when the resurrected Jesus appears to her and speaks to her. In her shock and relief she called him her teacher (“Rabboni”) and, apparently, tried to embrace him. But this Jesus told her she must not do. That attempted embrace is the only time she is singled out specifically in the gospels and it is the only time when she is alone with Jesus. Simply put, there was no personal preference or special relationship between the two.

But even though these eye-witness testimonies record so much of her presence and participation, we are told that the ancient church fathers, and Constantine himself, sought to eradicate the truth about Mary from the records by attempting to erase her name from memory. To this we can safely say that there is absolutely no evidence of this whatsoever. By the time of Constantine, there were numerous copies of the Scriptures scattered to all parts of the empire. We have remnants of many of them recovered from all kinds of places and some of them date back nearly to the originals themselves. There are no such editorial emendations, no selective re-writing of history as the skeptics want to insist actually happened.

Instead, the selective re-writing of history deliberately began with the appearance of some mysterious Gnostic tracts. These began emerging as late as 150 to 200 years after the time of Christ. Yet, they claimed to be further accounts of other eye-witnesses! (That is as believable as if I were to show you what I claimed to be a “first-hand account” today of a conversation between Grant and Lee during the War Between the States!) The problem is that some people do believe these later writings. And by writing this fiction, Dan Brown has now given them some credibility in the minds of people who do not know any better.

There are two passages from the Gnostic writings that are held up for our attention (rf. pp. 246-7). The first is the *Gospel of Philip* (which dates from approximately the latter half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> c.). It does not read as the original gospels do, it is a mixture of spontaneous statements of wisdom and illustration as gnostic writings often do.

Among some of its teachings it claims:

- light and darkness, life and death are brothers
- the virgin birth is to be denied
- the Holy Spirit is feminine
- the death and resurrection of Christ is to be denied
- saints are served by evil powers
- God is a man-eater.

Then, in the heart of the writing is this obscure passage below. The integrity of the document has suffered and what has been lost is marked with brackets and in some of those brackets suggested readings are offered:

*As for the Wisdom who is called "the barren," she is the mother of the angels. And the companion of the [...] Mary Magdalene. [...] loved her more than [all] the disciples, and [used to] kiss her [often] on her [...]. The rest of the disciples [...]. They said to him "Why do you love her more than all of us?" The Savior answered and said to them, "Why do I not love you like her? When a blind man and one who sees are both together in darkness, they are no different from one another. When the light comes, then he who sees will see the light, and he who is blind will remain in darkness."*

At its worst, the writing only presents itself as a scandal, sort of an ancient tabloid-style newspaper, trying desperately to ruin someone’s reputation. At its best, it does not have to say what Brown and some others have presumed and lead others to conclude. Earlier in the same writing, there is mention and description of a “kiss of fellowship between believers where nothing sexual is intended” (rf. Bock, p. 22). It is more likely, then, that if a kiss is actually described, then the kiss alluded to in the former passage carries a similarly spiritual, familial connotation rather than a sexual one.

The other Gnostic writing is called the *Gospel of Mary Magdala*. It is badly segmented and portions are lost. Below is a lengthy quotation from it. The context is important. The scene is one where the disciples ask Mary to tell them things he told her but not them. We pick it up in amid her teaching:

*And desire said, I did not see you descending, but now I see you ascending. Why do you lie since you belong to me? The soul answered and said, I saw you. You did not see me nor recognize me. I served you as a garment and you did not know me. 12) When it said this, it (the soul) went away rejoicing greatly. Again it came to the third power, which is called ignorance. The power questioned the soul, saying, Where are you going? In wickedness are you bound. But you are bound; do not judge! And the soul said, Why do you judge me, although I have not judged? I was bound, though I have not bound. I was not recognized. But I have recognized that the All is being dissolved, both the earthly things and the heavenly. When the soul had overcome the third power, it went upwards and saw the fourth power, which took seven forms. The first form is darkness, the second desire, the third ignorance, the fourth is the excitement of death, the fifth is the kingdom of the flesh, the sixth is the foolish wisdom of flesh, the seventh is the wrathful wisdom. These are the seven powers of wrath. They asked the soul, Whence do you come slayer of men, or where are you going, conqueror of space? The soul answered and said, What binds me has been slain, and what turns me about has been overcome, and my desire has been ended, and ignorance has died. In a aeon I was released from a world, and in a Type from a type, and from the fetter of oblivion which is transient. From this time on will I attain to the rest of the time, of the season, of the aeon, in silence. When Mary had said this, she fell silent, since it was to this point that the Savior had spoken with her.*

Then comes the interchange below:

*But Andrew answered and said to the brethren, "Say what you wish to say about what she has said. I at least do not believe that the Savior said this. For certainly these teachings are strange ideas." Peter answered and spoke concerning these same things. He questioned them about the Savior: "Did He really speak privately with a woman and not openly to us? Are we to turn about and all listen to her? Did He prefer her to us?" Then Mary wept and said to Peter, "My brother Peter, what do you think? Do you think that I have thought this up myself in my heart, or that I am lying about the Savior?" Levi answered and said to Peter, "Peter you have always been hot tempered. Now I see you contending against the woman like the adversaries. But if the Savior made her worthy, who are you indeed to reject her? Surely the Savior knows her very well. That is why He loved her more than us. Rather let us be ashamed and put on the perfect Man, and separate as He commanded us and preach the gospel, not laying down any other rule or other law beyond what the Savior said. And when they heard this they began to go forth to proclaim and to preach.*

Mr. Brown only quotes the latter part in order to draw sympathy for this poor, misunderstood Mary. He even draws the proper conclusion for you on p. 248: He composes the words that Teabing says: "I daresay Peter was something of a sexist." That comment by the character of Professor Teabing makes him out to be an idiot and it proves that the author, Mr. Brown, is actually malicious in his intent to twist and pervert what this gnostic writing actually says. As a fictional record, it is clear that the author of *The Gospel of Mary Magdala* is deliberately posing the scenario to make it look as though Andrew and Peter, who still hold to an orthodox view and find Mary's teaching unacceptable in content, are still wrong simply because it was Mary that was

doing the talking. And, of course, that is exactly what Mr. Brown wants you to think as well.

## Chapter 6: Has Mary Magdalene been Disgraced?

*"The threat Mary Magdalene posed to the men of the early Church was potentially ruinous. ... The Church, in order to defend itself against the Magdalene's power, perpetuated her image as a whore ...  
... her name was forbidden by the Church, ... "*  
(Prof. Teabing, *The Da Vinci Code*, p. 254)

In Dan Brown's book, Mary Magdalene's reputation becomes a key factor in building the case against the ancient Church and in finally revealing to the world the truth that has been suppressed for centuries. In fact, it is vital to Dan Brown's argument that a smear campaign against her character be seen as having taken place in the early church in order that Professor Teabing and other Neo-Gnostics can then come to her rescue. You see, reader, if Mary has not been smeared she cannot be exalted.

Over 100 years, perhaps as many as 150 years, passed from the time the gospels were written until the time the *Gospel of Mary Magdalene* was penned with its outrageous, Gnostic, counter-Christianity and its portrayal of the apostles as rejecting Mary and her message. The Apostolic Fathers did not fail to energetically recognize and refute the opposition of Gnosticism as it reached its hay-day. And they did that not with slander or malicious attacks but with solid exegesis and argument. They defended the orthodox Christianity according to the authority of the gospels themselves and by applying good logic to the Gnostics' own teachings which displayed the fallacies of their claims.

Nothing else changed for another 300 years until the era of Pope Gregory (590-604). Gregory is the pope recognized historically as having firmly established the supremacy of the Roman See over all the church and who did much to move the Roman Church into the medieval age. He was not a theologian but a trained lawyer. His homilies are generously preserved and they are known for their pastoral simplicity and his use of anecdotal illustration. Katherine Jansen describes Gregory's typical preaching style as showing "recourse to the tropological sense of the text, [that is,] its moral sense."<sup>1</sup>

Olson and Miesel points out in their book that when Gregory applied this to the person of Mary Magdalene, it meant that he "believed that the seven demons that had once possessed Mary Magdalene were not only literal demons but also represented the seven deadly sins."<sup>2</sup> Pope Gregory's actual homily put it this way:

*She whom Luke calls the sinful woman, whom John calls Mary, we believe to be the Mary from whom seven devils were ejected according to Mark. And what did these seven devils signify, if not all the vices? ... It is clear, brothers, that the woman previously used the unguent to perfume her flesh in forbidden acts. What she therefore displayed more scandalously, she was now offering to God in a more praiseworthy manner. She had coveted with earthly eyes, but now through penitence these are consumed with tears. She displayed her hair to set off her face, but now her*

*hair dries her tears. She had spoken proud things with her mouth, but in kissing the Lord's feet, she now planted her mouth on the Redeemer's feet. For every delight, therefore, she had had in herself, she now immolated herself. She turned the mass of her crimes to virtues, in order to serve God entirely in penance, for as much as she had wrongly held God in contempt." (Hom. 33, PL 76:1239)*

Clearly, Gregory is guilty of confusing one Mary with another. He is also guilty of assuming Mary Magdalene's past was that of prostitution. But this could not, even in the farthest reaches of exaggeration be considered a smear campaign. Rather, Gregory is saying that even a prostitute, with as wicked and shameful a past as that had been, can still be redeemed, cleansed and forgiven. Even such a sinner as her can find a place of worship and adoration and praise at the Savior's feet. And if Mary, then you, too, can be forgiven; you, too, can be saved.

Furthermore, an illustration within a homily, as this was, is not the same as a papal pronouncement declaring a formal position of the Church. That association of Mary with the woman of prostitution did, indeed, become a western tradition, but Mary's name was never forbidden or scandalized by such an association because the focus was always on the mercy and grace that Christ had shown to her. Her memory and service were not banned but celebrated in the Roman Catholic Church and there are ministries and organizations of mercy named after her.

Meanwhile, in the Eastern Orthodox Church, Gregory's suggested link of the anonymous sinner of Luke 7:36-50 (which never even identifies the sin as prostitution) with the introduction of Mary Magdalene (Luke 8:1-3) was never accepted or believed. Nevertheless, the tradition of the Eastern Church also remembers and celebrates Mary's name and memory as a faithful follower of Christ. Nowhere is Mary attacked or degraded.

You see, the real scandal for the Gnostics, neo-Gnostics and feminists is in thinking of Mary Magdalene as a sinner in any sense of the word at all. Gnostics do not understand the gospel. They do not accept the work of Christ on the cross, the truth of the resurrection, forgiveness and gift of salvation through faith in him. They reject it all and have no need for any of it.

To the Gnostics, it is important and vital to declare to the world that Mary was not a sinner. She was not in need of salvation. If anything, Jesus was in need of her! In fact, the rest of the supposed conspiracy is built on that very premise. Mary had to be the first among the apostles because Jesus loved her more than anyone else. She came from a kingly lineage. The supposed hope of Jesus was that from their supposed sexual union, a new heir for the throne of David might come forth. And after Jesus was martyred, the real hope of all the world rested in her womb alone. All of this is an absolute denial of who Jesus truly was and is. In fact, to the Gnostics, Jesus' time is past. Now is the age of the Magdalene.

There simply is no exegetical or historical evidence for any of this whatsoever. There is absolutely nothing that successfully links Mary Magdalene to a past of prostitution. But in all our study and defense of Mary's honor, we must not fall into the trap of arguing the Gnostic and feminist side for them. Mary was not a woman without

sin. To be possessed of seven demons meant to be completely enslaved to the temptations and wickedness of this world. And to be vulnerable and prone to such enslavement required her natural, Adamic propensity to reject God in her life and choose selfishly. Mary sinned because she was a sinner. And only through her trusting in Jesus as her Savior gave her much more life than giving herself to him as her lover.

Jesus rebuked those demons and commanded them to release her and filled her instead with new life by the Holy Spirit. And for the rest of her life, she was devoted to the One who could do for her what she could not do for herself. She only wished to served Him who had ministered to her in a way that she could never do for Him.

<sup>1</sup>Jansen, Katherine Ludwig, The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup>Olson, Carl E. & Sandra Miesel, The Da Vinci Hoax, San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004, p. 82-83.

## Chapter 7: Was Mary Magdalene an Apostle for Christ or for the Sacrilegious Feminine?

*"Jesus was the original feminist. He intended for the future of His Church to be in the hands of Mary Magdalene."  
(Prof. Teabing, The Da Vinci Code, p. 248)*

### ***Mary as an Apostle of Jesus***

An *apostle* is one who is "sent out" literally. He is a messenger doing the will of another. Jesus, himself, is referred to as an apostle in Heb. 3:1 as one sent from God the Father. In the Gospels, which are the most ancient writing we have, it is clear that Jesus picked up and chose to use that term in a specific, technical sense. He rose from prayer and called from among his following of disciples twelve men. This group of twelve would be known as his "apostles". The definition of that technical term is later reiterated in Acts 1:21-22. The group of twelve is again singled out for all eternity in Rev. 21:14. There were always and only 12 men in this category. Peter refers to himself by this title in both of his New Testament letters.

It is clear that Paul also saw himself in this group. Although the apostles elected Matthias (Acts 1:26) to replace Judas, Paul continually claimed to have been personally called by the risen Lord (Acts 9:1-19). As such, he argued for the validity of that title for himself in Gal. 1:11-17, and readily referred to himself by that title over 15 times in his letters and speeches. The solid doctrine of his letters, his tireless, self-sacrificing energy to promote the gospel abroad, and, ultimately, his willingness not only to pour out his life but offer up his death for the sake of Christ all demonstrate the veracity of this testimony and claim.

But the title is also used less technically and more generally to refer to other devoted Christians in the book of Acts and elsewhere. Although the number of these is comparatively few (probably less than 5 versus almost 70 times that the term is used technically), still the more generic use of the word is used appropriately for others who

were sent out in the name of the gospel in word and in deed. This might even include one woman, at least, depending on what you do with Romans 16:7.

But the title is never given to Mary Magdalene. That is, until one of the Church Fathers, Hippolytus (170-236 AD), wrote this elaboration in his commentary on the *Song of Songs*:

*"Lest the female apostles doubt the angels, Christ himself came to them so that the women would be apostles of Christ and by their obedience rectify the sin of ancient Eve ... Christ showed himself to the (male) apostles and said to them: ... 'It is I who appeared to these women and I who wanted to send them to you as apostles.'"*

*(Hippolytus, Commentary on the Song of Songs 24-26, as quoted by Darrell Bock, p. 20)*

Obviously, Hippolytus is generously paraphrasing Jesus' words to Mary Magdalene, as well as the other women equally, on the morning of his resurrection. It is important to note that the first such reference to Mary as "apostle" comes from a Church Father with more than a small controversy tied up with his own life and service; and also that the title conferred upon her is found, not in a letter addressed on the subject of leadership and authority, but in the midst of his commentary on an Old Testament book of Scripture that speaks to devotion and endearment. Also, lest we miss it, notice that his attributing of the title was given not to Mary herself, or even individually or uniquely to any one person, but to all the women that morning for the specific task of being the "messenger from the risen Jesus", to bring the news of his resurrection to the true apostles - particularly to the true apostles - Peter and John.

We should also observe that referring to Mary as an actual apostle is something that the Gnostic writer of *The Gospel of Mary* (late 2<sup>nd</sup> century) could not bring himself (or herself) to do or did not think of doing, apparently. Even though he fictionalized some special words having come from Jesus to Mary Magdalene - words which she depicted as then giving to the real apostles - nevertheless, the writer never has her calling herself that title, nor was she ever referred to in the writing by it.

With the coming of the Middle Ages (now one thousand years after the fact), fascination for Mary Magdalene grew and she became the figurehead for some in the church's outreach ministry to women.

*By the eight century the Western Church was celebrating a feast day for Mary Magdalene, ... By the ninth century there were specific prayers ... , and by the eleventh century there was 'a complete mass dedicated to the saint ... '. During the abbacy of Geoffrey, Mary Magdalene was recognized as the patron of that church in a papal bull ... ". (Olson, p. 88)*

But the Mary Magdalene they celebrated was always the one saved by the grace of Jesus Christ from sin and condemnation and, therefore, one who could be held up as a model of deliverance to any and all who needed that same deliverance from the sin and degradation of their own lives. That such a woman could be given the opportunity and blessing to bear the great news of the resurrection to the apostles gave rise to the term "apostle to the apostles" - messenger to the true messengers.

### *Mary as a Tool of Pagan Feminism*

What all this means is that the present fascination and Gnostic claim that Mary Magdalene had originally been given authority over all the other apostles by Jesus himself is absolute fiction produced whole cloth virtually out of thin air by feminist theologians of our own day and age. We are now two thousand years after these events and in a present atmosphere charged not only feminist thinking but irresponsible and egregious scholarship.

Kenneth Woodward sums up the present reality of academic debate this way:

*... a small group of well-educated women decided to devote their careers to the pieces of Gnostic literature discovered in the last century, a find that promised a new academic specialty within the somewhat overtrodden field of Biblical studies, on which they could build a career. They became experts in this literature, as others become experts in the biology of the hermit crab. But unlike those who study marine decapod crustaceans, some of them came to identify with the objects of their study--in some cases, perhaps, because they had no other religious community to identify with other than that formed by common academic pursuit; others perhaps because they were in rebellion against whatever authoritative religious community nurtured their interest in religion in the first place, still others because they found in the Gnostic texts the kind of affirmation of inner divinity that their own New Age inclinations led them to.*

This is no broad brush, prejudicial dismissal of current academic scholarship by women on the part of Mr. Woodward. He succinctly describes three basic points:

#1 – This is, indeed, an argument generated and upheld by only a small group of educated women, mostly connected with Harvard Divinity School, who have, by such claims, gained personal notoriety. They have published a cache of books pretending to challenge tradition by revealing supposed truth and true, historical facts. But in reality they stand and argue on nothing more than their own speculations, imaginations, and tortured interpretations of obscure and late writings. Their goal is not to enlighten our understanding of the true history of Christianity but to do away with it altogether. They want nothing more than to overthrow the historic Christian faith and replace it with a matriarchal paganism.

#2 – Many of the Gnostic texts they cite are not new at all but have been known for some time and, what's more, known for a long time for what they really are. The discovery of the *Nag Hammadi* Library in Egypt in 1945 did bring forth more Gnostic literature but not on the issues desired and claimed by these feminists. Rather, that discovery really added nothing of substance to their discussion. For instance, even though, in his book, Mr. Brown claims over 80 gospel versions were in existence when the canon was being formed (p. 231), there were actually less than 10 in existence - and that is only if the term "gospel" is made intentionally broad. Even though he gives the impression (p. 246) that *The Gospel of Phillip* would be a "good place to start", it is, in fact, the only such documental statement at all which might be construed to suggest an intimate relationship between Jesus and Mary. Likewise, *The Gospel of Mary* is the only text in existence dealing with a supposed struggle for power involving Mary and Peter. And you, reader, have already read both of those texts here for what they truly are.



*Most scholars agree that those attempting to construct a picture of early Christianity based on Mary Magdalene as Jesus' wife and head apostle must do so by subjectively picking and choosing elements from second- and third-century writings, then project them back to the first century. (Olson, p. 93)*

#3 – The only thing that is really of substance (and danger) here is a modern feminist resentment and rebellion against the truth and the authority of the gospels themselves. The era of feminism we are currently enduring began in this generation in the 60s and early 70s. On the surface there were appreciable and understandable issues – social and economic equality, respect and judicial protection and prosecution against gender prejudice and violence. But below that sympathetic surface were deepening layers with sinister motives and agendas. Equality is really not the goal, it is superiority, even dominance and control. And, at the philosophical and theological level, it is even a reach and a claim for divinity itself.

Space does not allow me to explain or defend this thoroughly except to mention the key word in present day feminist theology: “the sacred feminine”. The male and his dominance is to be rejected (even that of Christ). The woman must be allowed to be exalted (and Mary Magdalene makes for a good icon for this). And this is done strictly on emotional, existential grounds and a narcissistic sexuality. Allow me some references merely to illustrate.

*The whole point, for many in the movement, is to discover divinity within the self and to encounter it in the female form. (Davis)*

*The 'male logos' must give way for 'Eros, the bridal aspect of divinity ... I would climb down from the Logos-oriented cross and redesign my life based on the blueprint for balance ... (Starbird)*

*I don't think we need folks hanging on crosses and blood dripping and weird stuff. (Williams)*  
*{My own} research helped clarify what I cannot love: the tendency to identify Christianity with a single, authorized set of beliefs however these actually vary from church to church – coupled with the conviction that Christian belief alone offers access to God. (Pagels)*

*Redemption 'consists essentially in knowledge of one's self. (Hauke)*

However you may react to statements like these, it must be clear that academic scholarship is not the aim or even a desire here. Rather, bizarre motives and visions use the appearance of legitimate study and research in order to gain public attention toward the goal of seeking and demanding what cannot be proven to actually be true and to try to override what simply cannot be denied.

*A central and re-occurring theme in the works of authors such as Margaret Starbird, Lynn Picknett, Susan Haskins, and Elaine Pagels is that of sexuality and gender. For those writers, Mary Magdalene represents a woman who is freed from sexual repression, who is not dependent upon a male-only hierarchy, and who fulfills her desires through confident individualism, not repentance and submission. Put directly, it is about power, with the recognition that sexuality is a core element of that power” (Olson, p. 80).*

### *Rectifying the Sin of Ancient Eve*

I want to admit something here: one thing these worshippers of the “sacred feminine” claim that is true: their pagan religion predates the advent of the Christian era and that it was this paganism that was driven out by the gospel. But that battle actually goes back much farther. It goes back to the Garden of Eden where the very first woman was enticed with the same lie that trips up her daughters today: “You can be much more than just a man, you can be as God.” Modern feminists want Mary Magdalene to be their “apostle”, their prophetess crying in the wilderness with a new “gospel”, a nongospel, an anti-gospel, a call to worship the “sacred feminine”.

But the truth is, the technical term of “apostle” did not apply to Mary or to any of the women beyond their task that bright, resurrection morning. The true apostles were those twelve men chosen and called of Jesus who led the church, wrote for the church and died for the cause of Christ’s gospel message. When Paul underscores this with own his teaching, he regards the continuing headship in the church to belong solely to the men called of God to preach, teach and shepherd. He is not asserting some new, male prejudice or even something that was simply a part of the culture in which he lived. He was reiterating what God has taught his people all along. Leadership in the home and in the church both symbolize the role of God in relation to his people and Christ in relation to his bride, the church, and that such roles are given to men.

The women did have a glorious place in the plan of God, however, and Hippolytus saw that truly. In a figurative way, they were, indeed, rectifying the sin of Eve. Mary Magdalene, along with the other women, had the privilege of bringing the good news of redemption in the risen Lord Jesus to the apostles. These women came to men with the wonderful truth of God’s love rather than with the deceptive and terrible lie of Satan on their lips as Eve had taken to Adam. In doing so, they were allowed, by the grace of God, to demonstrate the reversal of the sin of mother Eve, heralding the birth, death and resurrection of the promised Messiah (cf. Gen. 3:15). And rather than trusting in Satan’s lie of self-achievement, self-advancement and even self-deity as their mother Eve had done, these women came humbly trusting in God for deliverance from sin and for restoration unto true daughterhood. And unlike Satan, God did not let these women down. By faith, they had become the true, adopted daughters of the King.

Bock, Darrell L., *Breaking the Da Vinci Code*, Nashville:Nelson Publ., 2004.

Olson, Carl E & Sandra Miesel, *The Da Vinci Hoax*, San Franscico:Ignatius Press, 2004.

Woodward, Kenneth, “A Quite Contrary Mary”, [www.beliefnet.com](http://www.beliefnet.com), 11/2003

## Chapter 8: The Formulation of the New Testament

*“The Bible did not arrive by fax from heaven. ... The Bible is a product of man, my dear. Not of God. The Bible did not fall magically from the clouds. man created it as a historical record of tumultuous times, and it has evolved through countless translations, additions, and revisions. History has never had a definitive version of the book.”*  
(Prof. Teabing in *The Da Vinci Code*, p. 231)

Actually, a very important part of the Bible does claim to have arrived “by fax”, as it were, from heaven. When Moses descended from Mt. Sinai, he carried with him the Ten Commandments which were, by its own testimony, written by the very finger of God. So do the words God gave directly (and this is just a sampling) to the prophets Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 36:2), Isaiah (Is. 40:1), the Psalms (Ps. 68:11) and others in the Old Testament as well as the book (vision) of John which we call *The Revelation* (Rev. 1:19). In fact, over 3000 times throughout the Scriptures in the Bible are found the words “The Lord says”. And, in more than a few places throughout the Scriptures, there are affirmations of the divine authority present in them (1 Cor. 14:37; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21; 3:15-16). To deny that; to claim, instead, that the Bible is a product of man and not God, is not a statement with any historical veracity. It is just a personal opinion and judgment. And history has always had more than enough of that! The Scriptures claim to be from God, that is not in dispute. But mankind simply wants to deny that any such thing could possibly be true. The only thing left to decide is whether you accept that fact or deny it.

### **The “Evolving” New Testament**

“There is a distinction between the canonicity of a book of the Bible and its authority. ... People frequently speak and write as if the authority with which books of the Bible are invested in the minds of Christians is the result of their having been included in the sacred list. But the historical fact is the other way about; they were and are included in the list because they were acknowledged as authoritative.” (F.F. Bruce)

The story of the formulation of the New Testament begins with the oldest records about the subject of the New Testament: Jesus Christ. At first, the words and acts of Jesus were verbally proclaimed by those who had witnessed and ministered under him themselves. But before that first generation was gone, the first written testimonies of the gospel story were committed to writing. This was done by those who were eye-witnesses, as in the case of Matthew and John, as well as by the scribes or secretaries of other eye-witnesses, such as Mark and Luke. Virtually all of the books listed in the New Testament were in existence by the beginning of the second century.

But as early as the end of the first century, titles were given to the four gospels to indicate that they had already been collected together and esteemed as a four-fold witness to Christ: *The Gospel According to Matthew, According to Mark, According to Luke, and According to John*. At about the same time, there was also an effort to collect Paul’s letters together, and they bear the same testimony in their various titles: *The Epistle of Paul, the Apostle, to the Romans, to the Corinthians, to the Galatians, to the Ephesians* etc.

In the period of the Early Church Fathers (70-120 AD), most of the gospels and epistles were readily quoted from, already being in existence and already being regarded as authoritative. In later Christian writings, the recognition of the special, divine status of these documents is evident because the Church Fathers credit these earlier writings as having unique and inspired authority while, at the same time, deliberately refraining from claiming such authority for themselves or for one another.

Later, in the period of the Apologists (120-220 AD), the Christian faith was defended aggressively against Jews and Romans alike who were persecuting Christians for their faith, as well as those who were dissenting from the plain teaching of these documents. They did so by also quoting the gospels and Paul readily. But they did not quote from the Church Fathers in the same way or claim such inspiration for themselves. Even the Gnostics, whom the Apologists were refuting, appealed to the Gospels and to Paul's writings in an effort to find support for their own arguments.

The first attempt to make an official list (or canon) of authoritative books came from an unorthodox source. In the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c., a Gnostic heretic named Marcion drew up a New Testament list to suit his own purposes. It consisted of two parts: *The Gospel* and *The Apostle*. This list held no official status. It only served his own purposes. *The Gospel* was only a part of Luke's gospel, which he edited liberally, and *The Apostle*, which only consisted of ten of the letters of Paul that he liked. But even here, nothing else was considered relevant or added to the list. No other writings were even considered by him.

It was due to Marcion's list, and the attention that it received, that moved the leaders of the church to see that a more carefully defined list was necessary. Their initial response was their own list, which included the four gospels, the thirteen Pauline letters, the book called Acts of the Apostles, along the writings of some of the other apostles as well as some "apostolic men". As R. Laird Harris writes: "We then have a history of the New Testament books as an authoritative collection almost exactly like our New Testament from someone who wrote less than seventy years after the death of the last apostle and who may well have talked with Polycarp himself or others who knew the apostles."

During the second century, a flood of other, spurious writings appeared. These writings all claimed to have been written by the original apostles and were also called by the traditional titles - Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Apocalypses. There was only one reason for this, of course. They were trying to claim legitimacy. The best counterfeit is the one that closest resembles the real thing - and these later writers knew that. But they really did not fool anyone. As Harris observes: "There was no large number [of texts] that gained recognition only to lose it. In fact, there was not even one that gained any noticeable degree of recognition only to lose it."

By 230 AD, Origen described the New Testament discussion this way:  
those accepted by all Christians everywhere included:

the four Gospels, Acts, 13 letters of Paul, 1 Peter, 1 John and Revelation,  
those still questioned by some included: Hebrews, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, James, Jude. These were, eventually, included in the accepted canon. Others included the

Epistle of Barnabas, Shepherd of Hermas, Didache, and the Gospel According to Hebrews. These were not false writings but still were not considered original and inspired. But all others were in a class well below even these. And they were never seriously considered anything but spurious.

Finally, contrary to Mr. Brown's fictional claims, Constantine and the Council of Nicaea had nothing whatsoever to do with the final formulation of the New Testament canon. In fact, no council or "word from on high" took that step in the early church. Athanasius (296-373 AD), writing in a Paschal letter (367 AD), listed the 27 books we now recognize as being accepted by all Christians everywhere. Augustine and Jerome also affirmed the same list in their writings. Likewise, the later Synods of Hippo (393) and Carthage (397) also listed these same books. But this was not in some official way of pronouncement but simply to record the fact that all the Church had come to accept their established canonicity.

### **The Unchanging Witness**

Rather than being a weakness because we cannot boast that the New Testament was "faxed" to us or that it dropped out of the sky from God - which sound like the claims the Mormons make about their book - the greater integrity can be laid to their charge because of their antiquity and accuracy, their years of testimony and trustworthiness, their power and their consistent message. And far from having "evolved through countless translations, additions and revisions", the multiple texts of the Scriptures not only trace clearly back through time - even as far as 130 AD with the fragment of John's gospel that resides in the John Rylands Library in Manchester, England - but also to give us an overwhelming confidence that by their collection and study we can know, to an extremely high degree, precisely what the originals said.

There have been many attempts continuing even in our own day, such as Dan Brown's fictional writing, to pollute and destroy the integrity of the New Testament Scriptures. They do this by outrightly denying their integrity or by attempting to rewrite them to suit someone's particular purposes, or simply by attempting to bring them into a "political correctness" (which is what some translators and publishers do today). But the true words of these ancient documents will be with us for all time. And so, the call to guard the true Word of God will not be over until the Lord comes again. But at the same time, he has not failed to leave us without a witness.

Bruce, F.F., *The Books and the Parchments*, Old Tappan, NJ:Revell Co. Publ., 1963.

Harris, R.L., *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible*, Grand Rapids:Zondervan, 1969.

## Chapter 9: The Life and Times of Constantine

*"[Constantine] was a lifelong pagan who was baptized on his deathbed, too weak to protest. ... Three centuries after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, Christ's followers had multiplied exponentially. Christians and pagans began warring, and the conflict grew to such proportions that it threatened to rend Rome in two. ... [H]e simply backed the winning horse."  
(Prof. Teabing in The Da Vinci Code, p. 232)*

*"The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."  
Tertullian, Apologeticum (c. 210)*

The 3<sup>rd</sup> century in Rome is the time most often depicted and described in textbooks and films dealing with the rise of Christianity. Starting with Septimus Severus (193-211), persecution against Christians took the form of empire-wide policy and blanket intolerance. That was followed by the persecutions of Decius, Valerian, Aurelian and Diocletian, each making decrees for the arrest, destruction and extermination of Christians, churches, ministers, and copies of the Scriptures. Each wave was worse than the one before it. But there was no "warring" as Mr. Brown puts it. Christianity grew incessantly but peacefully, the martyrs literally giving themselves over to soldiers out of trust in their Savior and of joyful hope for life to come, the soldiers having no other recourse other than to slaughter them – men, women and children - at will and in cold blood.

That is because the war was not with swords but with ideas. The revolution that was slowly taking over Rome was a new world and life view that persuaded many in a day and age when the old religious and philosophical systems continued to buckle under the weight of increasing depravity and decadence. Diocletian, desperate for anything that would keep the empire from imploding, divided up the empire into two sections – east and west – and appointed several "junior emperors" to be in charge of each. Then, he promptly slipped into quiet retirement. One of Diocletian's junior emperors, Galerius, the real architect of the last, great wave of persecution against Christians, finally gave up that fight, issuing the Edict of Toleration in 311.

Constantius, a junior emperor in the west, died in 306 and his son, Constantine, took his place. Along with Licinius, Constantine issued a second decree of toleration in 313. His famous battle against Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge in 312 made Constantine the sole emperor in the west and in possession of the city of Rome. Later, he also defeated Galerius to once again unite the empire under one rule.

The only historical record we have of Constantine's conversion to Christianity is from the historian, Eusebius. Although historians since have debated the sincerity of that conversion, the evidences really bear witness of the traumatic struggle going on to keep the empire afloat and the powerful, positive effect, albeit inconsistent at many levels, of the Christian faith on more and more people's lives.

Most likely, Constantine was exposed to Christianity through the conversion of various and increasing numbers of his own household. Before facing Maxentius at the

Milvian Bridge, the account describes a vision Constantine received encouraging and rewarding his own trust in Jesus Christ. Rather than being an impulsive thing, there apparently was at least enough time to determine and decide to act and depend upon such faith, and then mold and mount the symbol of the cross on the staffs of his army before going into battle. Afterward, Constantine readily credited his victory to this newfound faith – issuing his own Edict of Milan, in 313, which reversed public policy regarding the Christian faith from public enemy number one to a vital force for public good in the empire.

The other things Constantine does as emperor that relate to Christianity seem to fit the character and practice of one who is a) trying to keep his empire from falling apart, and b) is only a young student, at best, of his newfound faith. The coins of the realm did continue for several years to bear his pagan title, Pontifex Maximus but that may have only been politically expedient for him to do. And it is true that he did not submit to baptism until near the end of his life. But far from not wanting it, Constantine had been taught, as many others at the time, to understand baptism as a cleansing for only past sins thus making it much more useful at the end of one's life.

Constantine also demonstrated great favor toward the historicity of Christianity. He showed a great interest in the sites of the Holy Land and, along with his mother, Helena, established and retained the historic claims of the faith building the first church buildings over the sites of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, at Calvary in Jerusalem, as well as other sites such as the supposed site of Mt. Sinai in the Sinai Peninsula.

Constantine also encouraged the church publicly. He richly gifted the church in Rome, particularly, and granted the clergy immunity from various impositions placed on the general citizenry (the remnants of such are still with us today in the form of tax breaks, etc.). His letters reflect a distinct and clear Christian witness and testimony.

But with the new era and the conversion of the emperor came with it the marriage of politics and religion and that was not ever really called into question. Most of the church, after such centuries of persecution and misery, embraced and welcomed the influence and favor that the emperor gave to the church. (Only Donatus, in Africa, is on record as having challenged this thinking: "What does the Emperor have to do with the Church?" It would be a voice not again heard for several centuries.) And Constantine, wanting as much influence over his struggling empire as he could get, embraced involvement in the church whole heartedly.

*"What higher duty have I as emperor than to destroy error and repress rash indiscretions, and so cause all to offer to Almighty God true religion, honest concord and due worship?"*

Constantine died in 337. Constantine's son, Flavius Julius Constantius, eventually took control. We know he was a Christian because of the ardent Arian direction in which he desired to take the empire. But he also moved Christianity forward as the official religion of the empire. He closed pagan temples and prohibited making sacrifices to them upon pain of death. He also removed the Altar of Victory from the Senate House. Even Athanasius was turned off by his enforcing zeal.

He was followed in 361 by Julian, Constantine's nephew, who was known for definitely not being a Christian and in making as many strides as he could to revert the

empire “back to Hellenism”. For instance, he would “steal” the idea of doing Christian acts of piety & morality, encouraging pagans also to be “just as good and merciful” in the name of other gods.

Jovian followed Julian in 363 and Valentinus followed him in 364, both Christians. After them, Gratian began his rule in 375. It was here that the fate of Roman paganism was decided. At first, Gratian tolerated other religions, but under the influence of Ambrose, bishop of Milan, he took definitive steps to destroy paganism by process. In 380 he ordered all his subjects to subscribe to Christianity. In 381 he called for the council of Constantinople to finally put to rest the Arian controversy. In 391 he prohibited all sacrifices and closed all pagan temples. Organized paganism was effectively removed from before the face of the empire.

## Chapter 10: What Really Happened at the Council of Nicaea?

*“Constantine was a very good business man. ... [H]e created a kind of hybrid religion that was acceptable to both parties. ... During this fusion of religions, Constantine needed to strengthen the new Christian tradition, and held a famous ecumenical gathering known as the Council of Nicaea. ... Jesus’ establishment as ‘the Son of God’ was officially proposed and voted on by the Council of Nicaea.”*  
(Prof. Teabing, *The Da Vinci Code*, pp. 232-33)

The Christian church, even the ancient church growing out of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD, has never held to the principle or slogan: “No creed but Christ.” Even before the canon of the New Testament was completely agreed upon, the words of the gospels and the letters of Paul were drawn upon to formulate and express the beliefs and professions of faith that Christians took upon themselves - and were willing to die defending - declaring their conversion and commitment to Christianity.

The earliest of those creeds and confessions were used in places such as Jerusalem (before 70 AD) and Antioch, and were utilized at times of baptismal ceremonies and inductions into membership into the church. To the west, the Old Roman Creed, precursor to the Apostles Creed, was recited to affirm one’s faith and belief: “I believe in one God ... and in his son, Jesus Christ, ... crucified ... on the third day brought to life from the dead”. By the time of Tertullian (200 AD), there were at least 3 versions of this creed, but they all affirmed and paralleled these words regarding Jesus.

So when Constantine called for a church council to meet at his spacious palace in Nicaea in 325 AD, it was not to elevate Jesus from being thought of in the church as a mere mortal to deity. Contrary to the lies of Mr. Brown, the church never regarded Jesus as just a mere man.

But it is true that any further definition of what was meant by confessing Jesus’ deity had not yet been worked out. Particularly the points of contention were these:

- there are Scriptures which seem to clearly equate Jesus with God the Father:



*John 1:1: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

*Colossians 1:15: He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.*

*John 10:30: "I and the Father are one."*

*Phil. 2:5b-6: Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,*

- and there are also Scriptures which seem to suggest a role for Jesus' person that was under that of the Father:

*Mark 10:18: And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.*

*Matthew 26:39: And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will."*

*John 14:28: You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.*

*1 Timothy 1:17: To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.*

*(All quotations from the ESV)*

The incidents that initiated the calling of a council were not political – the Christians were not “warring” with pagans, and there was absolutely no desire on anyone’s part to “fuse” or compromise the tenets of the Christian faith with the dying vestiges of paganism. The issue was within the church; it was a theological and disciplinary debate.

Alexander of Alexandria, following the teaching of Origen (b. 185 AD), advocated and taught the “logos” doctrine from John’s gospel which stressed the eternal nature of Christ. One of the bishops under him, Arius, adamantly opposed this view on the grounds of the need to preserve the oneness of God’s nature. Logically, Arius argued, Jesus *must* be inferior to the Father in regards to the question of eternity. [Jehovah’s Witnesses of today are mere neo-Arians!] Alexander wrangled considerably with Arius who did not back down. Finally, Alexander disciplined Arius, who appealed to Eusebius of Nicomedia, who had the ear of Constantine.

Constantine, who had succeeded in becoming the one ruler of the entire empire 20 years earlier, had also assumed the role of head of the church. He took it as his responsibility to settle this matter as well as to handle and decide other, smaller matters that had arisen within the church such as when would be the official time to annually celebrate Easter, and to affix other structures of canon law into place. Constantine called for a conference of church bishops for these purposes and transported and hosted over 200 bishops and their companies at his own expense.

Constantine convened the council and managed to set a generous and commodious tone which encouraged fellowship and unity. Still, the two sides soon brought their debate to the floor. After some attempts at conciliation failed, the Alexandrian side proposed revising one of the older creeds of the church, probably one

of the earliest from Jerusalem, by adding to it the Greek word “homoousion” to describe Jesus – which meant “of the same substance” and would be used in the creed to compare Jesus to the Father. This proposal eventually won the day. The result was the composing and approval of the Nicene Creed. Note how the creed was followed by a direct condemnation of Arianism in any of its expressions and forms:

*We believe in one God, the Father, almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible;  
And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the son of God, begotten from the Father, only-begotten, that is, from the substance of the Father, God from God light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance from the Father, through Whom all things came into being, things in heaven and things on earth, who because of us men and because of our salvation came down and became incarnate, becoming man, suffered and rose again on the third day, ascended to the heavens, will come to judge the living and the dead;  
And in the Holy Spirit.  
But as for those who say, there was when he was not, and, before being born he was not, and he came into existence out of nothing, or who assert that the son of God is a different hypostasis or substance, or is subject to change or alteration – these the Catholic and apostolic Church anathematizes.*

Although one would think this to solve the issue, Arius and his disciples would not submit that easily. The Arians aggressively pushed for their case, and, for a while, it looked as if they might actually succeed. But in 381 AD, some 50 years after the council at Nicaea, another council was held, this time at Constantinople, which revisited the issue. Once again, Arianism was rejected and removed from the church. The council refined and perfected the older Nicene formula into the form that we are familiar with today.

*I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.  
And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; [God of God], Light of Light, very God of very god; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.  
Who, for us men for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the living and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.  
And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father [and the Son]; who with the Father and the son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.  
And I believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.  
Amen.*

The doctrine of Christ would undergo still further refinement at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, but Arianism was, by then, a dead heterodoxy.

## Appendix A: Concerning Christian Symbols

*“‘Transmogrification,’ Langdon said, ‘The vestiges of pagan religion in Christian symbology are undeniable. Egyptian sun disks became the halos of Catholic saints. Pictograms of Isis nursing her miraculously conceived son Horus became the blueprint for our modern images of the Virgin Mary nursing Baby Jesus. And virtually all the elements of the Catholic ritual – the miter, the altar, the doxology, the communion, the act of ‘God-eating’ – were taken directly from earlier pagan mystery religions.’*

*Teabing groaned. ‘Don’t get a symbologist started on Christian icons. Nothing in Christianity is original.’*

*(The Da Vinci Code, pp. 232)*

“Transmogrification” comes from the root word “transmogrify” which means “to change or alter greatly and often with grotesque or humorous effect”. Dr. Jekyll changing into Mr. Hyde would be an example of transmogrification. The latter half of this definition is what separates “transmogrification” from “transformation” which simply means “to change”, and in this case, “to change in character or condition”. The etymology of “transmogrify”, according to Merriam-Webster, is unknown. It would seem, therefore, that Mr. Brown’s great symbologist has, himself, borrowed a very unoriginal term which comes from where he knows not and has applied it imprecisely and even inappropriately in the attempt to mislead others for his own purposes.

And “symbologist”? There is no such term according to Merriam-Webster and if you search for such a field or specialty online, the only symbologist you immediately find is Robert Langdon! Mr. Brown’s “symbologist”, you see, is itself just a symbol, another word for a mask behind which one intentionally seeks to teach or communicate phony information and myth, in this case, about the history of the Christian faith.

One main reason why a “science” such as this “symbology” would be phony is because icons themselves tend to be phony. Pictures, images, etc., always and primarily reflect the artist who creates them or the person or persons who employ the artists at the moment. The meaning and interpretation is his own. Halos are not borrowed from Egyptian deities, they are the artistic way the artist singles out and identifies the main character in his portrayal. Icons can and do easily mean different things to different people, different cultures and different times. (Just do a historical study of the etymology of the “peace” sign, for instance, or the swastika.) And trying to track down a “true” derivation of any given symbol – let alone try to convince us that its use and meaning has been scrupulously and conspiratorially maintained and communicated – is vain and naïve at best. Mr. Brown wants to convince us that the symbols of Christianity are all borrowed and meaningless. At the same time, he wants to persuade us into being convinced that the symbols of hidden and suppressed secrets are all quite original, profound and historically meaningful. This is imagination and fiction at best. At worst, as here, it is deliberate deception.

There can be no doubt that various “symbols” that Mr. Brown refers to in his book are really just things - traditions and mannerisms that the Christian faith has picked up along the way. But they are far from being real clues as to where the tenants of the Christian faith came from or how they changed the doctrines of that faith. These symbols are really signposts showing the path by which the true faith, often in very specific times and events of history, overcame the attacks and attempts levied against it to change and compromise that faith all along the way.

Every culture and every generation that has ever embraced the Gospel has contributed to such symbolism. How Christmas is celebrated, for instance, is widely different from one culture and one nation to the next and even from one age to the next. (The present generation in America, for instance, is the first one to add the tradition of manic and unbridled materialism to the celebration of Christmas.) To turn back and track the origins of symbols just to prove they were all borrowed or “man-made”, or that some symbols resemble the traditions and practices of other pagan religions, does not succeed to prove or argue that the Christian gospel, itself, is also fake or borrowed. Searching out such “mystery” is an absolute waste of time.

There is no real point in arguing about the various symbols and their origins. No one would deny that in the midst of the transition from pagan religions and superstitions to Christianity, as was done in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, much ignorance, tradition and misconception were also transferred over. But other things were done thoughtfully and deliberately, and after great debate, discussion and prayer. For instance, the dates for Christmas and Easter were not quietly borrowed and adopted to somehow “make” Jesus a god by giving him the miraculous birth and resurrection (notions which were first taught elsewhere) and making them church dogma. These realities were the testimony of Christians from that very first Christmas morning and that first Lord’s Day. And those early Christians were willing to stand true to the testimony of historic Christian faith even in the face of death - precisely refusing to worship idols and man-made deities, not wishing whatsoever to compromise in any way. But still, those decisions concerning such dates were, admittedly, just man-made. Nothing was given us by God regarding the annual celebrations of Jesus’ birth and resurrection. They were simply times chosen - whether wisely or poorly - to commemorate the truth of those events.

For what it is worth, this has also worked the other way around from time to time: Christian symbols are taken and incorporated into other religions or practices. The Red Crescent is the Islamic version of the Red Cross. (Even more than the symbol, the concept of needing to organize in order to be compassionate and merciful toward others in need has been borrowed from the Christian message and now finds its way even into Islam.) The covenant sign of the rainbow from Gen. 9 is taken and used by groups advocating anything from diversity of the races to homosexuality - neither of which has anything to do with the Biblical message. The dove, taken from the story of Noah and the Ark, complete with the olive branch in its mouth has, somehow, been “transmogrified” (to use Mr. Brown’s term) into the quintessential symbol of peace - peace not defined in any historical, objective or theological standard, mind you, but

rather to mean whatever anyone wants it to mean at the time. But nobody would ever think of scoffing at the sincerity of such things as these merely because their symbols were not original.

But all of this is not to say that Christianity has always necessarily endorsed, claimed or has truly benefited from all these so-called symbols either. Catholics and Protestants (to draw with a broad brush) take drastically different views regarding the use of icons and images. But we can agree that wisely chosen and applied symbolism can be rich in meaning and point to truth with just as much profundity as Mr. Brown wants to use symbolism to suggest his distortion and lies. Elsewhere, there are questions and disagreements among Christians regarding some symbols that are already in place. As widely accepted as the holidays of Christmas and Easter are as cultural celebrations, not all Christians are persuaded that they really should be celebrated, *per se*, because they are not given as such by God in His Word. But even these disagreements do not force us to conclude that the basic Gospel should be dismissed as fiction. Meanwhile, other symbols, such as we find in the rich Christian tradition of the arts – music, architecture, sculpture and painting – have all seen truly glorious contributions to the representation of the Gospel in the culture of man – Leonardo da Vinci included!

But, you see, the real sadness of this little bit of Mr. Brown's propaganda is that he plants the seeds of doubt in people's minds about the use of "symbols" that are really quite irrelevant. The real symbols of the Christian faith are not pictures or robes or days or colors. The real symbols are words – words well studied, thought out and formulated and then put down on paper from age to age as confessions and creeds of the Church's faith and testimony. The real symbols of Christianity include the Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Canons of Dort, the Westminster Confession of Faith. These are the real symbols behind which the Church stands – they are real, historical, meaningful, profound, and, I assure you, quite, quite, original.

Rather than blending in with other religions for political and pragmatic reasons, the Christian faith, by the tools of her real symbols, has always called for the radical embracing of its radical message, calling for radical change, for repentance, faith, commitment and evangelism. Mr. Brown would have his readers focus on the things that are incidental and, essentially meaningless, and draw our attention away from the sure testimony of the Gospel and its history. If Christianity is, indeed, true, Mr. Brown is to be condemned for his deception. He has become the symbol of Satan, the Father of lies, and he is to be regarded as such.

## Appendix B: The Da Vinci Code – A Year Later

### A Little Context

In 1925, there was a rising groundswell of support among liberals for the so-called science of evolution. In the state of Tennessee, the lower house of legislature passed the Butler Bill which declared that science shall not be taught in the public classroom in such a way as to deny the biblical account of Divine creation.

The ACLU jumped on this law and found a willing group of townspeople in Dayton, TN, to stage a trial in court to test the legislation. There was no actual breaking of the law, no actual teaching of evolution in any classroom. The willing substitute teacher had never been in any danger at all of sentence or jail time. It was all staged and it turned into a media circus which publicly mocked Christianity in the media - especially through the biting and abusive commentary of the newspaper reporter, H.L. Menken - while, at the same time, holding up the “liberating truth” of advancing science.

In the trial, the focus on the law, itself, was minimized. Evidences were put forth arguing for the legitimacy of evolution, and Clarence Darrow was allowed full reign to take the trial anywhere he wanted. In the end, however, he threw in the towel early and had his client plead guilty so as to move the venue to a higher court which, eventually, overthrew the Dayton judgment. Evolution had lost the battle but won the war.

In 1960, the movie version of the play “Inherit the Wind” was released, employing major Hollywood stars for the central roles. In the 35 years between the 1925 trial and the 1960 production of the movie, most of the evidence that had been offered to support evolution in the actual trial had been since been proven false or worse, was revealed to have been intentionally faked. Meanwhile, nothing new had come along to replace that evidence. Evolution had virtually no leg to stand on.

But Hollywood was out for blood. The screenwriters deliberately distorted the trial, depicting a local, fundamentalist minister, rather than the ACLU, as the one bringing the poor, honest and sincere teacher to trial. The Christians of the town were portrayed as backwoods, ignorant, bigoted bullies who wanted only to shout down well-meaning scientists. The prosecution was represented by an opportunistic politician while the defense was represented by a famous lawyer acting only with a mission of integrity and, of course, doing so *pro bono*.

The movie was well received by the public and came to be completely embraced believed as teaching an accurate, historical account of the 1925 trial. In an incredibly profound thought, Philip Johnson said,

*“The play [into which the movie came] has had so much impact that its story is more important than what really happened. The play is not primarily about a single event; it is about the modernist understanding of freedom.”*

To date, the movie has been remade 3 times and the videos are still being shown to classrooms as “history”. The modernist’s understanding of freedom has been deeply drummed into the brains of an entire generation. But what have been the effects? How

much of our culture now readily accept evolution as “fact” and dismiss Christianity as religious nonsense based solely on such propaganda as this?

In the release of The Da Vinci Code there are many parallels to actual the Scopes trial and the distortions in “Inherit the Wind”. The historical event here is the life of Jesus Christ, and the revisionist manipulation put forward for all to see is Dan Brown’s book and the movie upon which it is based. As then, there is currently a rise in competing worldviews – not over science this time, but history. And, like the original authors of “Inherit the Wind”, Dan Brown has re-written and redefined actual events for his own political, social and financial purposes with the deliberate effect of falsifying the truth and replacing it with lies and myths. And he has couched his story in the same prejudicial way – the representation of the gospel as foolish, revised, and prejudicially pushed forward into naïve people’s minds, and that the church of Christ is chauvinistic, sinister, self-serving, and even murderous. Meanwhile, those, such as Mr. Brown and his heroic characters, are the only ones seeking after the “truth”. They are the ones who are sincere, bold, self-denying, even self-sacrificial.

The movie, like the book, is often dismissed by Christians, scoffing at the notion that a mere book or movie could damage the reputation and weight of the Christian gospel and message that much. Instead, they try to disarm the real impact of such mediums by commenting on their poor literary or cinematic style. But neither of those are of any consequence. According to Wikipedia, the book has sold over 60 million copies, been translated into 44 different languages and is surmised to be the 8<sup>th</sup> best-selling book of all time. As of September of 2006, the movie has earned \$753,683,645 U.S. It not only satisfies the curiosity, the mystery-lover, and the skeptic in all of us, but it also feeds the desire in the heart of sinful man to despise and reject Jesus Christ as God and dismiss the gospel as anything but a hoax. What has been the effects? What effects will it continue to have in the future?