

Top 10 Catholic Questions on the Da Vinci Code

By Matthew Arnold

Dan Brown's controversial novel *The Da Vinci Code* has sold over 40 million copies and spent many months on the top of the best-seller lists. The source of the controversy it has generated, and the true explanation of the book's popularity, lie in dubious, anti-Catholic religious and historical claims presented in the form of a murder mystery. The subject of a big-budget Hollywood movie and the source of many books and DVDs, the fictional claims of *The Da Vinci Code* demand a non-fiction response.

1. Isn't *The Da Vinci Code* "only fiction" and therefore harmless?

Firstly, fiction *can* be harmful. Writing "mere fiction" does not give an author the right to slander individuals or groups, or to commit blasphemy. For that matter, does Dan Brown really intend the heretical claims in his book to be considered fictional? This is an assumption that Brown, himself, refutes.

Although the plot of his story is obviously fictional, a preliminary note under the bold heading "Fact," informs readers that, "All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents and secret rituals in this novel are accurate." Moreover, Brown has often publicly defended the outrageous claims in his book as "gospel" truth.

So if critics complain about his many appalling religious distortions and historical errors, it is the height of hypocrisy for Brown and his defenders to hide behind the excuse, "It's only fiction," when he has gone to so much trouble to convince the public that the many errors expounded in *The Da Vinci Code* are not "only fiction."

2. Do the Gnostic gospels reveal the true history of Jesus?

According to historian Dr. James Hitchcock: "*The Gnostics did not accept the Incarnation of Jesus and treated doctrinal orthodoxy as being too literal-minded. The gospels were*

not to be taken at face value but as stories with hidden symbolic meanings...Thus it was possible to write new 'gospels'...modern people like Dan Brown, who treat the Gnostic gospels as history, miss the point—to the Gnostics themselves it was irrelevant what actually happened when Jesus was on earth, if he ever was."

The first Gnostic gospels weren't written until AD 150, others in the third century. Their supposed authors, Peter, Phillip, Thomas, Mary Magdalene, etc. were all long dead when the Gnostic gospels were written.

The Gnostic gospels were not "lost," they were abandoned because they were known to be heretical fables that fail the test of historicity—both today and in the early centuries of the Church.

3. Was the Christian Bible really "collated by the Roman Emperor Constantine?"

Brown's claim that Constantine assembled the New Testament at the 4th century Council of Nicea is historically ridiculous.

Writing a century before Nicea (c. A.D. 233), Early Church Father Origen affirms: "*The Church has four Gospels; but the heretics have many... But among all of these we approve none others except those, the four only Gospels, which are received by the Church.*"

In fact, at Nicea a copy of the Four Gospels was placed on a splendid throne beside the Emperor as a sign of the presence of Christ in His Church!

While the Gospels and the other Biblical books were well known by the early Church, the Canon of the New Testament wasn't officially set until the Council of Hippo (A.D. 393) and then confirmed by the Council of Carthage (A.D. 397) partially to put an end to the false claims made for

spurious writings like the Gnostic gospels.

4. What about the claim that, after Constantine created his "new Bible," all the "earlier" gospels were gathered up and burned?

We've already shown that historically this is nonsense, but it's also just not logical. For one thing it had already been tried by Pagan Rome for some three centuries.

Catholics (men, women and children) had proven themselves quite willing to die to protect the Four Gospels. They suffered martyrdom for three hundred years rather than give up the Sacred Books, or deny the Resurrection, or deny the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, etc.

Many of the bishops at Nicea were missing eyes and hands from previous Roman persecutions. It is an insult to the memory of these courageous people of faith, not to mention the intelligence of the informed reader, to suggest that they suddenly abandoned the Gospel because of the mere threat of persecution.

5. Did the Council of Nicea establish Jesus as the Son of God by vote "and a close one at that" as *The Da Vinci Code* claims?

Fictional historian Leigh Teabing claims "*until that moment in history, Jesus was viewed by his followers as a [merely] mortal prophet...*" This is nonsense.

Jesus' Divinity was clearly established in His earthly ministry as witnessed by the Scriptures and Apostolic Tradition long before the fourth century (cf. John 1.1-14; Mark 14.61-62, etc.). Rather, the Council of Nicea was called to put an end to the Arian heresy.

The heretic Arius taught that Jesus was divine, but not equal to God the Father. Therefore all the bishops gathered at Nicea agreed that Jesus was both divine and human. It was

the *definition* of this truth that was worked out by the council, and that definition was voted on, but it was hardly close, the final vote being 316 to 2.

6. Was Mary Magdalene the victim of “a smear campaign” by the Church?

This is a truly strange charge considering that, after the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene is arguably the most important woman in the New Testament!

She is mentioned first among the women who ministered to Christ (Luke 8.2, 3); all four Gospels place her at foot of the Cross with the Blessed Virgin and St. John; all four name her as the first witness to the resurrection; and, at a time in both Jewish *and* pagan culture when a woman could not give legal testimony, it is on her word that John and Peter go to the empty tomb to see that Jesus is risen (John 20.8).

For these reasons, and more, the Catholic Church refers to Mary Magdalene as the “Apostle to the Apostles,” and considers her the model Christian—an ideal example of penitence, true contrition, and good works. A most unusual “smear campaign” indeed.

7. Was Jesus Married?

Brown claims to find evidence for the marriage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene in the heretical Gnostic gospels, but this is false.

The Gnostics believed all matter to be evil and therefore rejected procreation as the source of more “evil” matter. The idea that Jesus was married and had children is antithetical to Gnosticism and unheard of in their false gospels.

Further, Christian Tradition is unanimous that Jesus was celibate. He Himself recommends celibacy (Matthew 19.12), as does St. Paul (1 Corinthians 7.7-8; 32-36).

However, spiritually speaking, Jesus *is* married. John the Baptist calls Jesus the “Bridegroom” (John 3.28-

30); in the Parable of the Marriage Feast, where a king hosts a marriage feast for his son, the king is God the Father, His Son, the Bridegroom, is Jesus. (Matt 22.1-14, Luke 14.16-24) Jesus is also the Bridegroom in the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins. (Matthew 25.1-13) His Bride, of course, is the Church. (Ephesians 5.25)

8. Is Mary Magdalene seated next to Jesus in Leonardo Da Vinci’s “Last Supper?”

The figure seated on Jesus’ right in “The Last Supper” is John the Apostle, not Mary Magdalene. The reason there has never been any question about this is because “The Last Supper’s” depiction of St. John clearly follows both the artistic conventions that came before it, as well as the well-known Biblical account.

Scripture teaches that the “beloved disciple” who “*leaned on His [Jesus] breast at Supper*” is St. John (cf. John 13.21-24; 19.26-27; 21.21, 24) and Leonardo’s depiction of him is typical. Because St. John was the youngest of the Apostles, artists from all periods tend to depict him as both beardless and effeminate.

Virtually all reputable art historians agree the figure on Jesus’ right is St. John the Apostle. This is what has always been known about Leonardo’s masterpiece.

There simply isn’t any controversy except in the imagination of Dan Brown and some of his more gullible readers.

9. What are the sources for the many false assertions in *The Da Vinci Code*?

Although falsely portrayed as a product of “meticulous research” the *Da Vinci Code* actually represents no credible scholarship whatsoever. Mr. Brown doesn’t quote a single book of the New Testament, or any of the writings of the early church when he makes claims about what early Christians believed.

Likewise, all his assumptions about the Knights Templar, the so-called

“Priory of Sion,” and Mary Magdalene’s identity as the “true Holy Grail,” come from works of pseudo-history like *Holy Blood*, *Holy Grail* and *The Templar Revelation*.

His notion of Mary Magdalene as the true leader of the early Church is taken from another speculative work, *The Woman with the Alabaster Jar* whose author also cites *Holy Blood*, *Holy Grail* as a source.

None of these books were written by historians, nor are any of them taken seriously by the legitimate academic community.

10. According to *The Da Vinci Code*, “Every faith in the world is based on fabrication.” Is faith really only, “acceptance of that which we imagine to be true, that which we cannot prove?”

Dan Brown and his fictional characters contend that to believe something by faith is irrational. But real faith is not blind acceptance of what we cannot prove, but trust in one who has proven himself. Faith is not imagination, but a rational reaction given to compelling evidence.

The missionaries of the New Testament did not appeal to feelings, but to facts: the resurrection and the empty tomb; Jesus’ miracles; His fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy; in other words, evidence.

Faith, by definition, means to believe in something you can’t prove. But it doesn’t mean believing in something for no reason.

The ads for the *Da Vinci Code* say, “Seek the Truth.” Catholics need not fear this advice because it is precisely the truth that will debunk the book’s many fabrications.

As Jesus said, “*If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free*” (John 8:32-33)

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