

Serious Errors in *The Da Vinci Code*

The media are heavily promoting Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, and there are plans to turn it into a film as well. Although it is a novel, and Dan Brown is an entertaining writer, it makes claims about a series of things about Christianity that build up into a huge theory. It claims things are facts when they are not. Each part of the theory is blatantly wrong. It is an attempt to rewrite history by quasi non-fiction, with a selective use of the evidence. It claims that, in spite of being a novel, its history is factual. The book leans on an earlier work, *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*. Dr Darrel L Bock has written *Breaking the Da Vinci Code* (Nashville: Nelson: 2004), and it is very useful for answering questions that many will ask. Here is a quick review of its main points. Dr Bock has a Ph. D in theology and is a research professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, Texas. He is a Protestant. The foreword to Dr Bock's book is written by a Roman Catholic, Dr Francis Moloney, of the Catholic University of America, Washington.

The ABC TV program on the last Sunday night revealed errors in claims in *The Da Vinci Code* about the grail, the Priory of Sion, and the Knights Templar, the Cathars, and a church in Scotland. We hope that the more serious errors will be exploded in similar fashion this Sunday night.

The claim that Mary Magdalene was the secret wife of Jesus is wrong. Most of the women mentioned in the New Testament are identified by their connection with a male relative, like Mary, the wife of Clopas. However, Mary Magdalene was not identified in this way. "Magdalene" merely means "from Magdala", which was a town on Lake Galilee (modern Migdal, which means "tower"). In fact, none of the texts, even the Gnostic ones found at Nag Hammadi, say that Mary Magdalene was Jesus' wife.

All scholars of all persuasions agree that Jesus was single. Being single would not have made Jesus un-Jewish. Many men connected with the Essenes, for example, were celibate, and many men connected with the Dead Sea Scrolls were also celibate. Being single could be understood and appreciated by other Jews around Jesus.

The allegedly newly discovered Gospels were Gnostic, and do not reflect Christianity as it was in its earliest period. They were later than the New Testament, from the second and third centuries, and explicitly disagreed with the view of Jesus that is presented in canonical books of the New Testament. There were not eighty other Gospels considered for the New Testament. The Nag Hammadi collection had only five (*Truth, Thomas, Philip, Egyptians, and Mary Magdalene*). They have been known about for a long time, and were refuted in detail by Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Tertullian (writers in about 180 – 220 AD). What is new is that Gnostic writings can now be studied in their original Gnostic sources, rather than merely through such hostile sources. They also underline the truth that there was a wide spectrum of claims to represent the truth Christian faith at the time of the early church. They have a vastly different view of God. Salvation comes from inside men themselves, and for only an elitist number, not from Jesus Christ. Rather than depicting Jesus as more human than the New Testament, they sharply distinguish the real Jesus from the substituted human Jesus. They are not a new way to see Jesus. They denied that Jesus Christ has come "in the flesh."

The New Testament was not put together only in the fourth century at Constantine's initiative, and the Gospels are not too distant from Jesus to be of value about Him. Jesus' divinity was always believed by Christians from the beginning. Dr Bock gives a useful summary of some of the chief passages in the Gospels about Jesus' divinity. The Council of Nicea did not make the books of the New Testament the Word of God. The current reinterpretations of the Christian faith often dismiss the uniqueness and vitality of the Christian faith. Dr Bock summarises the historical factors that contributed to the recognition of the New Testament canon as the books' apostolic roots, their widespread use, the threat of false teaching (including Gnosticism), and persecution. When the state attempted to destroy the Christian scriptures at the time of the Diocletian persecution, it was necessary to say which books.

Mary Magdalene's honoured role, particularly in connection with Jesus' resurrection, does not match the feminist claims of those who are currently promoting her. She did not have a special leadership role in the early church, which was later suppressed by the "winners."

The real villain is not Dan Brown, but the claim of such liberal scholars as Karen King and Helmut Koester, of Harvard and Princeton. This new school is making a direct attack on what Christianity is, and promotes feminism. Those who saw a Compass program on the ABC late last year about Mary Magdalene will recall their allegations. Dr Bock analyses their claims. Dan Brown has merely popularised their theories. In fact, Jesus was not a feminist, in spite of His tremendous respect for the role of women. It is not true that there were women among the apostles. Even the New Testament books sometimes used the word "apostle" in a weaker

sense. That Mary Magdalene took the news of Jesus' resurrection to the apostles does not mean that she was "the apostle of the apostles", or the foremost of them.

The Gnostic *Gospel of Mary* was not a dispute about gender roles, as the new school is claiming, but about the Gnostic claim to have access to special, secret revelation from God.

There has been no great cover-up in the early church, or since then, as is alleged, about a "royal bloodline" of Jesus and Mary Magdalene, a secret that the Vatican is alleged to have tried to bury.

There are some things that are partly true. The feast day of Mary Magdalene in the Western Church has wrongly used Luke 7:36-50 as the Gospel reading. This defames her, and continues the error that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute. The facts that the woman who wept at Jesus' feet is not named, and that the following section in Luke 8 explicitly names Mary Magdalene indicate that Mary Magdalene was a different person from the woman in Luke 7. The Eastern Church has never depicted Mary Magdalene as a prostitute, either.

In the light of all the fallacies in the central section of *The Da Vinci Code*, which are promoted mainly through Dan Brown's character Teabing, Dr Bock says that it is irrelevant to discuss the Sion Priory, the Knights Templar, Opus Dei, and the Merovingian royal line. However, Dr Bock does briefly set the record straight, and gives references for more detailed information about these. He briefly discusses the allegation that Mary Magdalene was included with the apostles in Da Vinci's painting of the Last Supper. Surely it is ludicrous to suggest that only eleven of the apostles would have been present with Mary Magdalene and Jesus!

The book by Dr Bock concludes with a summary of who Jesus was and is, and what Mary Magdalene can tell us about Him.