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**Some notes on**  
***The Da Vinci Code***

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## 1. The fabrication of *The Da Vinci Code*

*A novel packed with many misleading experts*

It seems that the main intent of Dan Brown's best seller is to come up with an appealing and seemingly credible account about "the real Jesus" that, in reality, only sows perplexity and suspicion in the minds of readers—Catholics in particular—as regards a possible conspiracy in the Catholic Church to hide a truth that would destroy the very foundations of its existence.

### *The times of Jesus*

In short, the novel's linear narrative approach deals with Jesus Christ, a sage who put forward devotion to "the lost sacred feminine" and wished to reestablish it through his supposed wife, Mary Magdalene. Thus, Jesus Christ was not the God he claimed himself to be but a man who, in order to give back to the world the "sacred feminine", wanted to found a church that would restore this form worship; which was why he entrusted it to Mary, and not to Peter, as is commonly believed. If this story has not reached us until now, it is because, early on in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, or 300 years after Christ's death, Emperor Constantine, the first Roman emperor to support and protect the Church, abolished the "sacred feminine" from Christianity, denied Jesus' humanity, and decreed that Christ was God. To permanently establish this decree, Constantine first manipulated the Council of Nicea (325 AD) wherein a patriarchal, authoritarian, and anti-feminist ideology was imposed after a contentious voting process. Next, the Emperor chose as "canonical" four gospels among the existing ones that were considered "safe" and suppressed those that contained any references to the marriage of Jesus and the Magdalene.

Meanwhile, he also tried to get rid of all of Jesus' progeny. He was successful in the former, but not in the latter, as some of Jesus' descendants fled to France and, centuries after, even occupied the French throne during the Merovingian dynasty.

### *The Middle Age*

The history of the descendants during the Middle and the Modern Ages can be summarized in their efforts to survive the Church's constant persecution. For if this truth were to come to light, then the Church's authority would be demolished. Thus the Church had successfully manipulated the Carolingian kings to exile the Merovingians, which led them to form a secret society called the Priory of Sion whose aim was to protect the survivors of Jesus' lineage and their secret. The Knights Templar that had connections with the Priory were persecuted and killed. Some of history's great artistic and literary figures were clandestine Masters of the Priory but only one, Leonardo Da Vinci, left clues to the secret in his works. The Church carried on with its efforts to suppress the "sacred feminine" by spearheading, for instance, Europe's notorious and widespread witch-hunts, where millions of women were persecuted. Nonetheless, Jesus' lineage, the true Holy Grail, continued to live on in families, like the Plantards and the Saint-Clairs.

### *The present time*

Brown's novel then moves on to the third period, which is set in present times. The Priory has finally decided to reveal the secret to the world through the Great Master Jacques Saunière, curator of the Louvre Museum and an expert in goddesses and

the sacred feminine. Saunière is found dead—probably assassinated. However, before he died, Saunière left a series of mysterious codes that he drew on the floor with his blood. His niece, Sophie Neveu, a cryptologist who works for the Paris police, steps into the picture. Saunière had given her an urgent call before he died because he wanted to tell her something important about their family. The primary murder suspect is Robert Langdon, a professor of religious symbolism in Harvard who happened to be in the scene of the crime. Sophie, however, believes that Langdon is innocent and helps him escape. She, with the help of Langdon and the scholar Sir Leigh Teabing, amid surrounding crimes and persecutions, immerses herself in studying goddess worship, leading her to decode Leonardo's paintings. Teabing also explains to her that Constantine built the Vatican as a new power base.

In the meantime, the reader is led to believe that the Catholic organization Opus Dei, which is ridden with juridical problems, is behind the murders. Moreover, a "progressive Pope" is thinking of breaking Church ties with Opus Dei. This moves the Opus Dei prelate to accept the offer of a mysterious Master to buy for a huge sum the proofs of the existence of the Priory. The Prelate could then use these proofs to blackmail the Holy See. The said Master is actually a wealthy English and anti-Catholic professor who wants to reveal the Priory's secret to the world. In fact, he chides the Priory for keeping silent out of fear of the Church and even hires an Opus Dei monk to carry out the above-mentioned crimes.

The novel inevitably winds up with a romance between Sophie and Langdon, Sophie's discovery that her Saunière

grandfather was the Great Master of the Priory of Sion and that she is last in the line of Jesus' descendants, and that Mary Magdalene's tomb lies beneath the entrance of Louvre's crystal pyramid, which was a project of the esoteric, Mason, and former French President Francois Mitterrand, The novel closes with Langdon returning to the Louvre. He reverently kneels as he listens to a woman's voice transmit to him the Wisdom of the Times.

### ***Fiction and reality***

*The Da Vinci Code* is certainly a work of fiction and so one cannot expect to draw any historical truth from it. However, the author confuses his readers in the section entitled "The Facts" wherein he states, "All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate." In other words, he tries to expound on historical concepts within the context of a fiction novel. Thus, as far as the critical reviews are concerned, the novel is superficially written. Objectively speaking, Brown tends to make many claims without any solid basis and commits numerous factual errors and inaccuracies. Here comes a short list: (1) Christian writings from the first century already state that Jesus is God. For instance, the Muratori Canon (190 AD) already says that there were only four canonical gospels and excludes almost all of the Gnostic gospels; (2) there was no form of contention or controversy in the Council of Nicea and only two of the 300 participating bishops cast dissenting votes; (3) the Vatican did not become the Pope's official residence until the 14<sup>th</sup> century; (4) the Priory of Sion did not exist in the Middle Ages: it was a neo-chivalric organization that was founded in Paris in 1956 by the French esoteric Pierre Plantard; (5) many supposed



witches, indeed and unfortunately, were burned at the stake in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Europe; but the figures did not reach millions at all and not all who were killed were women. What's more, it was the Protestant countries that registered the largest numbers of such deaths; (6) Harvard University offers no course on religious symbolism; (7) Opus Dei has no monks in the organization. The list can go on and on.

### ***Estrange success***

A final question: How could such a novel sell millions of copies? It's difficult to say but we may consider the fact that, three years earlier, Dan Brown published *Angels and Demons*, a novel of a similar vein and even with a character like Langdon. It was a flop. What made the difference between the two? On one hand, Brown toned down his anti-Catholic stance in *Da Vinci* to gain more credibility; on the other hand, he threw in a mix of the forgotten world of the Gnostics, radical feminism, and occultism to give a new and provocative image of Jesus that gels very well with the New Age trend that is very much in vogue in the USA and throughout the world, being introduced by teachers with an air of "Oxford-Harvard snobbishness"; in other words, a "harrypotter" for adults. Lastly, the author capitalizes on the poor religious instruction of many Christians to bring them to take seriously a cleverly spun tale that passes off tons of fantasy as history or reality.

## **2. Jesus Christ according to present-day gnosticism**

### ***The main ingredient in the Da Vinci Code mix***

More than a trend of thought, gnosticism is basically an attitude that claims possession

of special knowledge. Time and again gnosticism shows up alongside ways of thinking that are in vogue at the moment and, due to its extremely eclectic quality, it is difficult to render a precise definition of it. Claims to possessing esoteric knowledge usually emerge in periods of crisis, usually with the promise of acquiring a better understanding of reality, of enlightenment that transcends current realities and, consequently, of a presumed higher level of wisdom that would lead one to consider himself untrammelled by the norms of established authority. It is this gnostic foundation that's behind the huge success of the novel *The Da Vinci Code*.

### ***Modern gnosticism***

Nowadays, gnosticism is seen in such movements as the New Age and in other forms of occult, neo-pagan, and radical feminist groups. The first signs of gnosticism may be traced to some concepts of Plato's philosophy, Irani theology, and Judaic tradition, before and after Christianity came to be. Small wonder that in the second, third, and fourth centuries AD, gnosticism should also penetrate primitive Christianity with the intention of explaining the figure of Jesus Christ in a manner different from the four biographies whose authors, incidentally, took pains to compose in the first century and who either had personally known Jesus or met the first Apostles. Today, the majority of serious Christian (Catholic and non-Catholic) researchers agree that the four gospels were written during the second half of the first century—that is, in the few decades after Jesus' death and, therefore, a century before the emergence of the first gnostic gospel according to Thomas. These scholars may disagree as to which of the four gospels was first and whether or not

one had influenced the writing of the others. Nevertheless, not one has suggested any other possible way of depicting the life of Jesus.

### ***Classical Gnosticism***

The first news we have of the gnostics are found in the writings of the Fathers of the Church who waged battle against them. It is only lately that attempts have been made at systematizing the esoteric writings that have reached our time. The recent resurgence of gnosticism was propelled by the discovery of a number of gnostic texts in 1945 in Nag Hammadi (Upper Egypt). These were written in the fourth century even if some are copies of texts that were written one or two centuries earlier. Bentley Layton compiled these into the *The Gnostic Scriptures*, bringing together 46 works wherein one may trace the different schools of gnostic thought, for instance, that of the north of Mesopotamia, Basilides, and Hermes--the most radical of which was that of Valentin and his followers. Of these, only three are classified as gospels, or works that make some reference to the life of Jesus. However, as researcher Craig Blomberg states, if we put together all the documents that claim to be gospels from the first 500 years of human history, we would come up with 24, since most of these texts are mere compilations of Jesus' esoteric sayings and do not directly deal with his life. In other words, they are not really gospels. The oldest known gnostic gospel is that of Thomas, which must have been written around 150 AD, or 100 years after Mark's gospel. The rest, like those of "Truth," "Philip," "Egyptians," "Mary," and "Peter" were of the second, third, or fourth century. Others have been dated as totally or partly of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which is why, from the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards, these have

been translated and studied.

At best, such material can make for interesting literature because it offers a very good description of the gnostic groups. However, they are far cry from the antiquity, solidity, and quality of the four canonical gospels. Of late, gnostic literature has gained greater resonance because, as University of Pennsylvania professor Philip Jenkins in his book *Hidden Gospels* (Oxford University Press, 2001) declares, they seem to respond to a pervading desire to challenge the teachings and authority of the Catholic Church and to present a modernized version of Jesus. Information that moreover has been distorted by the media through exaggerations and presenting partial truths, if not at times total lies, as the truth. These writings have found a major sounding board as Dan Brown's historical sources for *The Da Vinci Code*, offering a new image of Christ that concurs with the "requirements" of today's world. In his work, Brown divulges that different forms of Christianity began to evolve after Jesus died, with each Christian community living out what it had understood about Jesus; thus each one enjoys some form of legitimacy. However, in the Councils of the fourth century, the Church, under the patronage of Roman Emperor Constantine, managed to impose its own inspired books and condemn as heretics those that rejected them. Nevertheless, "official" Christianity was only partly successful in its conspiracy to hide these books. While some had vanished for good, others have remained semi-hidden or, at best, discredited.

### ***Gnostic eclecticism***

According to Brown, the modern world's rediscovery of the gnostic world would bring

back the gospel's real message, which is precisely progressive, egalitarian, and feminist. Some passages of these gospels seem to suggest this possibility, while others, like the last paragraph of "Thomas," the most respected among the gnostic gospels, does not at all fit the idea of gnosticism as a basis for feminism: "Simon Peter said to them: 'Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life.' Jesus said. 'I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven.'" As regards references to Jesus and Mary Magdalene as a couple, the only source is the gospel according to Philip which, as expert Massimo Introvigne says, is a kind of catechism written late in the second or early on in the third century by the Valentinian school, a gnostic faction which, at that time, practiced a religion different and separate from Christianity's "Great Church." One then must not wonder that the harshest critics of Dan Brown's "de-mythification" of Christianity had been mostly specialists in exegesis—the critical explanation or interpretation of Scripture—who consider him as nothing more than a nuisance predator in a difficult field of research.

### **3. Iconography of Leonardo's "The Last Supper" & "The Da Vinci Code"**

#### *Deconstructing a deconstruction*

"The Da Vinci Code's" iconography of Leonardo's "The Last Supper" implies three things: First, that the absence of a chalice suggests that Leonardo is conveying a hidden message about the real nature of the Holy Grail; second, that the figure we assume to be the Apostle John is really Mary Magdalene, who is supposedly

married to Jesus; lastly, that Peter takes on a menacing stance against her because he considers her a rival. This monograph shall attempt to demonstrate the inconsistency of the said assumptions.

#### ***Misunderstanding The Last Supper***

Dan Brown's novel is based on the premise that Leonardo's "The Last Supper" is actually a code that, when broken, would reveal a secret that has been guarded for centuries—a secret that would surely be damning to Christianity and to the Vatican in particular. This could happen, thanks to Leonardo da Vinci who, as one of the few keepers of the secret, left a record of it while painting the said mural in the refectory of Santa Maria de la Gracia in Milan. The mystery begins to unveil by Brown when his main characters start questioning the absence of the chalice or the Holy Grail that contained the blood of Jesus. Any one who had seen other paintings of the Last Supper, like that of Juan de Juanes, would have asked the same question because the chalice is highlighted in the entire composition. Why does it not then figure in Leonardo's work? Could there be another reading of the Last Supper other than the traditional?

Dan Brown says "yes." The Apostle John, who is rendered with rather feminine features, is actually Mary Magdalene who was married to Jesus and, at that moment, expecting their child—Jesus' blood—which makes Mary the chalice that contains it. This idea was to be encoded in Leonardo's painting. That is why the space between Jesus and the Magdalene takes a chalice-like V form whose base points directly at Mary's womb. Thus the Holy Grail would no longer be an object but a person:

Mary Magdalene. On the other hand, Mary Magdalene and Jesus seem to mirror each other, for instance, in their symmetrical positions and the color of their garments, to signify their union, a composition that would even allow us to discern a letter "M"--which stands for Mary Magdalene--between the two figures. If this theory were to be accepted, then this would mean, not only the deconstruction of the image that Christianity has about itself, but also a return to the world of pagan mythology where goddesses recover the important role that had in the mythology of the former Olympus.

### ***Understanding The Last Supper***

However, is this theory well founded? Let us start by saying that "The Last Supper" has been so extensively studied for years and such studies have yielded more convincing theories, all of which affirm that, more than depicting the institution of the Holy Eucharist, this painting shows the Apostles' reaction to Jesus' declaration that someone was going to betray him. This is why the chalice does not appear as a central element in the painting. Moreover, there is no reason to assume that Jesus used a special vessel for consecrating the wine. In the painting, Jesus and all the other apostles, has a drinking vessel by his left hand. It must be remembered that this tempera painting was done at the end of the 15th century, while that of Juan de Juanes was done during the years of the Council of Trent, which promoted art that defended and exalted the Sacraments like the Eucharist.

In their book, "The Da Vinci Hoax" (2004) Carl Orson and Sandra Miesel offer new analyses to demolish the theory behind "The Da Vinci Code." They cite the great art critic Steinberg's description of the figures in

the scene: from left to right, Andrew is followed by Peter, then Judas, and John. No one can doubt their identities here. Steinberg explains that this grouping is based on the roles that the apostles were going to play in the Passion: one denies, the other betrays, while the other stays by Jesus' side. Steinberg even indicates other significant pairings in the painting, as seen in the proximity of the heads of the figures in it. For example, Peter and John, who often appear together, signify the active life and the contemplative life. And so as Peter energetically hoists himself up, John calmly takes in the sad news. And what of John's effeminate aspect? This is more due to the Florentine style of painting that was popular in the early 15th century and which can also be observed in Leonardo's other paintings, two of St John the Baptist which are kept in the Louvre and which were executed 20 years after the Last Supper.

### ***Brown confuses himself***

In his novel, Dan Brown insists that Peter's hand takes on a menacing gesture, suggesting his harassment of Mary Magdalene, his rival to future supremacy in the Church. However, a plain, unbiased look at the painting easily shows a gesture that suggests trust and intimacy between Peter and John, denoting the immediate and necessary conversation that ensued between them upon hearing Jesus' words. Lastly, even more provocative are the questions that Olson and Miesel pose to debunk the theory that Mary Magdalene occupies the place traditionally reserved for John. According to them, if John, whom the Gospel describes as the Apostle Jesus loved was absent in the painting, then where could he have gone? And if that calm and reserved person at Jesus' right were indeed

a woman, why immediately conclude that it is Mary Magdalene and not Mary, the Mother of Jesus? Finally, why is it often presumed that Mary Magdalene was a young and beautiful woman--the perfect partner for Jesus, who was then in his early 30s? Could she not have been middle-aged, if not old and even unattractive?

#### 4. Opus Dei and *The Da Vinci Code*

##### What the novel's success tells us

Rabidly anti-Catholic novels like those of Dan Brown's try to show that the Catholic Church is, among others, a misogynist institution, governed by the scheming and the ruthless. Brown also rather gleefully denigrates Opus Dei, depicting it as a perverse group that has nothing to do with what the Gospel teaches. Anti-Catholic authors have always been around but why do they so plague the western world today? And how could Opus Dei, an institution recognized by the Church, whose founder was declared a saint by the late John Paul II, be so maligned in this book?

Opus Dei is far from how the book presents it through the figure of the monk Silas, an albino with blood-shot eyes and a bizarre past. The author resorts to stereotype Hollywood villains portrayed, for instance, in Vincent Price's *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1960) and by the Twins in *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003). Silas' father, a tough longshoreman, used to beat him up as a child. This eventually leads to Silas murdering a stevedore that reminded him of his father. He spends time in jail and reforms but soon resumes his killing sprees. Brown also seems to take pleasure in describing Silas indulging in bloody self-flagellation and

mangling his thigh by clamping a nasty spiked chain around it. This scene, which appeals to viewers' apparent taste for sadomasochism, is relentlessly depicted in the film version, again, painting a distorted picture of Opus Dei.

##### ***Mortification in Christian tradition***

Is it calumny to say that members of Opus Dei actually use whips and cilices? One can easily get an answer through the Internet. It takes just 10 seconds to get to the web page of a certain Willy Vazquez, a numerary member of Opus Dei in Peru, who says, yes, some members, but not all, use them and not in the way Silas in *The Da Vinci Code* uses them. Vazquez further clarifies, "Just like all Christians, the members of Opus Dei seek to offer small sacrifices in order to unite themselves with Christ's sacrifice on the Cross. The Church, in turn, reminds everyone during Lent that Jesus fasted and offered sacrifices for 40 days in the desert before he launched into his public life. During Lent, the Church invites the faithful to also do penance and offer up sacrifices to prepare themselves for Holy Week. The members of Opus Dei perform acts of self-denial in ordinary ways--in what they eat and drink, in the way they deal with people, in their work, and in their struggle to become better persons. The celibate members of Opus Dei, in addition, use traditional modes of penance that are recommended by the Church, like the cilice and the discipline. Opus Dei did not make them up, as they have been part of the Church's 2000-year-old tradition. Opus Dei is not the only institution that uses them. In fact, the cilice and the discipline used in Opus Dei are so innocuous and perfectly adapted to the members' condition as ordinary men and women. They are used for



short spans and do no harm to the wellbeing of those who use it, considering the damage that excessive drug or alcohol use, high-cholesterol food, or even laziness does to people. Coming down to it, I must say that people in these times do need to practice some form of self-denial for their spiritual good. Those interested to learn more about Opus Dei but who do not wish to hear it from a member or even an ex-member, may check out John L. Allen, Jr.'s book, *Opus Dei. An Objective Look Behind the Myths and Reality of the Most Controversial Force in the Catholic Church* (Doubleday 2005). It is ironic that this book was published by the same house that released *The Da Vinci Code* in the USA.

#### ***The Brown's inspiration***

Why did Dan Brown attack Opus Dei in such an unrealistic way? Around the middle of March 2006, Brown faced a London court as a witness when the authors of the book *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* sued Random House on grounds that *The Da Vinci Code* substantially plagiarized one of their works. There, Brown revealed a document that contained clues to his work. He said he was going to write a thriller that would take a punch at the National Security Agency (NSA). The hero would be an Everyman besieged by evil powers beyond his comprehension. In no time, he realized that he managed to sell novels that contained three basic elements: a mysterious power of sorts, like a secret society or a government agency; a "big" idea with a vague moral foundation; and a hidden treasure. Further, these mysterious powers would involve evil conspirators within the NSA, the Catholic Church, or Opus Dei, who would wage battle against the "good guys," like the Masons, the Illuminati, or the priory of Sion. In *Slate*

*Magazine* (22 March 2006), journalist Bryan Curtis explains that the "big ideas" would be questions, like "Is the Vatican good or evil?" or "Is the NSA for or against us?" Finally, the hidden treasures in his stories would include items, like a meteorite, anti-matter, a gold ring, and the Holy Grail. Brown mixed all these elements to come up with a veritable bomb, which we shall try to analyze now.

We could start with the "what-if" method. In the book *The Da Vinci Hoax*, Olson and Miesel state: "Imagine a novel based on the premise that the Holocaust had never happened but was the invention of a powerful group of Jewish leaders who have used that 'myth' to garner themselves power and fortune. Or consider a theoretical novel claiming that Muhammad was not a prophet at all but a drug addled homosexual who married multiple wives in order to hide his deviant behavior and who killed non-Muslims in fits of rage against heterosexuals." Massimo Introvigne, a scholar on religions, suggests another what-if scenario. Imagine a book that says that, "after being enlightened, Buddha did not lead the presumed chaste life but had a wife and children. After he died, the Buddhist community encroached upon the rights of his wife, his rightful heir. Or what-if a famous Buddhist saint who died in the last century, like Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki 鈴木大拙 (1870-1966), was really the ringleader of a band of hoodlums? To perpetuate these lies, the Dalai Lama and other international personalities involved in Buddhism actually resorted to all kinds of schemes, including the murder of thousands, or millions, throughout history." The authors conclude that critics would be unanimous in censuring such a novel as politically incorrect. It would be banned from libraries and bookstores

and everyone would approve. And perish the thought of it having a film version.

### ***The Christian tradition under threat***

If we continue to ask ourselves why the latter scenario would happen, but not so in the case of *The Da Vinci Code*, the answer probably lies in the present moral decline of the West, which began decades before Dan Brown's works would even enjoy such a following. Their publication then would have generated a huge scandal. Moreover, the western world's all-out defense of the respect that the other creeds, like Buddhism and Islam, deserve seems to be but mere posturing and probably an unconscious move toward self-destruction. Umberto Eco expresses the same idea in another way in his column in *L'Espresso* (30 July 2005). He first points out that critics were right in riddling holes into the novel for committing gross historical errors as regards issues like, "Jesus' relationship with Mary Magdalene, their descendants' flight to France, and the founding of the Merovingians and the Priory of Sion. Brown simply collected trash that has been circulating for decades among worthless books on the occult." Secondly, Eco is concerned that Brown and company's ploy has succeeded, given that the numerous attempts to debunk the work have only served to boost its sales and push it further into the spotlight. Eco, an atheist, therefore hits the nail on the head: "I think what unsettles the Catholic Church is that 'credence to the *Code*' (and, consequently, to another Jesus) is symptomatic of de-Christianization... (for), as Chesterton once said, when people no longer believe in God, it is not that they have stopped believing—they just end up believing anything."

### **5. Jesus, According to *The Da Vinci Code*** *The critics' take on the novel*

After its initial impact on the consciences of Christians and on the culture scene in general, the novel *The Da Vinci Code* (2003) is starting to get the raw end of its attempt at de-mythifying Christianity. For using fiction as a mode for imparting history lessons, it has received due response from offended groups, among which include the Catholic Church, Protestant groups, and even albino associations. The citizens of Seville likewise are embarrassed by the way the author unrealistically describes their city. Among the Catholic organizations reacting, the Catholic Prelature of Opus Dei felt particularly offended for the unrealistic way in which is portrayed, and she had asked Sony that at least include a disclaimer in the movie saying that the story is fictional, something that was not accepted.

The book's more offensive affirmations touch on its negative and mistaken views of Jesus Christ: (1) that the first Christians did not think he was God; (2) that he married Mary Magdalene and sired a son with her; (3) that Jesus and the Magdalene symbolized the masculine-feminine duality in the manner of pagan deities like Mars and Athena or Isis and Osiris; (4) that Christian history was written by political conquerors—that is, it was "Peter's party" that made up the tale of Mary Magdalene as a repentant sinner; and (5) that Jesus Christ's divinity was established afterwards, at the instigation of Emperor Constantine in the Council of Nicea (325 AD), with the end of creating a patriarchal society. All these are strange affirmations, because not only the gospels but also the first documents of the Church say just the opposite.

The previous assumptions serve as a springboard for even more absurd ones to describe the Church: (a) that the Church turned misogynist and later developed a machinery that resorted to criminal acts to suppress feminism; and (b) that to remain in power, it has for 20 centuries deceived mankind about the figure of Christ. The list of errors as regards historical events can go on and on, but I shall now focus on how the novel presents Jesus Christ, based in the work of some experts in exegesis and history, debunking the many assertions and innuendoes that the novel wishes to pass off as fact, causing even some agnostic intellectuals to distance themselves from the work.

### ***Exegetical misconceptions***

*The Da Vinci Code* affirms that Jesus Christ was married, with Brown saying that the said union was “documented,” even as he does not say where the documents are, which puts his statement to doubt. Moreover, there are more powerful reasons to believe that Jesus was indeed celibate. In one hand, the evangelists mention his “mother” and his “brethren,” but not a wife. On the other hand, if we presume that someone wanted to do away with elements that would put Jesus “on the spot,” then why affirm the truth of other events and incidents, like Jesus’ baptism by John? Finally, Celibacy in Israel was rare, but some did practice it. Therefore, it should not be surprising that Jesus Christ would want to highlight his unique mission in this way. While he did not demean matrimony or demand that his followers be celibate, he emphasized nonetheless that love for God ought to be above everything else.

When Brown affirms that the marriage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene has

documented sources, he only gives credit to the guesswork of writer Margaret Starbird in the book, *The Woman with the Alabaster Jar: Mary Magdalene and the Holy Grail*. Starbird, however, she clearly points out, “Of course, I cannot prove that the dogmas of the ‘heresy of the Holy Grail’ are true: that Jesus was married or that Mary Magdalene was the mother of his child. Neither can I prove that Mary Magdalene was the woman with the alabaster jar who anointed Jesus in Bethany... But, yes, I can verify that these dogmas were part of a widely-believed heresy during the Middle Ages and that its traces may be found in numerous works of art and literature that survived despite constant and violent suppression on the part of the Church of Rome.” This statement is likewise debatable, refers to a heresy and is definitely a far cry from Brown’s assertions. Besides it is good to recall that scholar Phillip G. Davis had asserted in his book *Goddess Unmasked: The Rise of Neopagan Feminist Spirituality*, that the roots of Goddess spirituality lie not in prehistoric matriarchal societies, but rather in Western esoteric traditions and in the Romantic movement of the 19th century.

### ***Some historical errors***

Everyone knows that it is hard to be objective when writing history but it is also true that history, as a social science, observes certain standards to allow it to come as close to the truth as possible. Take the case of four witnesses to an accident. All four would narrate what they saw, each one with his or her own version of the truth. In the end, all four accounts will help the judge get down to what really happened. Such is the case of the four gospels that only do not contradict, but also complement each other. Brown’s construction of Jesus’ life does not

use as sources the gospels or the writings of the Fathers of the Church or the liturgical or historical documents, but only the so-called Gnostic gospels that date one or two centuries after the canonical gospels and which were written by a non-Christian sect that was influenced by Christianity. As Thomas Williams, Dean of Theology of the Regina Apostolorum University in Rome said in an interview published by Zenit News Agency, "One of the major differences between gnosticism and Christianity is the in the way they understand the origin of evil. Christians believe that God is an infinitely good being that created a world that is good and that it was man's abuse of freedom that sin and corruption stepped into the picture and brought about disorder and suffering. Some Gnostics, on the other hand, say that God is the source of evil because he created a disordered world and that it should not be surprising that to set things right, Cain had to murder his brother Abel, Esau had to sell his birthright to Jacob for a plate of lentils, and Jesus had to betray Jesus. The recently discovered Gnostic gospel of Judas presents a good Judas but this theory is certainly not new. For example, it is enough to recall the 1973 rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar* where Judas sings 'I haven't come of my own device...' and the 1977 Taylor Caldwell Novel, *I, Judas*. In other words, the method used by Brown to portray primitive Christianity it is something similar like to write about the disintegration of the Han dynasty, based only in the 14<sup>th</sup> century novel of *Romance of the Tree Kingdoms*.

As regards the proceedings of the Council of Nicea, it is easy to find information about history's first ecumenical council. It brought together 300 bishops, some of who had suffered persecution.

Although Emperor Constantine was not baptized, he facilitated the gathering after having again united the Empire (324 AD) because he also wanted to see a united Church in the light of a new heresy that was spreading like wildfire: Arianism, which denied the divinity of Jesus Christ. In 318 AD, Arius presented strongly his views to the bishop of Alexandria (north of Egypt), which was why the synod of bishops of Egypt excommunicated him and which led to his flight. There were bishops in the Council, like Eusebius of Cesarea, who were friends of Arius. Eusebius later became a famous Church historian whose books exaggerated Constantine's influence on the Council. But comparing Eusebius' *History* with other Council documents, historians conclude that Constantine had no influence on the formulation of the Creed that was approved there. This was for two reasons: he did not have enough theological know-how to impose upon questions being debated there and he personally leaned towards Arianism. Thus, contrary to Brown's claims, the semi-convert Constantine considered Jesus Christ, not as God, but only as an exalted creature.

In the 2003 *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Brown said, "When you put down the book, you will have learned a lot of great things. I had to do a lot of research for it." No one denies that Brown really worked a lot on his book but three years of preparation (*Angels and Demons* was published in 2000) do not seem enough to tackle such an ambitious project. Yet we have learned a lot, not from Brown, but from the expertise of the critics who have assessed his book. These are men and women who have worked long and hard in their fields of specialization through which Brown so superficially tread. We can

conclude that Brown attempt of de-mythifying Christianity, had rise too much criticism against him that the only thing de-mythified was his novel.