

**Ben Witherington**  
**“Discovering the Real Jesus: The Da Vinci Code”**  
**Text version of Powerpoint slides used in the talk**

**DECIPHERING THE DA VINCI CODE**

The book begins with a page entitled “FACT” which claims, among other things, that “all descriptions of ...documents... in this novel are accurate”. This unfortunately is not true. Indeed this whole FACT page creates the false impression that this novel is based on sound historical research. The truth is, it is based on all sorts of conjectures, some scholarly and some not, and critical judgment has not been applied to the most important sources used--the Gnostic Gospels. It is closer to pure fiction than historical fiction

**THE DA VINCI CODE**

It is not however surprising that a powerful and well written thriller, written in an age of widespread Biblical illiteracy and ignorance about the history of early Christianity might have such an impact, especially in such a beguiling and persuasive format. Come up with a conspiracy theory, implicate a major world organization like the Catholic Church, focus on secrets, claiming they have only recently been made known. Here you have the makings of a potent gumbo indeed, especially in a culture that is already suspicious of large scale institutions with power.

**THE DA VINCI CODE**

Robert Langdon, the main hero figure of the book himself stresses “every faith in the world is based on fabrication. That is the definition of faith--acceptance of that which we imagine to be true, that which we cannot prove. Every religion describes God through metaphor, allegory, and exaggeration... The problems arise when we begin to believe literally in our own metaphors....Those who understand their faiths understand the stories are metaphorical.” (pp. 341-42). These claims undergird much of what we find in this novel, leading to some clear errors of fact and interpretation.

**THE DA VINCI CODE**

What counts most in a post-modern culture is the power of your rhetoric, not the accuracy of your reporting or analysis. As one of the major protagonists says (p. 444): “It is the mystery and wonderment that serves our souls, not the Grail itself..” In other words, it is the thrill of the chase, not the thrill of the truth that we should be content within these matters.

This quote on p. 444 is a strange remark in a book which also repeatedly insists that the world deserves the right to know the TRUTH about the church's lies about Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and the Grail (see pp. 407-08).

#### THE SEVEN DEADLY ERRORS

ERROR NO. 1-- The canonical Gospels are not the earliest Gospels, rather the suppressed Gnostic ones (such as the Gospel of Philip, or of Mary) are. This claim is made more than once by the protagonists of the book, Teabing and Langdon, who are both portrayed as scholars, and so credible witnesses on these matters. In fact the claim is made that the four canonical Gospels were chosen from amongst some 80 Gospels (see p. 231) and the rest were suppressed.

#### THE SEVEN DEADLY ERRORS

ERROR NO. 2-- Jesus was portrayed as simply a man or a great prophet in the earliest historical sources, but was later divinized at the Council of Nicea. (pp. 231-34) This is patently false. Jesus is called THEOS some seven times in the NT including in the Gospel of John, and he is called Lord in the divine sense numerous times as well. No historian I know of argues that these texts postdate the Nicean council. It is the documents written in the first century about Jesus and his movement that suggest he was the divine Son of God. The Councils of Nicea and Chalcedon merely formalized these beliefs.

#### THE SEVEN DEADLY ERRORS

ERROR NO. 3-- Constantine was the bad guy who suppressed the earlier Gospels and imposed the canonical Gospels and the doctrine of the divinity of Christ on the church. In fact already well before Constantine and before the Gnostic Gospels we not only have the four canonical Gospels circulating together as authoritative sources in the Church (probably as early as 125 A.D since Irenaeus knows of this fact), but in fact we have the Muratorian canon list which lists these Gospels as authoritative in and for the church.

#### THE SEVEN DEADLY ERRORS

ERROR NO. 4-- Jesus was married, in fact he was married to Mary Magdalene. Since the NT is completely silent and does not support these ideas, of course one has to turn to other and later sources for them, in particular the Gospel of Philip probably written sometime in the late third century A.D. Unfortunately the relevant portion of this text has gaps and it reads (63.33-36) "And the companion of the... Mary Magdalene... her more

than ...the disciples.. kiss her... on her..." A parallel passage in the Gospel of Philip 58-59 seems to suggest a kiss on the mouth.

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ERROR No. 5-- Jesus must have been married since he was an early Jew (p. 245). This argument overlooks the fact that there were already exceptions to this sort of rule in early Judaism. Josephus (Ant. 18.1.5.20-21; Jewish War 2.8.2) Philo (Hypothetica 11.14-17) and the Dead Sea Cemetery all attest to the fact that some early Jews felt a calling to celibacy. There is no reason why Jesus could not have been one of them. In fact, it would appear that his cousin John the Baptist set such a precedent for this kin group,

#### THE SEVEN DEADLY ERRORS

ERROR NO. 6-- The Dead Sea Scrolls along with the Nag Hammadi documents are called the earliest Christian records (p. 245, see also p. 234). This is so false, it is what the British would call a howler. It's an error that even a student who had only taken an introductory course in the NT would know is false. The Dead Sea Scrolls are purely Jewish documents. There is nothing Christian about them. There is also no evidence any of the Nag Hammadi documents ever existed before the late second century A.D. With the exception of the Gospel of Thomas (early 2<sup>nd</sup> cent.).

#### THE SEVEN DEADLY ERRORS

ERROR NO. 7-- Brown misjudges the Biblical portrayal of the character of God. He keeps referring to the repression of the Sacred Feminine (see p. 309). The problem with this is that there is a clear witness in the Bible that God is neither male nor female. Rather God, the creator God, is Spirit (see e.g. Jn. 4.24). The Bible is not an attempt to replace ancient female deities with one or more male ones. In the Greco-Roman world there were beliefs in many gods and goddesses. Jews and later Christians were a tiny minority in that world swimming upstream, and what they insisted is that there was only one God who was Spirit.