

ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

“In the Nick of Time”

Occasional Essays
and Other Stuff
for Christian
Students

Presented by the
President of

Central Baptist
Theological
Seminary of
Minneapolis

American Christianity needs leaders. American Christianity needs *Christian* leaders. Christian leaders explain the Scriptures, bringing them to bear upon life's urgent questions. Christian leaders exemplify the life of faith, finding their ultimate satisfaction in God alone. They unite intellectual discipline with ordinate affection, turning their entire being toward the love of God. These essays are dedicated to the task of inviting today's Christian students to become tomorrow's Christian leaders.

—Kevin T. Bauder

“...Be instant in season,
out of season;
reprove, rebuke, exhort
with all longsuffering
and doctrine.”

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The Da Vinci Code

Part Ten

“It's a Wrap”

Kevin T. Bauder

Who doesn't enjoy a good mystery story, especially when it has a pinch of intrigue and a dash of conspiracy? If *The Da Vinci Code* were nothing but a story, Christians would find little to dispute. We might not like Dan Brown's depiction of Jesus, but if it were presented as mere fiction, we would most likely remain silent about the offense.

The problem is that Brown does not intend to write fiction about Jesus. Even though the story of murder, suspicion, pursuit, and vindication is made up, Brown rests the plot of *The Da Vinci Code* upon a theory about Jesus that he presents as factual. At the very beginning of the book, he stipulates that certain aspects of the book are fact. Specifically, he states that “[a]ll descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate.”

From those documents and rituals, Brown constructs a theory about Jesus that involves several elements. First, he says that early Christians acknowledged the “divine feminine” or goddess principle. By conceptualizing deity as at least partly feminine, the early followers of Jesus

developed a religion that promoted peace and wholeness, envisioned human sexuality as a means of divine communion, and dignified women.

Of course, many ancient religions worshipped goddesses. Among these religions, sexual intercourse was often viewed as a means of communion with the divine. Gnosticism, an ancient religion that sometimes used Christian language, admitted feminine deities. A few Gnostics even promoted sexual rites as a part of their worship, although most Gnostics were very strictly against sex in any form. This part of the truth fits Brown's theory.

The rest of the truth completely undermines Brown's thesis. Most goddess religions were very demeaning to women. Not uncommonly, they saw women as barely human or even subhuman. This was as true of Gnosticism as it was of Phoenician, Greek, or Roman religion. Moreover, the goddess religions were anything but peaceful. They tended to produce warlike nations that invaded neighboring countries and attempted to build empires. They often engaged in human sacrifice, including the torture and murder of children.

Contrary to Brown, religions that acknowledged a divine feminine were not peaceful. They did not dignify women. Except for the Gnostic cult, no early Christians were in any sense goddess worshippers. Even among the Gnostics, sex rites were rarely practiced. These rites were never practiced among mainstream Christians. *The Da Vinci Code* is simply wrong on these points.

The second element in Dan Brown's theory is that New Testament Christianity was a late invention, introduced at the Council of Nicea (325 AD) and enforced by the Roman emperor Constantine. According to this theory, the early Jesus movement had several branches, most of which were quite different from the Christianity of the New Testament. Constantine and his council created the New Testament and invented the deity of Christ.

The grain of truth in *The Da Vinci Code* is that people did offer alternative explanations for Jesus. Even during the lifetime of the apostles, proto-Gnostics were denying that Jesus could be the Christ. Both Paul and John wrote against incipient Gnosticism. Both apostles denied that Gnosticism was Christian.

The opposition between Gnosticism and New Testament Christianity led to a crisis of authority. Each theology claimed to base its beliefs upon the teachings of apostles. Each claimed to possess an apostolic tradition and apostolic writings. Which, if either, could be believed?

Irenaeus provided the answer to this question. While the Gnostics appealed to a secret tradition and hidden writings, he appealed to the public teaching of the apostolic churches. These were the churches that everyone knew had been founded by apostles, such as Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome. Irenaeus reasoned that where the apostolic churches agreed, they must represent the genuine apostolic teaching. He noted that the apostolic churches agreed at every point of faith. Gnostics, however, disagreed with the apostolic churches. In fact, Gnostics even disagreed among themselves. Irenaeus concluded that the faith of the apostolic churches must be accepted as the true faith taught by the apostles. He insisted that the Scriptures recognized among the apostolic churches must be regarded as genuine and authentic.

Gnosticism never recovered from the argument of Irenaeus. He appealed to the public teaching of apostolic churches and the public writings of the apostles. This severely undermined the status of the Gnostics, who could only appeal to hidden writing and secret traditions. In other words, Irenaeus had refuted the Gnostics and argued for nearly the whole New Testament more

than a hundred years before Constantine became emperor. Therefore, *The Da Vinci Code* is simply wrong on these points.

Part of Dan Brown's theory is that Mary Magdalene was a female apostle whom Jesus intended to lead His church. Brown bases this argument largely on a reference from a Third Century writer, Hippolytus, who refers to Mary and other women as "female apostles." In everyday usage, however, the word *apostle* simply referred to someone who had been sent with a message. This corresponds exactly to the commission that Jesus gave to the women who first witnessed His resurrection. He commanded them to tell Peter and the apostles that He had risen. In the ordinary sense, these women were "apostles," or messengers. This does not mean that they were appointed to the office of apostle or that they became leaders of the church.

One of the Gnostic gospels (the Gospel of Mary) has Mary Magdalene receiving special revelation from the Savior. Even if this happened, it is not a problem for New Testament Christianity. New Testament Christians believed that women could receive revelation and prophesy, just as they could in the Old Testament. For women to prophesy, however, does not place them in the office of apostle. Prophets and apostles are not the same thing. In short, no credible evidence exists that Mary Magdalene was an apostle. Once again, *The Da Vinci Code* is just plain wrong.

Of course, the most conspicuous part of Dan Brown's theory in *The Da Vinci Code* is the suggestion that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and that the two of them had children. Brown bases this theory upon several arguments: the fact that Mary traveled with Jesus; a supposed prohibition in Jewish culture against men remaining unmarried; a reference in the Gospel of Mary to the fact that Jesus loved Mary more than the other apostles; a similar reference in the Gospel of Philip, coupled with an allusion to Mary as Jesus' "companion," a term that (according to Brown) could only refer to spouses or lovers in the Aramaic language.

As we have seen, many women traveled with Jesus, so Mary Magdalene was no exception. Jewish men were not forbidden to remain single: examples to the contrary abound. The Gospel of Mary proves nothing except that Jesus was fond of Mary. The same can be said about the Gospel of Philip. Like the rest of the Gospel of Philip, the word *companion* is not even in Aramaic, but in Coptic. In both languages (and in Greek) it simply means companion. No credible evidence exists for a married Jesus. *The Da Vinci Code* is wrong again.

In one way, this is a moot point. Suppose Jesus had married: it would have changed nothing important about His person. The New Testament teaches that Jesus is fully God. It also teaches that He is fully human. As a human, Jesus could have married if that is what He had chosen to do. Dan Brown, however, seems to think that a married Jesus would completely subvert New Testament Christianity. Yet again, *The Da Vinci Code* is wrong.

The Da Vinci Code is wrong about the divine feminine. It is wrong about Constantine inventing New Testament Christianity. It is wrong about the apostleship of Mary Magdalene. It is wrong about Jesus being married. It is even wrong about whether the Jesus of the Bible *could* have married. When it comes to the main points of his theory, author Dan Brown is certainly consistent. He is consistently wrong.

As a mystery, *The Da Vinci Code* might be an interesting read. As a theory about Christianity, however, it definitely fails. If you find it plausible, you might also be interested to know that John

F. Kennedy is still alive. On a yacht with Elvis. In the Bermuda Triangle. Monitoring alien transmissions. From Hangar 18. For the Trilateral Commission.

The evidence for one is as good as the evidence for the other. ✖

This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, president of Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

MARIE MAGDALENE.

George Herbert (1633)

WHEN blessed Marie wip'd her Saviours feet,
(Whose precepts she had trampled on before)
And wore them for a jewell on her head,
Shewing his steps should be the street,
Wherein she thenceforth evermore
With pensive humbleness would live and tread :

She being stain'd herself, why did she strive
To make him clean, who could not be defil'd?
Why kept she not her tears for her own faults,
And not his feet? Though we could dive
In tears like seas, our sinnes are pil'd
Deeper than they, in words, and works, and thoughts.

Deare soul, she knew who did vouchsafe and deigne
To bear her filth ; and that her sinnes did dash
Ev'n God himself ; wherefore she was not loth,
As she had brought wherewith to stain,
So to bring in wherewith to wash :
And yet in washing one, she washed both. ✖

Central Baptist Theological Seminary of Minneapolis | [Contact Us](#)
900 Forestview Ln N, Plymouth, MN 55441 | 1-800-827-1043 | www.centralseminary.edu