



THE INVINCIBLE FAITH OF CHRISTIANITY IN DAN BROWN'S *THE DA VINCI CODE*

S.ANANDH RAJ

Research Scholar, Department of English, Swami Vivekananda Arts & Science College, Villupuram,
Tamil Nadu



S.ANANDH RAJ

ABSTRACT

This research article explains the historical inaccuracies in the portrayal of Mary Magdalene, the facts about the Dead Sea Scrolls, and The Council of Nicaea. It also talks about the invincible faith of Christianity and the values inculcated by the Christianity to human beings for removing the sins. It finally throws light on the facts that Christianity teaches salvation and eternal life comes from accepting Jesus's sacrifice on the cross as the redemption for our sinful human nature. By physically dying on the cross, Jesus paid the price for our sin, for our shame. Thus it talks about the invincible faith in Christianity and one can attain salvation and eternal life only by accepting Jesus's sacrifice on the cross as the redemption for our sin.

Key words: Portrayal of Mary Magdalene, Roman Emperor Constantine the Great, Council of Nicaea, Eighty gospels to four gospels, The Invincible Faith of Christianity.

©KY PUBLICATIONS

The Da Vinci Code claims that "The Bible is a product of man. Not of God . . . *The Bible*, as we know it today, was collated by the pagan Roman Emperor Constantine the Great". The novel goes on to explain through the British historian, Leigh Teabing that more than 80 Gospels were considered for the New Testament, but Constantine selected only four. The Emperor "omitted those Gospels that spoke of Christ's human traits and embellished those Gospels that made him Godlike. Teabing concludes that the Dead Sea Scrolls and Gnostic manuscripts from Nag Hammadi, Egypt, were "the earliest Christian records" – not the four Gospels.

According to the Catholic doctrine, the Bible is the product of man. God is the author of the Sacred Scripture because He inspired its human authors; He acts in them and by means of them. As Peter says, "Holy men of God spoke as they were

moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1: 21), and the "Scriptures are inspired by God and profitable for teaching" (2 Tim. 3: 16)

The Old Testament canon had been forming for centuries. Jesus and the apostles already recognized the authority of the Old Testament writings that existed in their time, as illustrated by the following verses: And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24: 27)

St. John, one of the apostles says the words of the Lord:

You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me. (John 5: 39)

And Paul went in, as was his custom, and for three weeks he argued with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead. (Acts 17: 2-3)

In the first century, the apostles and their associates wrote the books of the New Testament. They were passed down to succeeding generations of Christians and in the churches. In the second and third centuries, Gnostic heretics began to manufacture writings that falsely claimed to be from the apostles. Since they had not been passed down in the churches from the beginning, they were rejected. In response to these new, false writings the churches drew up lists of the authentic books that had been handed down from the apostles. A famous list of the Sacred Writings from the mid-second century is known as the Muratorian Canon.

The process by which the canon of scripture was formed was largely complete by the time of Constantine (the early fourth Century), and he made no contribution to it. There were a few Old Testament books that continued to be discussed after Constantine's time, into the late fourth century – further illustrating that he did not collate The Bible. No Bible scholar holds that Constantine played such a role in the development of the Scripture.

Constantine did in fact commission 50 copies of the Bible around 325 AD. The exorbitant cost of hand-copying such a large document on parchment was not within the reach of the commoner only an emperor could afford to do this. Constantine's Bible is a reflection, not of his ideology, but of the prevailing view of churches at that time, many of which possessed originals or copies of the apostle's writings.

Some 80 gospels are not in existence. Actually, 40 of them are known to have existed loosely as Gnostic "Scriptures". The vast majority of these are not stories of the life of Jesus, but rather explanation of the Gnostic world view. Mathew, Mark, Luke and John were the only ones ever considered, and their canonical states were clearly recognized by the Second Century AD. The earliest Christian writings cite these Gospels as the only authoritative and authentic texts about Jesus.

There are not even "eighty Gospels" in existence to be considered. The Gnostic writings include a few that are called "Gospels" (e.g. the Gospels of Thomas being the most popular among scholars second century AD or later), contain an unorthodox Gnostic theology, and were simply never considered for inclusion in the New Testament Canon. The Canonical Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) are all first century texts so they are the earliest gospels we have of the words and deeds of Christ. According to tradition, they are rooted in eyewitness testimony.

The first major church historian Eusebius, writing at the time of Emperor Constantine, distinguishes three categories of New Testament Scriptures: (1) universally acknowledged, (2) disputed, and (3) spurious (or simply "un canonical"). In category 1 which is universally acknowledged, he places the four Gospels (Mathew, Mark, Luke, John), the Acts of the Apostles (Acts), the epistles of Paul (which are 14 including Hebrews), the first epistle of John (1 John), the first epistle of Peter (1 Peter), and "should it seem right, John's Apocalypse" (Book of Revelation). In category 2 as "disputed", but recognized by the majority "he places the epistles of James, Jude, second Peter, second and third John. In category 3 as non-canonical he includes the Acts of Paul, the shepherd of Hermas, the Apocalypse of Peter, the epistle of Barnabas, and the teachings of the Apostles, the "Gospel according to Hebrews", and Revelation should seem it right since some reject it, while other count it among the acknowledged books.

The style of the Gospels is radically and clearly different from the style of all myths; there are no overblown, spectacular exaggerated events; nothing is arbitrary, everything is meaningful. There was not enough time for any myth to develop; several generations have to pass before the added mythological elements can be mistakenly believed to be facts; eyewitness would be around before that to discredit the new, mythic versions. The New Testament could not be a myth misinterpreted and confused with fact because it specifically distinguishes the two and repudiates the mythic interpretation.

The Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) were not “found in the 1950s” – they were first discovered in 1947, with subsequent finds in the 1950s. The Nag Hammadi (NH) documents are not “scrolls” – they are codices, which are an ancient form of book. The DSS did not even mention Jesus Christ’s ministry in very human terms. The DSS do not even mention Jesus Christ since they are Jewish documents dating mainly before the time of Christ. The Gnostic writings in general present a “divine” Christ who is not human. The DSS is the generic title for six groups of documents discovered between 1947 and 1956 in caves and sites of the Judean Desert near the western side of the Dead Sea; the most important group was found in eleven caves near the Wadi Qumran often called the (“Qumran Scrolls”) QS. In the DSS, there is no mention of John the Baptist, Jesus of Nazareth, his apostles or disciples, or anything Christian.

The DSS and NH documents say nothing about the “Grail”. They say nothing about Christ’s ministry in very human terms. The Vatican had nothing to do with delaying or suppressing the publication of these scrolls and codices. The glaring historical discrepancies and fabrications are found in the Gnostic Gospels not the New Testament. The DSS and NH documents are definitely not the earliest Christian records and they have nothing to do with the canon of the New Testament which was early recognized by the church as authoritative.

In *The Da Vinci Code*, Brown claims that the early Roman Catholic Church and the Vatican’s campaign were bent on eradicating pagan religions and convert the masses to Christianity so the church launched a smear campaign against the pagan gods and goddesses, recasting their divine symbols as evil. The author goes on to describe the vestiges of pagan religion in Christian symbology are undeniable: Egyptian sun disks became halos; Isis nursing Horus became the Virgin Mary nursing Baby Jesus; virtually all elements of Catholic ritual – the mitre, the altar, the doxology, and communion, the act of God-eating – were taken directly from earlier pagan mystery religions; nothing in Christianity is original.

The novel states that many aspects of Christianity were debated and voted upon by the Council of Nicaea – the date of Easter, the role of the bishops, the administration of the sacraments, and, of course, the divinity of Jesus. “Christianity honored the Jewish Sabbath of Saturday, but Constantine shifted it to coincide with the pagan’s veneration day of the sun”.

Technically, the church is not the “Roman Catholic Church” since there are both eastern (Greek) and western (Latin) rites – the official name is simply the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church is accused of a “smear campaign”, of eradicating and forbidding pagan religions. The church is also accused of subjugating, banishing, burning women and nonbelievers, of hiding the truth, of lying, killing, murdering, deceiving etc.

The halo or (nimbus) found in Christian art was used by a number of Pre-Christian cultures, including the Greeks and Romans. For example, Roman emperors were depicted on coins with radiantly lit heads. Christians gradually appropriated this cultural element and used it for Christian art. Moses’ face radiated light after he came down from Mount Sinai and Jesus’ face at the transfiguration “shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light”. The use of halos in Christian iconography is simply the church recognizing the usefulness of an artistic motif. The pagan mystery religions were quite different from Christianity in significant ways: they were based on an annual vegetation cycle, they stressed esoteric hidden knowledge; they emphasized emotional ecstasy over doctrine; their central goal was mystical experience. There is also a sharp contrast between the mythological characters of pagan mystery religions and the historical character of the gospels and the New Testament.

The image of a nursing mother is hardly unique to one religion since all cultures have mothers and children. One of the earliest pictures of Mary is a late second century fresco found on a wall of the catacombs of Priscilla in Rome, mentioned by Pope John Paul II in a general audience on May 23, 1990. The Madonna and the Child image has been depicted in numerous ways throughout history, often reflecting the culture of the respective

painters or sculptors. The word MITRE is derived from the Greek *mitra*, meaning “turban” or “headband”. It is the liturgical head-dress and part of the insignia of the bishop, and it didn’t appear in the west until the middle of the tenth century. It was not used by bishops in the east until after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. In the eastern churches it appears to be derived from the crowns worn by byzantine emperors; in the west or Latin Church it is a variation of unofficial hat worn by the Pope in processions.

There are over three hundred references to altars in the Old Testament. The first Christians, who were all Jewish, would hardly see the concept of an alteras new. The altar in the temple was a focal point of the Jewish religion, and there are several references to altars in the New Testaments. “Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you” (Matt 5: 23). “Leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Matt 5: 24). “Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense” (Luke 1:11). “We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat” (Heb 13: 10). “When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the words of God and for the testimony which they held” (Rev. 6:9)

A doxology is simply a hymn or ascription of praise and glory (from dox = glory + logos = word). Virtually all religions have statements about the glory and power of a deity, reflecting the natural human desire to recognize what is sacred. In historic Christianity, there are three types of doxology: the great, the less and the Metrical forms and the language of the doxologies are taken directly from the New Testament and reflect the unique beliefs of Christians.

As Amy Welborn in *De-coding Da Vinci* concludes:

There is no evidence to suggest, as Brown does, a direct adaptation of the fundamentals of Christian thought and practice from pagan mystery religions. The roots of Christianity are in Judaism. (90)

Carl Olson in *The Da Vinci Hoax* adds:

. . . there is little or no evidence that most pagan mystery religions such as the Egyptian cult of Isis and Osiris or the cult of Mithras existed in the forms described in their books prior to the mid-first century . . . much of the existing evidence indicates that the third and fourth century beliefs and practices of certain pagan mystery religions are read back into the first century beliefs of Christians. .

No doubt the early Christians were influenced by paganism and sometimes used the same terms and motifs as their pagan neighbors. However, the success of the Christian religion was impossible for pagans to ignore and conversely some of them borrowed Christian ideas in their rituals and practices. The “fundamental catholic doctrine” is not that Jesus was celibate. The fundamental catholic doctrine is that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again for our salvation and justification. This is the basic Christian gospel. The celibacy of Jesus follows from the theological teaching of Christ as the bridegroom to his church, the Bride.

Jesus indeed consorted with and elevated women of His day who were some of His closest followers, but He chose twelve men to be His apostles, the leaders in His church, with St. Peter as the head and rock upon which His church is built. And as for the supposed matriarchal societies ruled by women or “goddesses” there is no evidence for such societies, so the Catholic Church could hardly have banished or forbidden such things.

Amy Wellborn adds:

. . . the ideology driving these conclusions (for an ancient matriarchy), the ambiguous nature of these purported artifacts, and the discovery of weapons and clear evidence of traditional gender-based division of labor in many of these sites, has driven a stake into the myth of the Mother Goddess. There is no evidence to suggest that such an era ever existed. (74)

Referring to the First Council of Nicaea, which took place in AD 325, *The Da Vinci Code* states that upto the some moment in history, Jesus was that up to some moment in history, Jesus was viewed as a

mortal prophet, a great and powerful man. It is in the time of Constantine, he was made as a 'Son of God, "Constantine turned Jesus into a deity".

Constantine had called the council together to settle a dispute that had arisen when a priest from Egypt named Arius began to deny that Jesus was God, causing a scandal by repudiating the faith of Christians everywhere. Arius gained a number of followers (known as Arians) and the controversy between the Arians and traditional Christians grew so sharp that the emperor called the council to settle the matter. Personally, Constantine tended to support the position of the Arians, but he recognized the authority of the bishops in articulating the Christian faith. The bishops of the council reaffirmed the traditional Christian teaching that Jesus was fully divine. It was thus the bishops of the Council of Nicaea who reaffirmed the historic Christian position against Arius and his followers.

Constantine recognized their authority to do so in spite of the fact he would have preferred a different outcome. "Christ's divinity is stressed repeatedly in the New Testament. For example, we are told that Jesus' opponents sought to kill him because he "called God his Father, making himself equal with God" (John 5:18). "When quizzed about how he has special knowledge of Abraham, Jesus replies, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am" (John 8: 58), invoking and applying to himself the personal name of god – "I Am" (Exod. 3: 14). His audience understood exactly what he was claiming about himself, "So they took up stones to throw at him; but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple" (John 8: 59).

In John 20:28, Thomas falls at Jesus' feet, exclaiming, "My Lord and my God!" And Paul tells us that Jesus chose to be born in humble, human form even though he could have remained in equal glory with the father, for he was "in the form of God" (Phil. 2: 6).

The book claims that the marriage of Jesus Christ and Mary Magdalene was one particular troubling earthly theme that kept recurring in the gospels, and is a matter of historical record. In fact, it claims that Jesus got Mary Magdalene pregnant and the two had a daughter. The book states, "Mary Magdalene was pregnant at the time of the

crucifixion. For the safety of Christ's unborn child, she had no choice but to flee the Holy Land . . . it was there in France that she gave birth to a daughter. Her name was Sarah". Jesus as a married man makes infinitely more sense than our standard biblical view of Jesus as a bachelor. Later the book claims that this union gives rise to a bloodline that still exists in prominent European families. It also claims that the Catholic Church knows about this and has covered it up for centuries, even resorting to murder Christ's own descendants to protect the secret. It also claims that Jesus was the future of His church to be in the hands of Mary Magdalene. "Behold . . . the greatest cover-up in the human history. Not only was Jesus Christ married, but he was a father . . . the early Church feared that if the lineage were permitted to grow, the secret of Jesus and Magdalene would eventually surface and challenge the fundamental Catholic doctrine – that of a divine Messiah who did not consort with women or engage in sexual union . . . Many of the Vatican's Grail quests here were in fact stealth missions to erase members of the royal bloodline". The royal bloodline of Jesus Christ has been chronicled in exhaustive detail by scores of historians.

The four generally accepted gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, contain twelve verses on Mary Magdalene and none depict any type of marital relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. Mary Magdalene was part of a group of women who traveled with Jesus and his disciples when, "He began going about from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the Kingdom of God; and the twelve were with Him" (Luke 8:1). These women probably assisted in provisioning and feeding the travellers. Luke (8:3) informs us that Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others were contributing out of their private means to cover the costs.

Mary Magdalene was delivered from demonic spirits: "Mary, who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out" (Luke 8:2). At the crucifixion, the gospel of Matthew tells us, many women were present, looking from a distance. There were women who had followed Jesus from

Galilee, "among whom was Mary Magdalene, along with Mary, the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee" (Matt. 27:56). In verse 56, it would have been very easy to identify Mary Magdalene as "the wife of Jesus" if that had been the case. The other women were identified through their motherhood. Mary Magdalene is merely one of many women, a faithful follower of Jesus.

After the Sabbath following Jesus's crucifixion, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James, and Salome, went to Jesus's tomb; bringing spices to anoint Him. When they arrived at the tomb, they saw that the extremely large stone which had sealed its entrance had been rolled away. A young man in a white robe, an angel, sat inside the tomb. The angel told the women Jesus had risen from the dead and asked them tell his disciples He had gone to Galilee. They fled in fear and astonishment. After Jesus resurrected, "He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom he cast out seven demons. She went and reported to those who had been with Him, while they were mourning and weeping. And when they heard that He was alive, and had been seen by her, they refused to believe it" (Mark 16: 9-11). Luke (24: 9-11) also relates that, "women returned from the tomb and reported all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. Now they were Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James; also the other women with them were telling these things to the apostles. And these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them" (Luke 24: 9-11).

There is only one verse that concerns physical contact between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. Mary Magdalene was weeping outside the tomb. She beheld Jesus but did not recognize Him (John 20:14). Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, 'Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him and I will take Him away.' Jesus said to her, "Mary", she turned and said to Him in Hebrew, "Rabboni!" Jesus said to her, 'Stop clinging to Me; for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren, and say to them, 'I ascend to My

Father and you Father, and My God and Your God,' Mary Magdalene came, announcing to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord,' and that He had said these things to her" (John 20: 15-18).

Contrary to the supposition of *The Da Vinci Code* it takes quite a stretch of the imagination to interpret the scene just described as a reunion between husband and wife. Mary mistook Jesus for a gardener. She addressed him as "Rabboni" or "Teacher," a sign of respect, and not "Husband" or Jesus. She probably hugged him out of joy, but that was it. Jesus addressed her as "Woman," and did not want her clinging to him. This response is not particularly endearing or intimate, as one would expect from a wife, after having been crucified and resurrected!

In Jewish tradition, marriage is respected. Jesus could very well have been the Son of God and been married. Jesus was fully god and fully man. Marriage would not have restricted his being a deity and marriage was not something Jews kept secret. It was quite normal to be married. Prominent rabbis were married. The Bible tells us Peter was married. If Jesus had been married to Mary Magdalene we would have been told. It wasn't embarrassing in any way to disclose it. Note above that in Luke 8:3 Joanna is identified as the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward. Acts 18:2 tells us that Paul met Aquila and his wife Pricilla in Corinth, fellow tentmakers, and stayed with them. The only man in human history who physically rose from the dead was the incarnation of God Himself, Jesus Christ. Christianity teaches that salvation and eternal life come from accepting Jesus's sacrifice on the cross as the redemption for our sinful human nature. By physically dying on the cross, Jesus paid the price for our sin, for our shame. By simply praying to Jesus, to take charge of our life and forgive our sin, we accept Jesus; He turns us into a new leaf, and enters into a personal relationship with the personal god of the Universe.

The reason that Brown and a handful of others have tried to identify Mary Magdalene as the wife of Jesus is obvious: she is a prominent woman disciples of Christ, whose name we know, and whom we do not know was married to someone else. Other female disciples of Jesus are known to be

married to others. If one wants to force Jesus into the role of being married, Mary Magdalene is one of the few prominent and available women to be pushed into the role of being his wife.

Furthermore, there is nothing in the New Testament that states or implies that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene. According to the New Testament, Mary of Madala was a devout follower of Christ and one of the first witnesses of his Resurrection, but not his wife. There is no evidence in the New Testament or the writings of the church Fathers that she was married to Jesus.

Jesus also said things that indicated that he wasn't married to anyone. He explained that some voluntarily refrain from marrying in order to be fully consecrated to God. He says that they "have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake" (Matt. 19:12). He portrays voluntary abstention from marriage as the highest form of consecration, and as the spiritual leader of the Christian Movement, it would be strange for him to hold up such a standard if he himself did not meet it.

Moreover, the early church was unanimous in regarding Jesus as unmarried. This is not a later doctrine of the Church Fathers but something found in the New Testament itself. The authors of the New Testament regularly depict the church as "the bride of Christ." This metaphor would never have developed if a flesh-and-blood "Mrs. Jesus" was living just down the street. Only if Christ was celibate would the church have come to be depicted metaphorically as his bride.

Brown asserts that in the original Gospels, Mary Magdalene rather than Peter was directed to establish the church. Again there is no basis for this claim. None of the early manuscripts of neither the gospels nor any of the quotations of the gospels in the writings of the early church Fathers suggest that anything of the kind was said at any stage in the history of the gospels. Brown's assertion that Jesus was the original feminist is simply pandering to modern secular sensibilities.

Appealing to prior "unaltered" gospels that had not been doctored by Constantine or others in the early church is fatuous. There is no evidence that Constantine ordered any copies of Scripture to be changed. If one wishes to claim that he did give such

an order, one should be able to back it up with a citation from a contemporary source, but no such passage can be found. None of the serving records of the period – or even the records of later centuries – record Constantine or anyone else attempting to alter the texts of the existing canon to change this or any other doctrine.

The Constantine or anyone else had tried to change Scripture, Christians would have effused. The Christian Church had just come through an age of persecution in which Christians had been burned at the stake for refusing to deny their Lord and the Scriptures he gave them. To allow those writings would be unthinkable, and any attempt to change them would have resulted in an enormous controversy that would be mentioned in the writings of the period. It would have been a practical impossibility to change scripture, because thousands of copies were in existence all across the Mediterranean World, from Europe to North Africa. There was no central registry of who had copies of the Bible, so there was no way to track them down and edit them. There were simply too many copies floating in circulation.

But even if all of the copies then known to exist had been tracked down and altered, this would not have affected the copies of the Scripture that by this time already had been lost. Many of the early manuscripts of Scripture that we now have been waiting lost, in the desert until their discovery by modern archeology. But when we look at these copies, they teach the same doctrines as later copies and show no evidence of having been censored. Moreover, the writings of the early church Fathers from before the time of Constantine show the same teaching and quote the gospels as saying the same things as in the canonical gospels.

Works Cited

- Brown, Dan. *The Da Vinci Code*. USA: Doubleday, 2003. Print.
- Brown, Dan. *The Da Vinci Code*. London: Corgi Books, 2004. Print.
- Miesel, Sandra. "Dismantling *The Da Vinci Code*." <http://www.crisismagazine.com/Sep. 2003>). *Web. Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Ed. Jeffery Hunter. Vol 209. MI: Thomson Gale, 2006. Print. 9-14.

- Olson, Carl. *The Da Vinci Hoax: Exposing the Errors in The Da Vinci Code*. San Francisco: Doubleday, 2004. Print.
- Reidy, Maurice Timothy. "Breaking the Code." *Common Weal*. 130. 15 (2003): 46. Print.
- Schorow, Stephani, "Code Read: Author Weaves Medieval Art, Mysticism, Murder in a Fascinating Best-Selling Tale." *Boston Herald*. 8 Aug. 2003, New York ed.: E29. Print.
- The Holy Bible*. Red Letter ed. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984. Print.
- Welborn, Amy. *Decoding Da Vinci Code: The Facts Behind the Fiction of The Da Vinci Code*. Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 2004. Print.
-