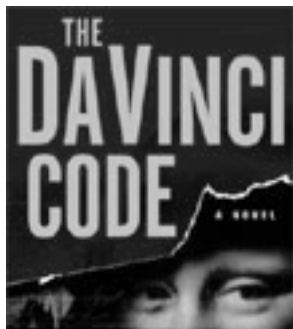


# ENQUIRE WITHIN

**Question:** *We have seen a lot about the Da Vinci Code recently. Have you read the book? What is it and what do you make of it, Neil?*

**Answer:** I haven't read the book, to be honest, but I have read about the un-surprising ballyhoo which it created.

I will start by saying that there is nothing new in the proposals made in the Da Vinci code. Ideas like these have always been around in what are called **Gnostic** writings. These are alternative and secret interpretations of the meaning and person of Jesus Christ. You may read easily many alternative books or writings, including material called **The Apocryphal New Testament**. The Gnostics gained influence and support then and still do now by the power of their esoteric and secretive approach.



We all know that some people long to be on the inside, to be in the know, to have secret or special knowledge denied to the ordinary people. This motivation makes "Gnostic" ideas popular in every age, including our own. An open and transparent religious approach is the one we would support, and we would shun the esoteric approach.

The book, published in 2003, offers an alternative take on Christian early history, as follows:-

- early Christianity entailed "the cult of the Great Mother." Mary Magdalene represented the feminine cult and the Holy Grail of traditional lore;
- she was also Jesus' wife and the mother of his children;
- Magdalene's womb, carrying Jesus offspring, was the legendary Holy Grail (as seen in Da Vinci's encoded painting, The Last Supper);

- Jesus was not seen as divine (God) by His followers until Emperor Constantine declared him so for his own purposes;
- The Nicean Council of the 3rd Century was the context for Constantine's power grab and the relationship of Magdalene as paramour of Christ was quashed there;
- "Mary Magdalene's remains and the secret documents that tell the real story were found on the Temple Mount when Jerusalem was conquered in the First Crusade."

The author, Dan Brown sees a connection between the Nag Hammadi documents (Gnostic Gospels) discovered in 1945 and this storyline and he claims that the "truth" about Christ and Mary Magdalene has been kept alive by a secret society named the Priory of Sion that was lead by great minds like Da Vinci. He went on to claim that in Da Vinci's great painting of the Last Supper, Mary Magdalene is present and her presence is a coded message about the true situation as opposed to the message which has been received and believed by Christians for 2000 years.

The Da Vinci code is fundamentally irreverent fun. To offer a rebuttal of the points one by one would take too much space and more importantly it would flatter the author as a serious scholar which he is not. He is a novelist and a clever one at that, but the central reason for his book concerns making a profit from a romantic novel describing a scandalous state of affairs involving famous and respectable people which has, allegedly, been kept secret from ordinary people for centuries. The ingredients of a best-seller par excellence!

Brown can be easily challenged in at least two major areas: (1) There are things he claims to be historical which, in fact, are not historical at all; and (2) he completely misrepresents biblical history. If anyone wants to find out more, there is plenty to see on the web!

**Neil Richardson**