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HAS THE DA VINCI CODE UNDERMINED CHRISTIANITY?¹

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When Mel Gibson produced *The Passion of the Christ* — a movie that substantially follows the contours of the New Testament accounts of Jesus' death — he immediately became the subject of controversy. Leon Wieseltier, the literary editor of *The New Republic*, called *The Passion* “a repulsive, masochistic fantasy, a sacred snuff film” that is “without any doubt an anti-Semitic movie.” Maureen Dowd, writing in the *New York Times*, accused Gibson of “courting bigotry in the name of sanctity.” Andy Rooney of *60 Minutes* characterized Gibson as “a real nut case” whose ulterior motive was making money.

Conversely, when Dan Brown released his runaway bestseller *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Doubleday, 2003) — a novel that characterizes the New Testament Gospels as “fabrications” and the deity of Christ as a fable — he was immediately lauded as a brilliant historian. *Library Journal* characterized his work as “a compelling blend of history and page-turning suspense,” a “masterpiece” that “should be mandatory reading.” *Publisher's Weekly* called it “an exhaustively researched page-turner about secret religious societies, ancient cover-ups, and savage vengeance.” Best-selling author Nelson DeMille christened *The Da Vinci Code* “pure genius.”

Why is *The Passion* excoriated and *The Da Vinci Code* extolled? Why are Gibson's motives denounced and Brown's dignified? Why is Christ's Passion referred to as a “repulsive, masochistic fantasy” and his supposed marriage to Mary Magdalene touted as a researched material fact? The answer may surprise you. It is not just that in our increasingly secularist culture it has become politically correct to cast aspersions on Christ and the church He founded. It is because of a great reversal of values. Fiction — such as the notion that Christianity was concocted to subjugate women — is being cleverly peddled as fact, while fact — such as the deity of Christ — is being capriciously passed off as fiction. Nearly all of Brown's assertions in *The Da Vinci Code* are based on several statements he presents on the first page under the heading of “FACT.” Most notable among these “facts” is the following: “The Priory of Sion — a European secret society founded in 1099 — is a real organization. In 1975 Paris's Bibliothèque Nationale discovered parchments known as *Les Dossiers Secrets*, identifying numerous members of the Priory of Sion, including Sir Isaac Newton, Botticelli, Victor Hugo, and Leonardo da Vinci.”

At first blush, this may seem rather harmless; but Brown uses this “fact” (which in reality is completely untrue, since the Priory of Sion was really founded in 1956) to cast aspersions on Jesus Christ, the historicity of the Gospels, and the uniqueness of Christianity. Brown depicts the Priory of Sion as a secret society bent on covering up the scandal of Christ's marriage to Mary Magdalene — who would have been the true leader of the church if she had not unceremoniously crashed into an apostolic glass ceiling erected by its patriarchal leadership. Much of what Brown trumpets as truth is based on a fabrication concocted by an anti-Semite with a criminal record.² Brown, however, says he is so confident in the reliability of his claims that were he to write a nonfiction piece on the same theme, he would not change a thing.³

Finally, during one of my early morning treks to Starbucks, a young woman pulled me aside and, fighting tears, asked me to reassure her that the Christian faith was valid. She, along with a group of her friends, had read *The Da Vinci Code* and was seriously shaken by its assertions. Contrary to Brown's dogmatic assertions, however, there are compelling arguments that show that the Bible is divine rather than human in origin, that Jesus Christ is God in human flesh, and that amid the religions of the ancient

world, Christianity is demonstrably unique.⁴ No one should feel that his or her faith has been undermined by the fantasies and lies presented under the guise of truth in this novel.

— *Hank Hanegraaff*

NOTES

1. Adapted from Hank Hanegraaff and Paul L. Maier, *The Da Vinci Code: Fact or Fiction?* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2004), vii–x.
2. See *ibid*, 10–12.
3. Dan Brown, interviewed by Charles Gibson, *Good Morning America*, ABC, November 3, 2003; interviewed by Elizabeth Vargas, “Jesus, Mary and Da Vinci,” *Primetime Live*, ABC, November 3, 2003.
4. See, e.g., Hanegraaff and Maier, 42–88.