

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 One

“Coming Soon to a Theater Near You”

Kevin T. Bauder

First published in 2003, Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* is a mystery thriller that also advances a proposal about the origins of Christianity, the canonization of the Bible, and the nature of Jesus Christ. The book has been wildly popular. By August of 2005 it had been translated into 44 languages and had 36 million copies in print. Anchor Books is scheduled to release another 5 million paperback copies on March 28, and Broadway Books will follow with a 200,000 copy “special illustrated edition” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Da_Vinci_Code]

A movie version of *The Da Vinci Code* will be released to North American theaters on May 19. The movie, which is being directed by Ron Howard, stars Tom Hanks as Robert Langdon, Audrey Tautou as Sophie Neveu, and Ian McKellan as Leigh Teabing. If it proves as popular as the book has been, Christians might do well to be prepared with a response.

Why respond to a work of fiction? Would anyone really take it seriously? Does Brown even expect it to be taken seriously?

The book itself gives part of the answer to that question. In an “introductory comment” before the beginning of the story, Brown writes that “All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in the novel are accurate.” The documents and rituals to which he refers are at the heart of the plot. They are also the heart of Brown’s proposal about Christianity.

In an FAQ on Brown’s website, he acknowledges that the characters in the book are fictional, but he also says: “it is my belief that some of the theories discussed by these characters may have merit.” Responding to scholars who have attempted to disprove his proposal about Christianity, Brown insists that “these scholars and I obviously disagree.” To the charge that the history in his book contradicts the history that people have learned in school, Brown replies, “Since the beginning of recorded time, history has been written by ‘the winners’.... Many historians now believe (as do I) that in gauging the historical accuracy of a given concept, we should first ask ourselves a far deeper question: How historically accurate is history itself?”

Brown clearly intends to offer more than fiction. As a matter of fact, he has drawn most of the theory (though not the plot) of *The Da Vinci Code* from the book *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln. So heavily does Brown’s work rely on *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* that Baigent and Leigh are suing him for plagiarism.

The theory that Brown advances in *The Da Vinci Code* depends upon several controversial assertions. Three of these claims are particularly crucial—and debatable. The first is that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene (who was also an apostle) and that the two of them had children together. The second is that Christianity is merely the winner among a variety of competing faiths among the early followers of Jesus. The third is that the early followers of Jesus acknowledged the “sacred feminine” or goddess principle, a belief that they inherited from ancient Judaism.

The last claim is easily the strangest. Through the book’s characters, Brown argues that all the world’s ancient religions incorporated some form of goddess worship. The recognition of this sacred feminine linked fertility with divinity and viewed sexual intercourse as a means of communing with the divine. According to Brown, ancient Judaism recognized this principle and had Yahweh (the masculine principle) cohabiting with Shekinah (the feminine principle) in the temple. Brown insists that the sacred feminine was part of Jesus’ teaching. Jesus’ marriage to Mary Magdalene embodied the principle, which was acknowledged by the early followers of Jesus. The sacred feminine, however, was crushed out of Christianity by Constantine at the Council of Nicea. Christianity has been a violent and morally impoverished movement ever since.

What this means is that orthodox Christianity did not exist until Nicea—which is Brown’s second claim. Brown uses the characters in his story to argue that Jesus was a merely human prophet who founded a church that had female leaders and even female apostles (such as Mary Magdalene). After the death of Jesus, rival factions in the church struggled for power. Male domination was a key issue. Constantine used the Council of Nicea (325 AD) to create a male-dominated version of Christianity that would suit his political purposes and unify the empire. Part of this new Christianity included the deity of Christ, which had not previously been taught. In order to substantiate its claims, the Council of Nicea compiled a New Testament that included only those writings that would support its claims. Many other documents—including many gospels—were excluded. Backed by the power of Constantine, this new Christianity was able to squelch other versions of the Jesus story, eventually making the claim that it was the only orthodoxy.

Ultimately, all of Brown's claims depend upon the theory that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene, that the two of them had children together, and that Mary was an apostle. Brown thinks that this is the deep, dark secret that Christianity has brutally suppressed through the centuries. He advances the bulk of his evidence on this point.

Brown notes that Mary Magdalene traveled with Jesus (Luke 8:1-3). He argues that Jewish males were expected to marry and that failure to marry was a scandal for them. He cites Hippolytus, a second-century theologian, for evidence that Mary Magdalene was an apostle. He quotes from a Gnostic document, the Gospel of Philip, which has Jesus kissing Mary and which calls her Jesus' "companion." The term *companion* is important to Brown: he insists that this is an Aramaic word that is reserved for lovers and spouses. Finally, Brown cites the Gospel of Mary Magdalene (another Gnostic document) to demonstrate that Jesus showed special favoritism towards Mary.

Brown's proposal is obviously subversive to Christianity. If he is correct, then Christianity as it is known today cannot be true. People who believe Brown's proposal will not believe the Bible. Through *The Da Vinci Code*, Brown's theory has been propagated to millions of people. When the movie is released, this theory will be propagated to millions more.

Christians ought to be ready to respond to people who find *The Da Vinci Code* persuasive. An effective response must take account of all three issues that Dan Brown raises. That is exactly what I intend to do over the next several issues of *In the Nick of Time*. ✕

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.

The Bible

Thomas Traherne (1637-1674)

That! That! There I was told
That I *the Son of God* was made,
His Image. O Divine! And that fine Gold,
With all the Joys that here do fade,
Are but a Toy, compared to the Bliss
Which Hev'nly, God-like, and Eternal is.

That We on earth are Kings;
And, tho we're cloath'd with mortal Skin,
Are Inward Cherubins; hav Angels Wings;
Affections, Thoughts, and Minds within,
Can soar throu all the Coasts of Hev'n and Earth;
And shall be sated with Celestial Mirth. ✕

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