

What was Christianity?

Did the Da Vinci Code Expose True Christianity?

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Introduction

It would be very easy to dismiss The Da Vinci Code's claims about Christianity by pointing out that the book is a work of fiction and that its main character (if one may use the term liberally), the Priory of Sion, is well known for being a hoax¹.

But that would be too easy.

As such, I decided to take the opportunity to honestly assess the evidence brought forward in the book and its references (although by only reading excerpts, due to time constraints), which I compared against traditional sources regarding the history of Christianity. The fruit of this analysis is what I am sharing with you today.

The topics covered in Brown's book are so wide that a subset must be picked, for the sake of everyone's sanity. As such, in this document, we will look at Mary Magdalene, the nature of God (under the question of Sacred Feminine), women in early Christianity, and finally the central character: Jesus.

In the terms of Sir Leigh Teabing:

"The vast majority of educated Christians know the history of their faith" – Sir Leigh Teabing, The Da Vinci Code, chapter 55

Or, in the terms of the apostle Peter:

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. – Apostle Peter, 1 Peter 3:15 (NIV)

In this spirit, let us be educated.

¹ Laura Miller, *The Last Word; The Da Vinci Con*, The New York Times, February 22, 2004 and Sharan Newman, *The Real History Behind the Da Vinci Code*, pp. 68-69

Statement of Biases and Objectives

I am a practicing Christian. Not Catholic, not Protestant, not Orthodox (in the traditional sense of the term), just a disciple of Christ (in the sense of the early, pre-Constantine church).

This document aims at showing the rational evidence that support Christian belief in the context of allegations from a bestselling work of fiction, The Da Vinci Code, written by Dan Brown.

Who Is Mary Magdalene?

1 Traditional View

The traditional view of Mary Magdalene is the repentant prostitute who anointed the feet of Jesus before his crucifixion. One image, among many, represents this belief very well:



Figure 1: Mary Magdalene by Luca Signorelli

2 Da Vinci Code's View

The Da Vinci Code tells that Mary Magdalene was not a reformed prostitute who was simply following Jesus, but of his wife. Not only she was married to him, but also was the mother of their child, a woman of a royal bloodline, and the future leader of Jesus' church. Let us look at some quotes:

"As I said earlier, the marriage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene is part of the historical record." He began pawing through his book collection. "Moreover, Jesus as a married man makes infinitely more sense than our standard biblical view of Jesus as a bachelor."

"Why?" Sophie asked.

"Because Jesus was a Jew," Langdon said, taking over while Teabing searched for his book, "and the social decorum during that time virtually forbid a Jewish man to be unmarried. According to Jewish custom, celibacy was condemned and the obligation for a Jewish father was to find a suitable wife for his son. If Jesus were not married, at least one of the Bible's gospels would have mentioned it and offered some explanation for His unnatural state of bachelorhood." – Da Vinci Code, chapter 58

And the companion of the Savior is Mary Magdalene. Christ loved her more than all the disciples and used to kiss her often on her mouth. The rest of the disciples were offended by it and expressed disapproval. They said to him, "Why do you love her more than all of us?"

The words surprised Sophie and yet they hardly seemed conclusive. "It says nothing of marriage."

"Au contraire." Teabing smiled, pointing to the first line. "As any Aramaic scholar will tell you, the word companion, in those days, literally meant spouse." – Sir Leigh Teabing and Sophie Neveu, Da Vinci Code, chapter 58

"According to these unaltered gospels, it was not Peter Christ gave directions with which to establish the Christian Church. It was Mary Magdalene."

Sophie looked at him. "You're saying the Christian Church was to be carried on by a woman?"

"That was the plan. Jesus was the original feminist. He intended for the future of His Church to be in the hands of Mary Magdalene." – Sir Leigh Teabing and Sophie Neveu, Da Vinci Code, chapter 58

A source² used by Dan Brown support this affirmation using the following arguments:

1. The anointing of Jesus by Mary Magdalene is an obvious reference of the Hieros Gamos, the sacred union in pagan rituals.
2. The use of her hair for the anointing was clearly considered as sexual in the Jewish society of the time.
3. It is likely that she was an Egyptian or Ethiopian priestess.
4. It was considered to be necessary for a rabbi to be married at the time of Christ.

3 Reality

Mary Magdalene obtained the reputation of a repentant prostitute who anointed Jesus' feet is the work of 'merging' the different characters called Mary in the new testament, done officially by Pope Gregory the Great in 591³, although she is not directly mentioned as a prostitute, but only as a sinner.

To understand who Mary Magdalene was, it is important to cast aside traditional views of the character and focus on what historical documents do, and do not, tell us about her. As such, we will look at the actual contents of the Gnostic Gospels and how she was penned by the authors of the Bible.

² Excerpt from Lynn Picknett, *Mary Magdalene*, reprinted in Dan Burstein, *Les Secrets du Code Da Vinci*, 2004, pp. 44-52

³ Sharan Newman, *The Real History Behind the Da Vinci Code*, p. 153

3.1 What do the Gnostic Gospels Really Say?

The Gnostic Gospels used to support the claim that Mary Magdalene was married to Jesus actually don't support the idea at all.

There exists a Gospel of Mary, of Gnostic tradition, dated between 120-180 CE. Although the text is only partial, it makes no reference to any marital relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene.

The Gospel of Phillip manuscript does not have a full word describing where Jesus was kissing. Thus a kiss on the mouth is an educated guess. Also, the term companion used in the manuscript (which is in Coptic, not Aramaic, contrary to what the Da Vinci Code says) refers to a spiritual companion⁴. Furthermore, the same text considers kisses as symbolic for transmission of knowledge⁵.

3.2 Biblical Accounts

Mary Magdalene is not considered as a very important character in the Gospels. There are only a dozen quotes that talk to her, saying very little about her. Let us look at them:

And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people. When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!"

Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.

As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb. – Matthew 27:50-61 (NIV)

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. –Matthew 28:1 (NIV)

⁴ Lee Strobel, in a sermon.

Available at <http://www.leestrobel.com/videos/davinci/strobelT1114.htm>

⁵ Excerpt from Esther de Boer, *Mary Magdalene: Beyond the Myth*, reprinted in Dan Burstein, *Les Secrets du Code Da Vinci*, 2004, pp. 73-80

With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"

Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome. In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there. – Mark 15:37-41 (NIV)

So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid. – Mark 15:46-47 (NIV)

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?" – Mark 16:1-3 (NIV)

When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. She went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping. When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe it. – Mark 16:9-11 (NIV)

After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means. – Luke 8:1-3 (NIV)

When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened. – Luke 24:9-12 (NIV)

Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. – John 19:25-27 (NIV)

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" – John 20:1-2 (NIV)

At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

"Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher).

Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her. – John 20:14-18 (NIV)

This is indicative of very little, except of the fact that she was likely to be financially independent disciple of Jesus⁶ and most likely of Jewish ancestry⁷. Furthermore, there is no evidence that Mary Magdalene was the woman who anointed Jesus' feet. This alone removes one of the major pillars of the thesis that she was Jesus' wife or the goddess of the New Testament (a matter we will cover in the next section).

There is, however, another indication in the New Testament that do hint about Jesus celibacy:

This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me. Don't we have the right to food and drink? Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas? Or is it only I and Barnabas who must work for a living? – Apostle Paul, 1 Corinthians 9:3-6

It has been commented that this kind of situation would have brought forward an obvious "just like Jesus was married", which is not there, leaving an indirect proof that Jesus was a single man⁸.

4 In a word

In short, it seems from the text that Mary Magdalene was a Jewish single woman, disciple of Jesus. Anything more practically falls in the realm of speculation.

⁶ Katherine Ludwig Jansen, in an interview with Dan Burstein. Published in Dan Burstein, *Les Secrets du Code Da Vinci*, 2004, pp. 87-90

⁷ Excerpt from Esther de Boer, *Mary Magdalene: Beyond the Myth*, reprinted in Dan Burstein, *Les Secrets du Code Da Vinci*, 2004, pp. 73-80

⁸ Lee Strobel in a sermon,

available online at <http://www.leestrobel.com/videos/davinci/strobelT1114.htm>

The analyses that lead to the conclusion of the marriage of Mary Magdalene and Jesus are quite questionable, and have been well summarized by Kenneth L. Woodward:

The evidence simply isn't there, which is why those who advance them rely on what is called "rhetorical analysis" of Biblical texts rather than historical or archeological evidence. – Kenneth L. Woodward, *A Quite Contrary Mary*, Beliefnet⁹

⁹ Available online at http://www.beliefnet.com/story/131/story_13188_2.html and also reprinted in Burstein

Who/What is God?

1 Traditional View

Traditionally, the Creator has been represented and understood as follows:

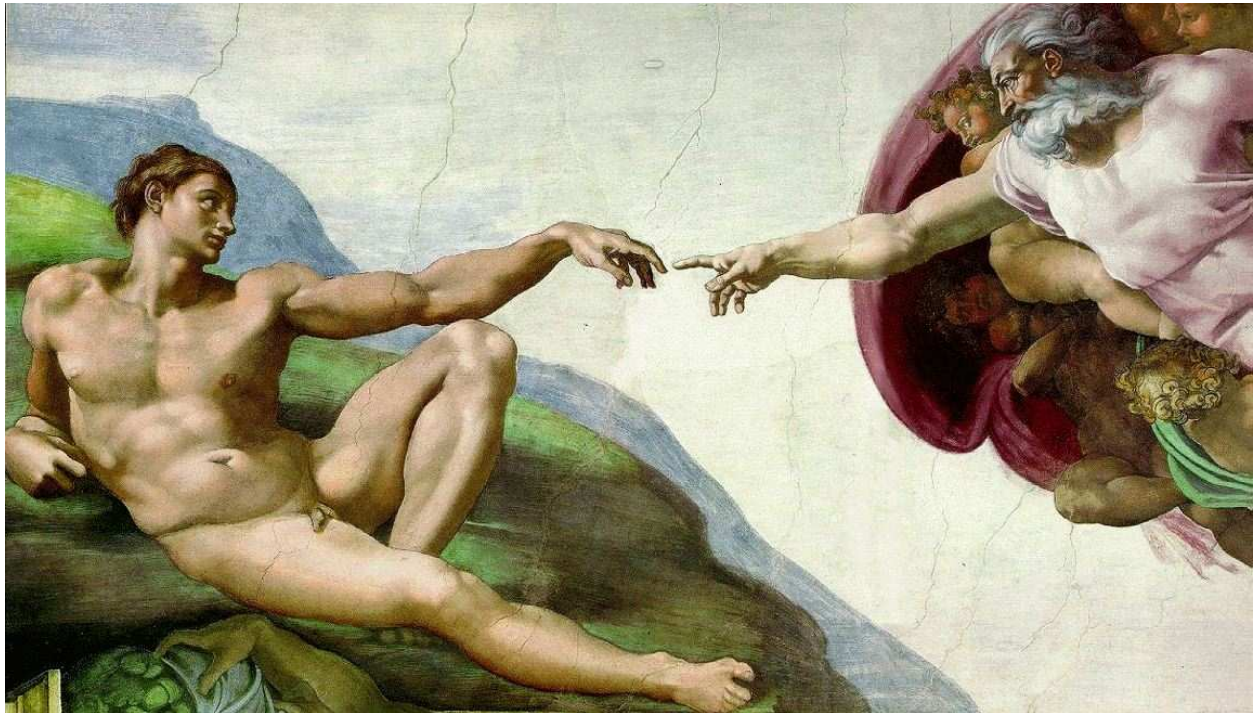


Figure 2: The Creation of Man by Michelangelo

2 Da Vinci Code's View

In his novel, Dan Brown presents God as the 'Sacred Feminine' without explaining much of neither its context nor significance. As an introduction, let us look at some quotes from the book:

[...] Hieros Gamos had nothing to do with eroticism. It was a spiritual act. Historically, intercourse was the act through which male and female experienced God. The ancients believed that the male was spiritually incomplete until he had carnal knowledge of the sacred feminine. Physical union with the female remained the sole means through which man could become spiritually complete and ultimately achieve gnosis – knowledge of the divine. – Robert Langdon, The Da Vinci Code, Chapter 74

[...] the early Jewish tradition involved ritualistic sex. **In the Temple, no less.** Early Jews believed that the Holy of Holies in Solomon's Temple housed not only God but also His powerful female equal, Shekinah. Men seeking spiritual wholeness came to the Temple to visit priestesses – or **hierodules** – with who they made love and experienced the divine through physical union. The Jewish tetragrammaton YHWH – the sacred name of God – in fact derived from Jehovah, and androgynous physical union between the masculine **Jah** and the pre-hebraic name for Eve, **Havah**. – *The Da Vinci Code*, chapter 74

Sophie looked skeptical. “My friends who are devout Christians definitely believe that Christ literally walked on water, literally turned water into wine and was born of a literal virgin birth.”

“My point exactly,” Langdon said. “Religious allegory has become a part of the fabric of reality. And living in that reality helps millions of people cope and be better people.” – Sophie Neveu and Robert Langdon, *The Da Vinci Code*, chapter 82

“The Priory believes that Constantine and his male successors successfully converted the world from matriarchal paganism to patriarchal Christianity by waging a campaign of propaganda that demonized the sacred feminine, obliterating the goddess from modern religion forever.” –Robert Langdon, *The Da Vinci Code*, chapter 82

In order to better understand the Sacred Feminine, let us look at some thinkers who explain in more details this concept, and whose books were part of Brown's bibliography.

According to Pagels¹⁰, there were different schools of thought regarding the gender of God among the Gnostics. Some considered a male-female dyad, some suggested a divinity beyond gender, and others considered that gender could be used at will, depending on what was to be highlighted. The Holy Spirit was a feminine in Greek, and the Proverbs include a female Wisdom that hints to be involved in the process of Creation.

Freke and Gandy¹¹ claim the presence of the goddess Sophia within Christianity. The myth of Sophia tells the fall of the psyche into the creation and its redemption by its lover/brother as symbolisms of the states of consciousness that the initiates go through in their discovery of gnosis. They refer to the interpretation of Old Testament passages (in Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Genesis) in *The Exegesis of the Soul*, a Gnostic document. This document also refers to parallels between the Christian Sophia and the myth of Helen. They also cite a proverb where an anthropomorphized wisdom represents a faithful woman. They make links between the claimed Christian Sophia with the myths of Aphrodite, Demeter and Persephone. They quote *The Tripartite Tractate* as evidence that Christ came to rescue Sophia. They also point examples of New Testament passages that they consider as making allusion to the Sophia and an initiation to gnosis. For

¹⁰ Excerpt of Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, reprinted in Dan Burstein, *Les Secrets du Code Da Vinci*, pp. 115-117

¹¹ Excerpt of Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy, *Jesus and the Lost Goddess: The Secret Teachings of the Original Christians*, reprinted in Dan Burstein, *Les Secrets du Code Da Vinci*, pp. 119-132

example, Mary and Mary Magdalene are representations of the higher and fallen Sophia and they also claim that the genealogy of Jesus demonstrate the Goddess as a mother and prostitute.

The summary could fit in one sentence: if polytheistic religions of before had women, so must Christianity. But, in the end, it doesn't matter, because it's only an allegory.

3 Reality

What is the Sacred Feminine? In the words of an historian:

“Sacred feminine” is a term that changes its meaning with every use. It can mean the worship of goddesses in a pantheistic system. It can also mean the unity of masculine and feminine in one divine being or principle. It can mean the worship of nature as intrinsically feminine. It can even mean that there is something of the divine in every woman. – Sharan Newman, The Real History Behind the Da Vinci Code, p. 258

The supporters of the Sacred Feminine do have a point: traditional religion has consistently downplayed the gender-free God in favour of a masculine vision of the deity. However, as we will see here, this is a cultural issue, and not a theological one. We will look upon the names of God and different anthropomorphisms used in the Bible to show that God, indeed, is not a bearded man. Furthermore, we will have a quick glance at the understanding of the Bible's primary target demographic as well as few examples of lack of solidity for many claims of the Sacred Feminine proponents.

3.1 Names of God in the Bible

Let us have a look at some of the names used in the Bible to refer to God in Table 1.

Table 1: Names of God in the Bible (partial) ¹²

Yhwh Rohi The Shepherd-God Psalm 23 יהוה רעה	Elohim The one who is Genesis 1 אלהים	Abba The Father Galatians 4:6 Αββα
El Schaddai The Almighty Genesis 17 אל שדי	Adonai The Lord, the Husband Genesis 15:22, 18:12 אדני	Yhwh Shamma God is here Ezekiel 48:35 יהוה שם

¹² Bob Beltz, *Becoming a Man of Prayer*, 1996, pp. 34-43

Yhwh Sabaoth The God of the heavenly army Psalm 46 יהוה צבא	Yhwh Shalom The God of Peace Judges 6 יהוה שלום	Immanuel God is with us Isaiah 7 עמנואל
Yhwh Rophe The Healing God Exodus 15:26 יהוה רפא		

It is important to note that a term that refers to the glorious presence of the Lord, the Shekinah (שכינה) is not a term found in the Bible, but that is commonly used in Judaism.

Please notice that the Yhwh (יהוה) core is not pronounced in orthodox Judaism directly. It is a feminine term and is often accompanied by a qualificative, as we have shown above. It can be pronounced Jehovah, but it is often more replaced by Adonai (in liturgical context) or Hashem (in other cases)¹³. The pronunciation Jehovah comes from adding the vowel points of Adonai to the tetragrammaton¹⁴.

This quickly shows that the Almighty is represented both in masculine and feminine in the Bible, and that a purely masculine representation is inaccurate.

3.2 Biblical Anthropomorphisms

In the text of the Bible, there are multiple references to God expressing His reality through human traits. In many cases, the image chosen is feminine¹⁵. Let us look at a few anthropomorphisms found in the Bible:

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. - Genesis 1:27 (NIV)

"When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

¹³ Wikipedia, *Names of God in Judaism*, 12 June 2006, available online at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Names_of_God_in_Judaism#Shekhinah

¹⁴ Hebrew for Christians, *Hebrew Names of God*, available online at http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Names_of_G-d/YHVH/yhvh.html

¹⁵ For more on this issue, please refer to Women's Ordination Conference, *Female Images of God in the Bible*, available at http://www.womensordination.org/pages/art_Images

But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images.

It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. – God, Hosea 11:1-3 (NIV)

You deserted the Rock, who fathered you; you forgot the God who gave you birth. – Moses, Deuteronomy 32:18

"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! – God, Isaiah 49:15

Truth is nowhere to be found, and whoever shuns evil becomes a prey. The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice.

He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm worked salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him. – Isaiah, Isaiah 59:15-16

It is obvious thus that the use of human images to refer to the Divine in the Bible does in no way impose the conclusion that God is man. Quite contrary, those passages bring to the conclusion that he is beyond gender.

3.3 Jewish Traditional View of the Role of the Father

"This, then, is how you should pray:

" 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' – Jesus of Nazareth, Matthew 6:9-13 (NIV)

It could seem that orthodox Christianity has kept a masculinised view of God. But how did the Jews, the target audience Jesus addressed, perceive this term?

Rabbi Asher Jacobson, leading the largest orthodox synagogue of Montreal, gives us information about the Jewish understanding of God implying that it would make sense for Jesus to use the term 'Father' instead of 'Mother' to talk about God:

God is seen as the male because God is the one that gives life. God is the creator, the father, the master. The world, the universe, everything of creation is compared to the female for it receives. It receives life, it receives sustenance, it receives Godliness. – Rabbi Asher Jacobson¹⁶

¹⁶ Rabbi Asher Jacobson, in an interview with Dan Burstein. Available online at http://www.secretsofthecode.com/Sample_Rabbi.cfm

3.4 Analysis of the Claims of the Sacred Feminine

The claims of the Sacred Feminine in the Da Vinci Code and other referenced texts fall short very quickly under minimal analysis.

A short reading of Proverbs, chapters 1 to 9, show that Wisdom is personified in a few contexts, including standing in the middle of streets and squares (Proverbs 1:20). Wisdom is also assimilated to God's knowledge (Proverbs 3:19-20) and, in the overall context of the passage, leaves no hint that it is a separate divinity, especially with statements such as:

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. - King Solomon, Proverbs 9:10

A first observation that one could make regarding the claims of Freke and Gandy is that they heavily rely on Gnostic texts to make their point (we will see in Section 3.2 on why this is not a good idea) and they forget that the literary style of the Gospels is not mythological, but of a chronicle. Furthermore, we must point out their inability to even read the most factual Biblical passages. Their view, compared to reality, is summarized in Table 2. A final comment is that the authors found what they were set to find, as their references in the canonical New Testament is only about what they feel are allusions to different myths expressing the idea of a fallen Sophia.

Table 2: Summary of False Claims of Characters by Freke and Gandy

Biblical Character	Claim of Freke and Gandy	Biblical Text
Tamar	Temple Prostitute	Widow who dressed as a prostitute once. Saul's servant looks for her as a shrine prostitute (Genesis 38)
Ruth	Shameful sexual exploitation	Widow who remarried to a relative of her dead spouse (Ruth 4)
Baathsheba	Committed adultery with David	Committed adultery with David, eventually became his wife (2 Samuel 11 and onwards)
Rahab	Managed a brothel	Prostitute (Joshua 2)

While it's true that some mystery religions had stories of gods dying and rising, these stories always revolved around the natural life cycle of death and rebirth [...] People express the wonder of this ongoing phenomenon through mythological stories about gods dying and rising. These stories were always cast in a legendary form. They depicted events that happened 'once upon a time.'

“Contrast that with the depiction of Jesus Christ in the gospels. They talk about someone who actually lived several decades earlier [...]. That’s concrete historical stuff. [...]

And Christianity has nothing to do with life cycles or the harvest. It has to do with a very Jewish belief- which is absent from the mystery religions – about the resurrection of the dead and about life eternal and reconciliation with God [...]

*As for the suggestion that the New Testament doctrines of baptism or communion come from mystery religions, that’s just nonsense. For one thing, the evidence for these supposed parallels comes after the second century, so any borrowing would have come from Christianity, not the other way around.” – Gregory A. Boyd, interviewed by Lee Strobel. Published in Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, 1998, pp. 161-162*

*“A dominant female deity cannot be considered proof of women’s social and political power. The most that can be assumed is that this is a sign of the dignity that society ascribed to the maternal function.” – Eva Cantarella, quoted by Sharan Newman, *The Real History Behind the Da Vinci Code*, p. 261*

4 In a Word

While it is true that our society has seen the divine in a too masculine perspective, the claims of the sacred feminine simply do not hold ground. The proposition’s pillars are simply too weak to stand scrutiny, or simply bear no corroboration.

Women in Early Christianity

1 Traditional View

Traditionally, the church has been seen as the oppressor of women. By forcing them into being baby machines (sad part of Québec's history that not all readers might be aware of), burning them as witches, fighting against their right to vote and generally prohibiting them any activity outside of the home, the view that Christianity oppressed women is natural.

Pictorially, we could think of Christianity as the following:



Figure 3: Dirty Lock and Chain by PartsnPieces¹⁷

¹⁷ Image under Creative Commons 'By:' license, obtained online at <http://www.flickr.com/photos/partsnpieces/44332908/>

2 Da Vinci Code's View

The Da Vinci Code falls in line with this traditional view. Let us look at one telling quote:

"The Grail," Langdon said, "is symbolic of the lost goddess. When Christianity came along, the old pagan religions did not die easily. Legends of chivalric quests for the Holy Grail were in fact stories of forbidden quests to find the lost sacred feminine. Knights who claimed to be "searching for the chalice" were speaking in code as a way to protect themselves from a Church that had subjugated women, banished the Goddess, burned non-believers, and forbidden the pagan reverence for the sacred feminine." – Robert Langdon, *The Da Vinci Code*, Chapter 56

3 Reality

If we take a look at the early pre-Constantine church, we have a different portrait than for medieval Catholicism.

While it is true that women never were in the highest levels of power in the then-decentralized church, it remains that they were seen highly and had an important role. Let us look at some information from Jesus and the apostolic church that shed some light on women's role in early Christianity.

3.1 **Women in Jesus' Eye**

It is clear at the reading of the Gospels that Jesus of Nazareth was unlike many rabbis of his time. This is explained simply yet comprehensively by Douglas Jacoby:

The gospels record numerous accounts of Christ interacting with women on the same level as he did with men. Jesus had close relationships with women (John 11:5), supported them when others put them down (Luke 7:36-50, Mark 14:3-9), and taught them personally (Luke 10:39). Jesus' ministry was financed by women (Luke 8:3). His first post-resurrection appearance was to a woman (Matthew 28:1)! Jesus Christ did not hesitate to break through racial, traditional, and sexual barriers - to the utter amazement of his followers (John 4:9, 27). – Douglas Jacoby, *WHAT DOES THE BIBLE REALLY SAY ABOUT WOMEN?*, published in Douglas Jacoby, *Q & A: Answers to Bible Questions You Have Asked*, 1991 and online¹⁸.

3.2 **Women in the Time of the Apostles**

Although it can be generally accepted that Women in later (i.e. post-Constantine) Christianity conformed to society's patriarchy, it is important to wonder if the early church really did oppress women. Let us look at a few quotes from an historian:

¹⁸ The online version can be found at: <http://www.douglasjacoby.com/dajacoby/home.nsf/Article/C8B64912E94785D285256D64007129D0?OpenDocument>

These women took on many of the roles that were later done exclusively by men. They instructed people who were preparing for baptism. They distributed communion bread to shut-ins or those in their own households. They also preached in private homes to women who were sequestered by Roman law and could not be reached by other means.

There is no question that women were essential to the growth of the Christian faith. They were among the first converted from the wealthy, and it was in their houses that the first churches were established. – Sharan Newman, The Real History Behind the Da Vinci Code, p. 330

There is no evidence that I can find that women were ever ordained as priests. Preaching, prophesizing, instructing, assisting at baptism – these are all the activities that women seem to have performed in the first centuries of Christianity. – Sharan Newman, The Real History Behind the Da Vinci Code, p. 331

In fact, early Christians considered equality for all, independent on race and gender:

*There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.
– Apostle Paul, Galatians 3:28*

However, this did not translate itself into a universal access to ecclesiastical positions, as we mentioned previously. The teaching the Apostles was constantly in favour of submission to authority, be it God, governments, church leaders, masters (for their slaves) or husbands (for wives). This teaching, however, must be kept in the context of mutual submission and servanthip that were essential to early Christianity. Let us look at a few verses that highlight those ideas:

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her [...] –
Apostle Paul, Ephesians 5: 22-25 (NIV)*

Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you. – Anonymous, Hebrews 13:17

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. – Apostle Paul, Ephesians 6:5

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. – Apostle Paul, Ephesians 5:21

If women had to submit, were they oppressed?

Submission does not mean domination or oppression. The Bible teaches very clearly against abuse of authority (Matthew 20:25, Colossians 3:18-19). There are two correct meanings of submission, and neither of them usually settles very well when we hear it for the first time. One is to willingly put the needs of another (male or female) ahead of your own, as in Ephesians 5:21 -"Submit to one another out reverence for Christ." The second meaning is willingly to be in subjection to another's authority, as in the Hebrews 13:17 command of submission to the authority of church leaders. This also applies to the relationship of wives to husbands. - Douglas Jacoby, WHAT DOES THE BIBLE REALLY SAY ABOUT WOMEN?

4 In a Word

Early Christianity showed much more respect to women than the society it lived in. However, the equalitarian view of the Church did not mean equality of all believers on practical matters. The early church was organized with a certain (decentralized) hierarchy that involved women at most levels (except elder/pastor/priest/bishop, all synonyms of the same term), and their contribution was not only encouraged, but praised.

Who Was Jesus?

1 Traditional View

The traditional view of Jesus depends mostly on which tradition you come from. While all would agree that Jesus of Nazareth was a wise teacher and a good man, no-one will agree on the rest. Was he really a divine being? Was he a prophet of a divine being? Was he an enlightened man? Was he just a philosopher?

2 Da Vinci Code's View

Dan Brown will tell us that Jesus was the ultimate feminist, a mere prophet who was considered as such by his early followers. Let us read his words:

*"More than **eighty** gospels were considered for the New Testament and yet only a relative few were chosen for inclusion – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John among them."*

"Who chose which gospels to include?" Sophie Asked

"Aha!" Teabing burst with enthusiasm. "The fundamental irony in Christianity! The Bible, as we know it today, was collated by the pagan emperor Constantine the Great." – Sir Leigh Teabing and Sophie Neveu, The Da Vinci Code, Chapter 55

*Until **that** moment in history [the council of Nicea], Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet... a great and powerful man, but a **man** nonetheless. A mortal. – Sir Leigh Teabing, The Da Vinci Code, Chapter 55*

"Jesus' establishment as 'the Son of God' was officially proposed and voted on by the Council of Nicea."

"Hold on. You're saying that Jesus' divinity was the result of a vote?"

"A relatively close vote at that" – Sir Leigh Teabing and Sophie Neveu, The Da Vinci Code, Chapter 55

*"Because Constantine upgraded Jesus' status almost four centuries **after** Jesus' death, thousands of documents already existed chronicling his life as a **mortal** man. To rewrite the history books, Constantine knew he would need a bold stroke. From this sprang the most profound moment in Christian history." Teabing paused, eyeing Sophie. "Constantine commissioned and financed a new Bible, which omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ's human traits and embellished those gospels that made Him godlike. The earlier gospels were outlawed, gathered up and burned." – Sir Leigh Teabing, The Da Vinci Code, Chapter 55*

“Fortunately for historians,” Teabing said, “some of the gospels that Constantine attempted to eradicate managed to survive. The Dead Sea Scrolls were found in the 1950s hidden in a cave near Qumran in the Judean desert. And, of course, the Coptic Scrolls in 1945 at Nag Hammadi.[...] The scrolls highlight glaring historical discrepancies and fabrications, clearly confirming that the modern Bible was compiled and edited by men who possessed a political agenda – to promote the divinity of the man Jesus Christ and use His influence to solidify their own power base.” – Sir Leigh Teabing, The Da Vinci Code, Chapter 55

It was man, not God, who created the concept of ‘original sin’ – Robert Langdon, The Da Vinci Code, Chapter 55

The church at the time of Constantine would have destroyed this truth, and replaced it by a deified Jesus. A good (although ironic) pictorial representation of the process would be as follows:

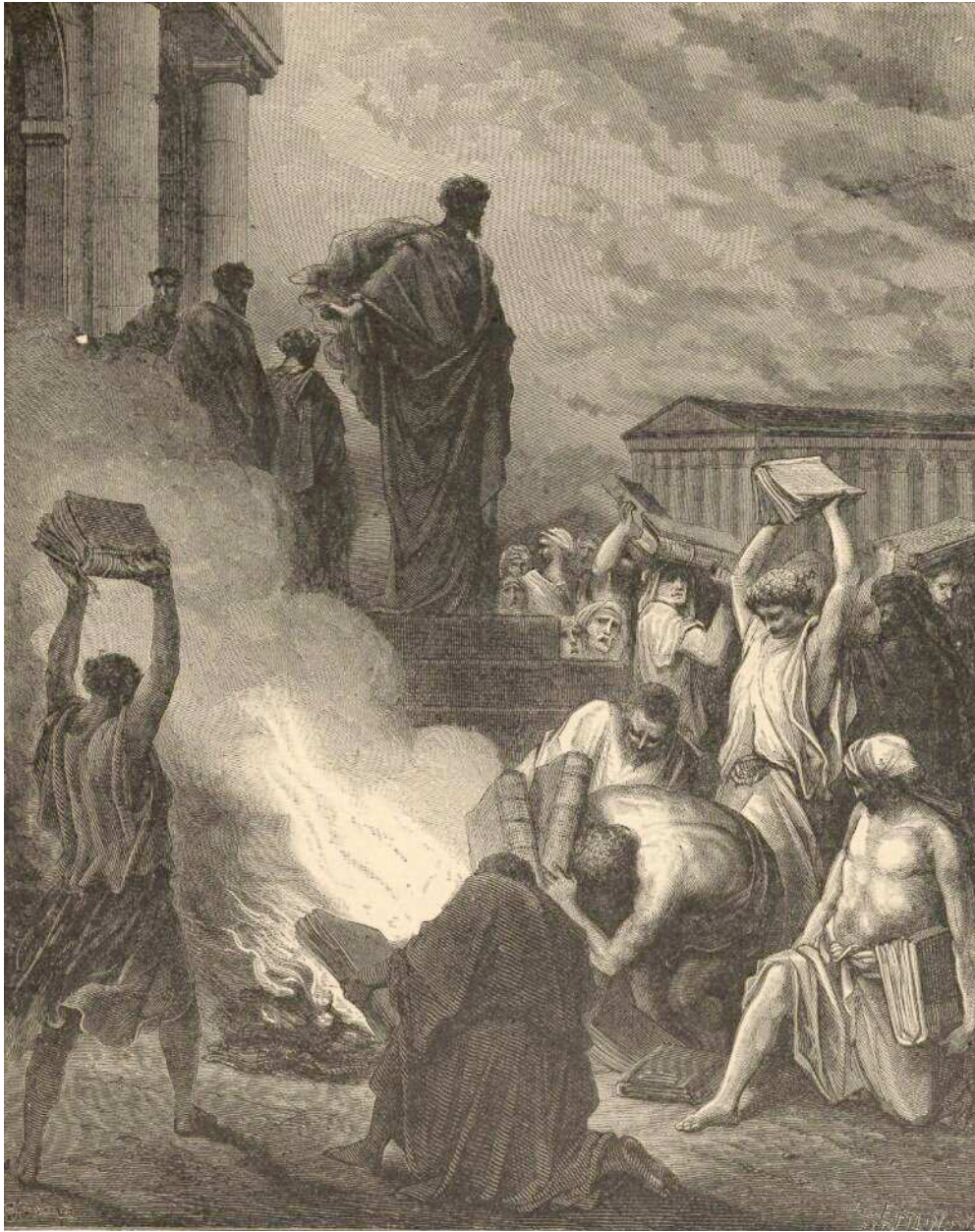


Figure 4: Paul at Ephesus, by Gustave Doré

3 Reality

A very brief summary of the origins of the Bible are as follows: the Canon was adopted in the councils of Hippo (393, New Testament) and Carthage (397 Catholic/Orthodox Bible). The official Bible edition for the Catholic Church was the Vulgate, compiled by Jerome in 405 and later modified at the Council of Trent and remodified by Pope Clement VIII as a response to the questioning of the apocryphal books by the

Reformation¹⁹. All those variant editions, and the late post-Constantine dating of the councils, can leave many confused regarding the Bible. Is it authentic? Is it the only reference regarding Jesus?

This section will look at the historical records regarding Jesus of Nazareth, their reliability and their contents. The reader will have to conclude that New Testament writings represent the best source of information regarding this man available.

3.1 The Early Christian Orthodox Documents

Although the Da Vinci Code and some of the writers who influenced Dan Brown claim that the Gnostic Gospels are the earliest Christian documents, this is not what the majority of scholars believe²⁰.

The earliest writings are the letters of Paul²¹, who died in 62 CE, and those writings are believed to have been written in the 50s, if not before. Those writings are very important not only because they are the earliest, but also because they contain a few creeds that are quoted by Paul and would date from his early Christian life in the 30s.

Mark's Gospel in the 70's, Matthew and Luke in the 80's, John in the 90's in liberal circles, but there is reason to believe of Mark in the 60's if not end of 50's²².

The documents of the New Testament are the best preserved of the antiquity²³. The earliest fragment from the New Testament is dated between 100 and 150 CE²⁴. The earliest integral text of the Gospels (and of some of Paul's epistles) date from about 200 CE²⁵. Overall, the New Testament texts are considered to be 99.5% pure, which is a reliability unknown to any other document of the antiquity²⁶.

¹⁹ Wikipedia, *Vulgate*, 13 June 2006, online at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vulgate> and Wikipedia, *Jerome*, 13 June 2006, online at: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerome>

²⁰ I found a reference that claims even earlier Orthodox dating and evidence but, alas, time was missing to investigate them. But please have a look at it yourself:

<http://www.allaboutgod.com/videos/nag-hammadi-video.htm>

²¹ There is some disagreement on whether he is the author of all the letters attributed to him. Nevertheless, a certain core (Romans, 1st and 2nd Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon) is undisputed. Please see Wikipedia, *Paul of Tarsus*, 12 June 2006, available online:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_of_Tarsus#Writings

²² Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, pp. 41-42

²³ Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, pp. 76-77

²⁴ Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, p. 80

²⁵ G. Steve Kinnard, *Getting the Most From the Bible*, p. 181

²⁶ Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, p. 85

The earliest Bible compilations found include the Codex Vaticanus (partial, about 350 CE) and the Codex Sinaiticus (partial, about 350 CE)²⁷.

3.2 Non-Orthodox Documents

There are other relatively early Christian documents that are not included in the New Testament: the Didache and the Gnostic Gospels.

The Didache was essentially a book on church organization and a guide to new converts, dated between 70 CE and 110 CE²⁸. It was considered as spurious by Eusebius of Caesarea²⁹ and was essentially ignored by early Christians.

The Gnostic Gospels mostly come from the Nag Hammadi library. Contrary to what the Da Vinci Code states, there are no Gnostic texts found at Qumran, only Jewish ones.

In the case of the Gnostic Gospels, we have a multitude of writings, the earliest being the Gospel of Thomas which is typically considered to date from about 140 CE³⁰. Other "early writings" are Secret Mark and Q, both of which are hypothetical documents that would contain information about a less divine Jesus³¹. Although the fact that they came later than the canonical gospels is a bad start, they also lack uniformity in teaching. Let us look at some of the teachings from the Gnostics:

Jesus said, "I am the light that is over all things. I am all: from me all came forth, and to me all attained.

Split a piece of wood; I am there.

Lift up the stone, and you will find me there." – Gospel of Thomas, verse 77

Simon Peter said to them, "Make Mary leave us, for females don't deserve life." Jesus said, "Look, I will guide her to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every female who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of Heaven." – Gospel of Thomas, verse 114³²

²⁷ Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, p. 80

²⁸ Dan Burstein, *Les Secrets du code Da Vinci*, p. 465 and

Wikipedia, *Didache*, 15 June 2006, online at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Didache>

²⁹ M. B. Riddle, *Introductory Notice To The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, available online at: <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/info/didache.html>

³⁰ Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, pp. 88, 165

³¹ Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, pp. 163-164

³² Obtained online at <http://www.misericordia.edu/users/davies/thomas/Trans.htm>

The editor of this version mention verse 114 as an ulterior addition, although this is unspecified in other versions I found.

When he said these things, he went away. And we knelt down, I and Peter, and gave thanks, and sent our hearts up to heaven. We heard with our ears and saw with our eyes the sound of wars and a trumpet call and a great commotion.

And when we passed beyond that place, we sent out minds up further. And we saw with our eyes and heard with our ears hymns and angelic praises and angelic jubilation. And heavenly majesties were hymning, and we ourselves were jubilant.

After this, we also desired to send our spirits above to the Majesty. And when we ascended, we were permitted neither to see nor to hear anything. For the rest of the disciples called to us and questioned us: "What is it that you have heard from the Master?" And, "What has he said to you?" And, "Where has he gone?" - Apocryphon of James (Cameron Translation) ³³

"Woe to you who love intimacy with womankind and polluted intercourse with them! Woe to you in the grip of the powers of your body, for they will afflict you! Woe to you in the grip of the forces of the evil demons! Woe to you who beguile your limbs with fire! Who is it that will rain a refreshing dew on you to extinguish the mass of fire from you along with your burning? Who is it that will cause the sun to shine upon you to disperse the darkness in you and hide the darkness and polluted water?" - Book of Thomas the Contender ³⁴

He said to me, "John, John, why do you doubt, or why are you afraid? You are not unfamiliar with this image, are you? - that is, do not be timid! - I am the one who is with you (pl.) always. I am the Father, I am the Mother, I am the Son. I am the undefiled and incorruptible one. - Apocryphon of John ³⁵

In general, Gnostic texts hold a strongly anti-feminine and dualist (the world and the body is evil, the soul is good) view that directly contradicts the other known teachings of Jesus coming from reliable sources³⁶. They also strongly taught against sexuality³⁷ and generally supported ascetism (think of a monastery). From a few of the excerpts we see, the view of Jesus is not uniform, if not contradictory (The Apocryphon of John shows a divine Jesus, whereas the Gospel of Thomas show a Buddha-like wise man). Furthermore, this demonstrates that Brown did not know what he was talking about when he used those writers as "proof" that Jesus was the ultimate feminist worshipping the sacred divine.

³³ Obtained online at <http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/jam2.html>

Please note that this part refers to instructions to reach Heaven

³⁴ Obtained online at <http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/bookt.html>

³⁵ Obtained online at <http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/apocjn.html>

³⁶Gary C Burger, *The Gnostic View of the Feminine*, available online at http://www.newmediaministries.org/DaVinciCode/GnosticFeminism_S.html

³⁷ James M. Robinson, in an interview with Dan Burstein, printed in Dan Burstein, *Les Secrets du Code Da Vinci*, 2004, pp. 152-156

3.3 Non-Christian Documents

There were also people who did not consider themselves as Christians who wrote about early Christian beliefs³⁸.

An important source is from Josephus, a Jewish historian who finished writing his *Antiquities* in about 93 CE. He mentioned at passing some of the beliefs of the early Christians:

Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the sanhedrim of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned – Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, Book 20, 9:1 ³⁹

Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day. – Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, Book 18, 3:3 ⁴⁰

Another interesting witness is Pliny the Younger, writing about 111 CE, when reporting on his persecution of the early Christians:

Meanwhile, in the case of those who were denounced to me as Christians, I have observed the following procedure: I interrogated these as to whether they were Christians; those who confessed I interrogated a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment; those who persisted I ordered executed. For I had no doubt that, whatever the nature of their creed, stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy surely deserve to be punished. There were others possessed of the same folly; but because they were Roman citizens, I signed an order for them to be transferred to Rome.

Soon accusations spread, as usually happens, because of the proceedings going on, and several incidents occurred. An anonymous document was published containing the names of many persons. Those who denied that they were or had been Christians, when they invoked the gods in words dictated by me, offered prayer with incense and wine to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for this purpose together with statues of the gods, and moreover cursed Christ—none of which those who are really Christians, it is said, can be forced to do—these I thought should be discharged. Others named by the informer declared that they were Christians, but then denied it, asserting that they had been but had ceased to be, some three years before, others many years, some as much as twenty-five years. They all worshipped your image and the statues of the gods, and cursed Christ.

³⁸ Please refer to Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, pp. 103-119 for more references

³⁹ Obtained online at <http://www.ccel.org/j/josephus/JOSEPHUS.HTM>

⁴⁰ Obtained online at <http://www.ccel.org/j/josephus/JOSEPHUS.HTM>

Please note that this passage is disputed by scholars

They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so. When this was over, it was their custom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food--but ordinary and innocent food. Even this, they affirmed, they had ceased to do after my edict by which, in accordance with your instructions, I had forbidden political associations. Accordingly, I judged it all the more necessary to find out what the truth was by torturing two female slaves who were called deaconesses. But I discovered nothing else but depraved, excessive superstition. – Pliny the Younger, Letters 10.96-97⁴¹

It seems that there are many outside (if not hostile) witnesses who confirm that early disciples of Christ saw him as their messiah and a divine being.

3.4 Which one Is Christianity?

From those two radical viewpoints which one is the one true Christian point of view?

Tertullian proposed a few interesting ideas to deal with his position:

We must follow, then, the clue of our discussion, meeting every effort of our opponents with reciprocal vigor. I say that my Gospel is the true one; Marcion, that his is. I affirm that Marcion's Gospel is adulterated; Marcion, that mine is. Now what is to settle the point for us, except it be that principle of time, which rules that the authority lies with that which shall be found to be more ancient; and assumes as an elemental truth, that corruption (of doctrine) belongs to the side which shall be convicted of comparative lateness in its origin. For, inasmuch as error is falsification of truth, it must needs be that truth therefore precede error. – Tertullian, Against Marcion, Book 4, Chapter 4 ⁴²

Grant, then, that all have erred; that the apostle was mistaken in giving his testimony; that the Holy Ghost had no such respect to any one (church) as to lead it into truth, although sent with this view by Christ, and for this asked of the Father that He might be the teacher of truth; grant, also, that He, the Steward of God, the Vicar of Christ, neglected His office, permitting the churches for a time to understand differently, (and) to believe differently, what He Himself was preaching by the apostles,—is it likely that so many churches, and they so great, should have gone astray into one and the same faith? No casualty distributed among many men issues in one and the same result. Error of doctrine in the churches must necessarily have produced various issues. When, however, that which is deposited among many is found to be one and the same, it is not the result of error, but of tradition. Can any one, then, be reckless enough to say that they were in error who handed on the tradition? - Tertullian, The Prescription Against Heretics, Ch. 29 ⁴³

Further, let us look at another point: the reaction to persecution. One interesting thing: the Apostles and the leaders of the early church were ready to die for their faith, whereas the Gnostic teachers were not⁴⁴. An old saying says “Liars make bad martyrs”.

⁴¹ Obtained online from <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/pliny.html>

⁴² Obtained online from <http://www.tertullian.org/anf/anf03/anf03-31.htm>

⁴³ Obtained online from <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/tertullian11.html>

⁴⁴ David Bercot, Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up, p. 109

It seems logical that the camp that was profoundly convinced of their beliefs was the Orthodox camp and not the Gnostic one (especially that a master of ascetism should, by training, be very resistant to torture).

Considering that the early texts and attestations strongly support the Orthodox camp, that their doctrine was much more uniform than the Gnostic and that they were ready to die for it, it seems necessary to side with Tertullian and accept the Orthodox definition of Christianity.

3.5 What did Early Christians Believe?

The writings of Paul also offer a window in time before their writing, as they quote early Christians creeds which could be as early as 35 AD. Let us mention Philippians 2:5-11 (divine nature of Jesus), Colossians 1:15-20 (crucifixion and divine nature), 1 Corinthians 15 (post-resurrection apparitions)⁴⁵, and 1st Corinthians 11:15-20 (description of the last supper).

Those creeds teach that:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. – Apostle Paul, Philippians 2:5-11

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. – Apostle Paul, Colossians 11:15-20 (NIV)

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. – Apostle Paul, 1st Corinthians 11:23-26 (NIV)

⁴⁵ Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, pp. 43-44

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. – Apostle Paul, 1st Corinthians 15:3-7 (NIV)⁴⁶

It is important to realize that the early Church relied on the prophecies found in the Tanak (תנ"ך), commonly referred as the Old Testament, as evidence for their beliefs. Here are some further examples:

He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. – Jesus of Nazareth, Luke 24:25-27 (NIV)

"Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer. – Apostle Peter, Acts 3:17-18 (NIV)

Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.

"How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture:

"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth."

The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. – Acts 8:30-35

Other documents from the early Christians (known as the “Church Fathers”) show some universal beliefs, some of which are not believed by many Christians today. Here is a short list compiled from Bercot’s book:

- Divorce for a reason other than infidelity was not permissible
- Abortion was a murder
- Simplicity in appearance
- Looking at pornography is wrong

⁴⁶ Please note that it is considered that the ending “, and last of all...” was added to the creed in the context of the letter.

- Equality between all humans
- Faith and deeds came together, and that one could lose their salvation
- Baptism was the normal channel for salvation (exceptions for those who died in persecution before having a chance to be baptized)
- Wealth, although not a problem in itself, was a danger for spiritual corruption

Here are ideas that the early Christians did not believe in:

- Predestination
- Salvation by faith alone
- Some forms of war were acceptable
- Capital punishment
- Original sin

3.6 What Really Happened at Nicea?

The Council of Nicea happened due to a controversy on the divine nature of Jesus brought forward by Arius. The controversy was related to whether Jesus was God forever, or if Jesus was generated before creation by the Father. The issue was not if Jesus was God at all, as all sides agreed on the divinity of Christ, simply not on the philosophical questions that related to it.

The Council resolved that the Father and the Son were of the same nature (divine) and that both existed eternally. Only a few opposed this decision, and they were promptly excommunicated⁴⁷.

One of the decisions at the Council of Nicea was to organize the Church along the lines of the Roman government. Dioceses and the first bits of the Canon Law were established then⁴⁸.

4 In a Word

In this section, we have seen that the only vision of Christianity that makes sense to accept is the orthodox one, believing that Jesus of Nazareth was a divine being that factually walked on the earth. We have also seen that other documents that bear some resemblance to Christianity were typically far removed in both time and content from the trustworthy sources and that they disqualified themselves in the eyes of the early church.

⁴⁷ John Anthony McGuckin, *The Road to Nicaea*, Christian History, Winter 2005

⁴⁸ David Bercot, *Will the Real Heretics Please Stand Up*, pp. 132-133

The claims of Dan Brown regarding early Christianity are historically inaccurate, simply put.

Conclusion

In the scope of this document, we have seen that some of the affirmations in the Da Vinci Code were founded, that is that Christianity has eventually closed the door to women, and that the patriarchal masculine view of God was unfounded.

However, we have seen that its claims regarding Mary Magdalene, the Sacred Feminine and Jesus to be simply unfounded. Those claims are based on documents that are typically untrustworthy, or in opposition to documents that are trustworthy.

We also had a glimpse at some of the beliefs of the early Christians, as well as their appreciation and involvement of women.

It is clear that a lot of the content in this document goes against many preconceived notions about Christianity. It is purposefully aimed at sparking questions and debate those preconceived notions and a questing for God, who so profoundly desires a relationship with us.

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Appendix: How did the Bible Come To Be?

Dan Brown is quite accurate when he mentions that the Bible did not arrive by fax. It was indeed a process, not a magic wand, that led to the compilation of the Canon. However, this process is far from being untrustworthy.

We have seen previously about the early manuscripts. Yet, we should wonder how they were chosen as 'The' reference. This section is overly simple on purpose. Any interested reader is encouraged to read a solid reference on the topic of canonology.

The earliest testimonies regarding the gospels are from Papias (125 CE, Mark and Matthew) and Iraneus (180 CE, mentions the four gospels)⁴⁹. We can also see that a major body of the New Testament was recognized before the end of the 2nd century by the early Christians (see Table 3).

Table 3: Pre-Constantine selections of the New Testament

Name/Author⁵⁰	Date (approx)	Omits
Marcion	144 CE	He is the first to propose a canon of the New Testament. It included a variant of Luke and Paul's letters. He was considered as a heretic for his dualist beliefs. ⁵¹
Muratorian Canon	170 CE	Hebrews, James, 1 st and 2 nd Peter.
Iraneus	170 CE	Philemon, James, 2 Peter and 3 John.
Clement of Alexandria	200 CE	Clement of Alexandria's selection: He did not include 2 Timothy and 2 nd and 3 rd John
Tertullian	200 CE	2 Peter, and 2 nd and 3 rd John
Old Latin translation (not the Vulgate)	200 CE	Hebrews, James, and 1 st and 2 nd Peter

⁴⁹ Craig L. Blomberg, interviewed by Lee Strobel. Published in Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, 1998, p.28

⁵⁰ G. Steve Kinnard, *Getting the Most From the Bible*, p. 177

⁵¹ Wikipedia, *Marcionism*, 12 June 2006, online at

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marcionism>

What would make a writing accepted⁵²? Here are the criteria that were used by the early church to sort out the texts:

- Apostolicity: is it originating from an apostle or one of his disciples?
- Orthodoxy: how close is it to the known trusted teachings?
- Acceptance: how widely accepted and used by the churches in general is it?

Although lists of accepted, disputed and rejected writings existed since 225 CE, it is not before 367 CE that a list including all the current New Testament was drafted⁵³. Some of the texts were not universally accepted at first due to one or more of the following factors:

Hebrews: This was questioned because of its anonymity

James: This was questioned due to its veracity. The supposed conflict with Paul's teaching on grace hurt its acceptance.

2 Peter: its genuineness was questioned. Also, its dissimilarity to 1 Peter brought questions.

2 and 3 John: These were questioned as their genuineness. The author identified himself not as an apostle, but as an elder.

Jude: This was disputed on the question of authenticity mainly because it quoted an apocryphal book, the Book of Enoch.

Revelation: Its authenticity was challenged. A controversy of millennialism arose because of this book. - G. Steve Kinnard, Getting the Most From the Bible, p. 179

The general view regarding this process is summarized as follows:

"To my mind, that just shows how careful the early church was", he replied. "They weren't 'gung ho,' sweeping in every last document that happened to have anything about Jesus in it. This shows deliberation and careful analysis. - Bruce M. Metzger, interviewed by Lee Strobel. Published in Lee Strobel, The Case for Christ, 1998, p.91

When the pronouncement was made about the canon, it merely ratified what the general sensitivity of the church had already determined. You see, the canon is a list of authoritative books more than it is an authoritative list of books. - Bruce M. Metzger, interviewed by Lee Strobel. Published in Lee Strobel, The Case for Christ, 1998, p.90

Overall, we see the compilation of the New Testament as long and tedious academic process of establishing consensus on which documents accurately reflect the teachings of the Apostles.

⁵² Bruce M. Metzger, interviewed by Lee Strobel. Published in Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, 1998, p.86

⁵³ G. Steve Kinnard, *Getting the Most From the Bible*, p. 178