

THE MICKEY MOUSE CODE

Dan Brown's "Da Vinci Code" was not just masterful literature, but a masterful piece of marketing as well. It was absolute literary CANDY for anyone who has a grudge against Christianity, or a grudge against the Catholic Church, and for the self-described "free thinkers," or "brights." And that's a pretty large market.

In fact, there was nothing in Dan's novel that would "shake" anyone's faith. Some people may not realize that even if Jesus HAD married, and had kids, it would not change anything. We Christians DO, after all, believe that he was truly human, besides being truly God. And, in any event, to use a British friend's words, it is a "load of bullox".

What a lot of us DID take issue with was Mr. Brown's note on page one stating, basically, without parsing it, that all the history and institutions in the novel are real when, in fact, from the start to the finish, he was making up history from scratch, with about as much concern for accuracy as a monkey throwing paint at a wall.

Nonetheless, whenever anyone would call him on all these huge whoppers in his story, Mr. Brown's retort was, "Hey, relax, it's just a novel." Therefore, instead of writing a boring "fact-check" book, of which there are so many, I decided to go INSIDE Dan's novel, and argue, not with Dan, but with Robert Langdon, and Leigh Teabing. After all, as Mr. Brown points out – it's a novel. This is a much more fun approach. I hope you have as much fun reading it as I had writing it.

Our little novelette begins at the start of chapter 55, with Robert and Sophie at the house of Doctor Teabing, late at night, searching for information about the mysterious "Holy Grail." (By the way, there is no "Holy Grail" in the Bible.)

The words in bold italic are quoted directly from the DaVinci Code. Everything else is mine.

Seated on the couch beside her new friend, Robert Langdon, Sophie drank her tea and ate a scone, feeling the welcome effects of caffeine and food. Sir Leigh Teabing, Robert's favorite professor from his university days, was beaming as he awkwardly paced before the open fire, his leg braces clicking on the stone hearth. Sophie and Robert had come, seeking knowledge about the true meaning of the "Holy Grail."

"The Holy Grail," Teabing said, his voice sermonic. "Most people only ask me where it is. I fear that is a question I may never answer." He turned and looked directly at Sophie. "However...the far more relevant question is this: What is the Holy Grail?"

Sophie sensed a rising air of academic anticipation now in both of her male companions.

“To fully understand the Grail,” Teabing continued, “we must first understand the Bible. How well do you know the New Testament?”

Sophie shrugged. “Not at all, really. I was raised by a man who worshipped Leonardo da Vinci.”

Teabing looked both startled and pleased. “An enlightened soul. Superb! Then you must be aware that Leonardo was one of the keepers of the secret of the Holy Grail. And he hid his clues in his art.”

“Robert told me as much, yes.”

“And Da Vinci’s views on the New Testament?”

“I have no idea.”

Just then there was a knock at the door. Teabing looked out the window. There on the porch was another old friend - Professor James Mathis.

“This is splendid!” Teabing exclaimed. “James is here.” Turning toward Sophie, he explained, “Mr. Mathis is an associate of mine from the museum. He’s quite an authority on ancient documents and comparative religion.”

A few minutes later, having persuaded his friend to join them, and having made the necessary introductions, Teabing glanced over at Robert.

His eyes turned mirthful as he motioned to the bookshelf across the room. “Robert, would you mind? On the third shelf, in the middle: La Storia di Leonardo.”

Langdon went across the room, found a large art book, and brought it back, setting it down on the table between them. Twisting the book to face Sophie, Teabing flipped open the heavy cover and pointed inside the rear cover to a series of quotations.

“From Da Vinci’s notebook on polemics and speculation,” Teabing said, indicating one quote in particular. “I think you’ll find this relevant to our discussion.”

Sophie read the words.

*Many have made a trade of delusions
and false miracles, deceiving the stupid multitude.*

--- LEONARDO DA VINCI

“Here’s another,” Teabing said, pointing to a different quote:

Blinding ignorance does mislead us.

*O! Wretched mortals, open your eyes !
--- LEONARDO DA VINCI*

Sophie felt a little chill. “DaVinci is talking about the Bible?”

Teabing nodded. “Leonardo’s feelings about the Bible relate directly to the Holy Grail. In fact, DaVinci PAINTED the true Grail, which I will show you momentarily, but first we must speak of the Bible.” Teabing smiled. “And everything you need to know about the Bible can be summed up by the great canon doctor Martyn Percy.” Teabing cleared his throat and declared, “The Bible did not arrive by fax from heaven.”

“I beg your pardon?” Sophie asked.

“The Bible is a product of man, my dear. Not of God. The Bible did not fall magically from the clouds. Man created it as a historical record of tumultuous times, and it has evolved through countless translations, additions, and revisions. History has never had a definitive version of the book.”

Teabing nodded toward James as an ally, hoping for confirmation. But James seemed a bit pensive. “So what do YOU make of all this, James?” the professor prodded.

“Well, actually,” He began, sounding a bit embarrassed, “I’ve been doing some research recently on that very subject.”

“Well, that’s brilliant, James. Please enlighten us,” Teabing said expectantly.

“Well, DaVinci wasn’t talking about the Bible. He was talking about the Medieval Catholic Church.”

Teabing countered politely, “Isn’t it the same thing?”

“Well...No,” Mathis replied, “In DaVinci’s day, it was actually ILLEGAL for common people to even READ the Bible. Reading the Bible without a priest was a crime sometimes punishable by death. So how could DaVinci be talking about the Bible – a book nobody was allowed to read, anyway? The common people were only allowed to know what the church wanted them to know in those days.” He paused, then continued, “The Catholic Church of those times made a huge profit from the ignorant superstitions that they encouraged. This is what infuriated DaVinci.”

He continued, “What was that he said, they *“Made a trade of false delusions ?”* Well that’s exactly what the church was doing. Churches competed with each other to get as many fake ‘relics’ as they could, so people would pay money to

receive magical blessings from them. In Luther's day, St. Peter's Cathedral was being built with large sums of money raised by the sale of 'indulgences,' little get-out-of-jail-free cards for your friends in hell. It was all a scam. That is the kind of thing DaVinci was talking about – NOT the Bible."

James paused for a moment, to let someone else in, but nobody said anything, so he kept going. "In fact, it was when people started reading the Bible again that the Renaissance began! Bringing the Bible back to the common man broke the power of the Medieval church, and that began a new period of enlightenment. THAT was when Europe started to become powerful. Science blossomed, and European technology raced ahead of the East."

"Think about it," He implored, "Just look at Europe and the West, today – It's exactly at the time when we are walking AWAY from the Bible that our countries are becoming WEAKER."

Leigh Teabing looked around the room – at Sophie, then Robert -- then looked back at James. "Well, certainly you're not going to start telling us that the Bible in its present form is the same as the original!"

"Why not?" Mathis looked surprised. "It's actually fairly certain that it hasn't changed at all in the almost 2000 years since Jesus died."

"What do you mean?" Langdon frowned.

"The fact is, we still HAVE ancient copies of the New Testament, and a few of them are from the end of the first century, or the beginning of the second century – only about 50 to 70 years after Jesus died."

Langdon looked questioningly at Teabing. Mathis hesitated. "Go on," Teabing smiled flatly, "We're all scholars here. Go ahead with your...uh...theories."

Mathis continued, "Papyrus p66, known as the Bodmer manuscript, is from about 125 AD. It holds the entire Gospel of John. At the moment it is in Cologne, Switzerland, at the Bodmer Library. The Beatty, p46, from circa AD 85 to 95, holds 10 of Paul's letters, in Dublin, Ireland. Then there are the fragments – even older. P64, the Magdalen Papyrus, is a small fragment of Matthew, from about AD 66. Fragment 7Q5, found at Qumran, is from about AD 50. 7Q5 is believed by the some of the most highly qualified papyrologists, who study ancient paper (papyrus), and paleographers, who study ancient writing, to be a piece of Mark's gospel – an actual piece of a gospel manuscript that was produced around AD 50 or even before. Well, Jesus died in AD 34. So that little piece of Mark came from a manuscript that was produced only – well – about sixteen years after Jesus' death."

“And you claim this proves that these manuscripts have essentially the same text that people read today in their Bibles?” Teabing asked with a note of skepticism. “You expect us to believe all this, based on these little fragments of yours?”

“The Beatty includes almost all of Paul’s letters. And we have LOTS of papyri I haven’t even mentioned. I’ve read the old Koine Greek words of the oldest complete papyri, myself. I’ve compared the writings with our translations. What more proof do you want? Of course the translations would almost HAVE to be the same as the old manuscripts. After all, they are BASED on those old manuscripts of the epistles and gospels. As for the small size of 7Q5, P64, or the Rylands fragment, they are like the DNA in a murder investigation – small -- but very convincing.”

“Come on Professor, look at all the different versions there are,” Robert protested.

“Have you ever been in a Protestant church, Robert? The pastor will read from his Bible while everyone follows along in theirs. In any sizeable church you might have 10 or 12 different versions. But there are no problems, because they all say the same thing –only the phrasing is slightly different. The translations are all based directly on the Greek manuscripts, and usually scholars from various denominations work together on them.”

“But back in the early days of the church, Who chose which gospels to include?” Sophie asked.

“*Aha!*” Teabing enthusiastically regained the initiative. *“The fundamental irony of Christianity! The Bible, as we know it today, was collated by the pagan Roman emperor Constantine the Great.”*

“I thought Constantine was a Christian,” Sophie said.

“Hardly,” Teabing scoffed. “He was a lifelong pagan who was baptized on his death-bed., too weak to protest. In Constantine’s day, Rome’s official religion was sun worship - the cult of Sol Invictus - and Constantine was its head priest. Unfortunately for him, a growing religious turmoil was gripping Rome. Three centuries after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, Christ’s followers had multiplied exponentially. Christians and pagans began warring, and the conflict grew to such proportions that it threatened to rend Rome in two. Constantine decided something had to be done. In 325 AD, he decided to unify Rome under a single religion. Christianity.”

Sophie was surprised. “Why would a pagan emperor choose Christianity as the official religion?”

Teabing chuckled. “Constantine was a very good businessman. He could see that Christianity was on the rise, and he simply backed the winning horse. Historians still marvel at the brilliance with which Constantine converted the sun-worshipping pagans to Christianity.”

“Dr. Teabing, there is NO evidence whatsoever of a war between Christians and Pagans at any time in the Roman Empire. Do you have any sources, any evidence?” Mathis waited.

Leigh Teabing seemed a bit hurt. He looked down at his coffee for a moment. Then looked over at James Mathis and said, defiantly, “I refer to Dan Brown, author of ‘The DaVinci Code.’”

James was stunned. “Dan Brown?” He was incredulous. “He is a NOVELIST, Mr. Teabing – a STORY teller. There are no ancient writers that ever mentioned anything like a ‘Christian-Pagan War’, no Roman records, no military records, nothing. Go to ANY history book. Look it up for yourself.”

“He wrote on the first page that everything in the book is true.” Teabing defended himself.

“And you take him at his word? A story-teller? Leigh, think about it. Dan Brown knows that there are a lot of people who would LOVE to see the Bible proven false. And Dan Brown is, above all, in the business of selling books – so he GIVES them what they WANT, Doctor. Don’t you SEE that? He simply caters to their wishful thinking.”

Sophie had a confused look on her face. “So what IS the truth, James? What do YOU know? What do you know for SURE about the early history of the Christians in the Roman Empire?”

“Well,” Mathis started, “As I said, there is absolutely NO evidence ANYWHERE, that I know of, of any kind of war. On the other hand, the rise of the Christian church is well documented by Jewish, Christian, and Roman historians, and there is no disagreement between them. These are historians who were ALIVE during those times. So I think I’d rather trust them than your ‘Dan Brown.’ First of all, Josephus, the renowned Jewish historian of the first century, talks about the fact that Christians believed Jesus to be the Messiah, the Son of God, and that Christians believed Jesus rose from the dead. Tacitus, and Suetonius mention the Christians as a despised, weak minority. Pliny the Younger agrees. We also have an ancient text from a Greek comedian -- Lucian of Samosata. He makes fun of the Christian belief that Jesus is God, and the Christian hope of Heaven.”

The list went on, “Papias was a Christian historian who chronicled the early

church. Hippolytus is another early Christian historian. Of course, the Christian historian Eusebius wrote an entire history of the Christians up through the time of Constantine. All of these men, each from his own perspective, talked about the rise of Christianity and NONE of them said anything – not one word – about any ‘war’ between Christians and pagans. Furthermore, there is nothing in any of the official Roman military records, or written communications. It simply never happened.”

“Okay, fine,” Langdon waved his hand impatiently, “But like Sophie said, what DO we know?”

“Well, at the start, the Christian church was considered a “religio prava,” an illegal and depraved religion. As soon as the persecutions of the Jews ended, the persecutions from the Romans began. At least two of the persecutions involved all the might of the entire Roman Empire from one end to the other.”

“Well isn’t that a war, Professor?”

“That’s a good point. If the Christians had organized themselves and fought back, then it certainly would have been. But they were a tiny minority, running for their lives. Furthermore, despite the persecutions, they believed they should OBEY the government, even a hostile one, and live at peace with their neighbors. The Bible is full of such passages. I’ve read them.”

“Well how could they possibly survive against the whole empire without fighting back?”

“EXACTLY! That’s the fascinating part. The odd thing is that the persecution actually INCREASED their numbers, because people started to admire their dedication. So more and more people became converts. They had no church buildings at first, but met in each other’s houses. Neighbors could then see their lives close up. Those neighbors began to admire the love that the Christians had for one another. Christians believed that ALL human life was worthwhile. So slaves had as much status in the church as their masters. Christians would save unwanted babies who had been left outside to die. And they took care of the poor. At one point in time, there were about 1500 poor people in Rome who were being fed every day by Christian communities. And you ARE RIGHT about one thing, Doctor Teabing. By the time 300 years had gone by, the church HAD indeed multiplied exponentially.”

Sophie asked, “How can anybody know, all these years later, how much it had grown?”

Robert cut in, “Oh, there are ways, Sophie,” he said, “For example, Christians usually included their symbols, like the cross or the fish, in the tombs of their

dead. We're then able to get an idea of the ratio of Christian graves to non-Christian graves, down through the years, and track their growth."

"Quite right," James agreed, "A researcher friend of mine, David Barrett, has estimated that by the year 300, about 10.4% of the Roman world was Christian. Also, by that time, about 410,000 believers had been killed for their faith in Jesus as God."

"Wait a minute, James," Teabing pounced, "Who ever said that the Early Christians really believed Jesus was God?"

"Well, THEY said so, Leigh. There are all kinds of quotes."

"Oh indeed!" Teabing smirked, "No doubt you'll mention Polycarp of Smyrna, in about AD 112-118 writing to the church at Philippi about Jesus' divinity, assuming that his readers believed as he did, or Justin Martyr writing that Jesus was the "Son of God" and "Master of all." He was born about AD 100, and was killed in AD 165. James, that's already 100 years – a whole century – after Jesus died. Plenty of time for legend to develop."

"You know your history, Leigh, for sure. But you left out the most important source of all – Paul's letters. All throughout Paul's letters, he CONSTANTLY refers to Jesus' divinity. And ALL scholars, from the most secular skeptics to the most ardent believers – all the scholars -- agree that Paul's earliest letters were written in the 50s AD, only about 15 to 20 or so years after Jesus died. And don't forget – because papyrus p46 is so old, we are pretty sure that what is written in today's published Bibles is basically the same, almost word for word, as what Paul wrote so long ago."

Robert interjected, "What about Constantine? You're ignoring his impact on the church."

"That's right," Teabing explained to Sophie, "Constantine needed to strengthen the new Christian tradition, and held a famous ecumenical gathering known as the Council of Nicea."

Sophie had heard of it only as its being the birthplace of the Nicene Creed.

"At this gathering," Teabing said, "many aspects of Christianity were debated and voted upon - the date of Easter, the role of the bishops, the administration of sacraments, and, of course, the divinity of Jesus."

"I don't follow," Sophie wondered, "His divinity?"

“My dear,” Teabing declared, “Until that moment in history, Jesus was viewed by his followers as a mortal prophet...a great and powerful man, but a man nonetheless. A mortal.”

“Not the Son of God?” Sophie said softly, almost to herself. Then she looked up, “Is that true, James?”

James took another swig of coffee. He had not intended to be the featured speaker of the evening, but he could not let this challenge pass unanswered.

He paused for a moment, then drew a deep breath, and finally spoke. “No Sophie, it’s not true. Two of the four gospels were written by eyewitnesses to Jesus’ life. Those eyewitnesses believed he was God’s Son, and that’s what they wrote. The other two gospels were BASED on eyewitness testimony and they concurred. Those historians that I talked about earlier, the apostles themselves, and those church leaders of the first century all testified that the early Christians BELIEVED those eyewitnesses. And a lot of intelligent, educated people who read their words today STILL believe, even today.”

He glanced at Langdon, “Robert, you mentioned the fish symbol. Well, that symbol was being used centuries before Constantine. It is found all over the Roman world. It was used, as you know, as a secret symbol, during times of persecution. The Greek word for fish formed a convenient acronym, meaning, literally, ‘Jesus Christ, SON of GOD, Savior.’ So again, the very first Christians knew Jesus as GOD. There is absolutely NO QUESTION of that. Every piece of evidence we have confirms it.” Then, looking directly at his old friend, Leigh Teabing, he said, “It’s a fact.”

Teabing just took another sip of tea, and dismissively waved his hand, signalling James to go ahead and continue.

Mathis went on, “Okay, let’s talk about Constantine. Constantine, according to all records, became a Christian in 312 or 313, after the Battle of the Milvian Bridge. Before the battle, he had experienced some sort of vision involving the Christian god. Eusebius says it was a shining cross. Constantine went on to win the battle and afterward, he did indeed become a Christian. Well, within a few years, anyway. It’s true that he wasn’t baptized until much later, on his deathbed. But that’s because he was involved in a sect of Christianity which taught that baptism was reserved for the end of one’s life.”

“Okay, fine, James, but he DID make Christianity a state religion,” Robert protested.

“In 313,” Mathis replied, “he issued the Edict of Milan which simply stated that the Christian faith and indeed, ALL FAITHS, should be TOLERATED in the

empire, without religious persecution -- Quite a visionary law for that time in history. But Christianity was only made LEGAL. It was NOT made the official state religion, until around 367 I think, under a different emperor."

Leigh Teabing interjected, "Yes, alright, and THEN in 323, having become more influential, Constantine CHOSE which gospels were to be used in the Christian church. He instituted a NEW BIBLE," Teabing added, somewhat petulantly. "After all, we now know from the Nag Hamadi texts that there were originally over 80 different gospels."

"The Nag Hamadi texts? The Gnostic Gospels?" Mathis asked.

"That's right," James. "You wanted better sources," Teabing chided, "Well those are the earliest gospels."

"They're from the fourth century, Leigh," James sighed, not really wanting to argue. "You know this, yourself, Leigh. ALL the experts, including the people who FOUND the texts -- they all agree. Those manuscripts have EVEN been carbon-dated, I believe. It's a fact. The Nag Hammadi documents were all produced around AD 350-400. That's more than 300 years after Jesus was on earth."

"Yes, of course," Teabing parried, "But you're talking about when the manuscripts that we currently have were produced. I'm saying that the ORIGINALS of the Gnostic gospels were WRITTEN prior to the New Testament."

"The earliest of ALL the Gnostic gospels was Thomas," Mathis was quick to point out, "And most scholars -- even anti-Biblical ones -- put it in the early SECOND century. A few say it MIGHT be late first century. The Gospel of Mary -- second century. The Gospel of Philip is THIRD century. And those dates are undisputed. The Gospel of Judas was also second or third century." He added, matter-of-factly, "The evidence is overwhelming. Even sources Dan Brown used for the DaVinci Code, Helmut Koester, for example, are forced to admit that the Gnostic gospels came later, and were, therefore, not even written by the people they are named for."

Speaking very politely now, he drove his point home: "How is it, Leigh, that, in all the writings we have from the ancient world, NO historians, Greek, Roman, Jewish, or Christian ever ONCE mentions ANY of those Gnostic gospels UNTIL about AD150. And yet we have the Four BIBLICAL gospels quoted literally THOUSANDS of times, and referred to by all kinds of writers?" Looking around the room, Mathis added, "But then, beginning in the SECOND century, we, all of a sudden, have MANY references to these "NEW" gospels, as the people of that

time called them. How can this be? SIMPLE! These Gnostic Gospels did NOT even EXIST until the middle of the SECOND century.”

Glancing down, Mathis noticed an old special issue of “U.S. News and World Report” lying on the coffee table in front of him. He recognized the cover. “Here, Leigh. Robert, you too. Here, look at this. Right here - Here it is - in this article, ‘History’s Greatest Cover up.’”

There, on page 35, speaking of the Nag Hamadi texts, it stated that “Some of them can hardly be later than about AD 120-150.” James then hammered the point home, “This is the most liberal estimate available, from a very secular magazine. And even THESE people cannot put the date of these texts any earlier than 120-150. And most true historians actually offer later dates, even further removed from the time of Jesus.”

He then continued, “Yet I’ve already demonstrated that the original FOUR gospels, and certainly Paul’s letters, were actually WRITTEN DOWN, INK ON PAPER, during the FIRST century. We actually HAVE the old COPIES to PROVE it.” He rested his case, “That’s almost 100 years prior to your Gnostic gospels. Your premise is simply false, Leigh.”

He felt terrible for hurting his friend’s feelings, but he continued: “As for Constantine collating the Bible, it’s ridiculous. The Bible had already been in constant use – the same 27 books we use today, for over 200 years, by the time Constantine came around. In fact we have a listing of them in the “Muratorian Canon,” from about AD180, long before Constantine. That list is almost identical to our 27 books. And then, there are all the quotes from church leaders. It’s obvious that the early Christians KNEW their Bible just as we do. Constantine came long, long AFTER that. And at Nicaea, the question of which books were true never even came UP. That’s from the original records of the meeting.”

“Okay, Professor Mathis,” Langdon cut in, “Game - set - match. Your point about the documents is well taken. But there is a lot of other evidence besides these Nag-Hamadi texts.”

Mathis couldn’t believe it. “You, as well, also believe in all this ‘conspiracy theory,’ Robert?”

“Transmogrification,” Langdon said. “The vestiges of pagan religion in Christian symbology are undeniable. Egyptian sun disks became the halos of Catholic saints. Pictograms of Isis became the blueprint for our modern images of the Virgin Mary nursing Baby Jesus. And virtually all the elements of the Catholic ritual - the miter, the altar, the doxology, and communion, the act of ‘God-eating’ - were taken directly from the earlier pagan mystery religions.”

Teabing looked directly at James, and added, "Nothing in Christianity is original. The pre-Christian god Mithras - called the Son of God and the Light of the World - was born on December 25, died, was buried in a rock tomb, and then resurrected in three days. By the way, December 25 is also the birthday of Osiris, Adonis, and Dionysus. The newborn Krishna was presented with gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Even Christianity's weekly holy day was stolen from the pagans."

"What do you mean?" Sophie asked.

"Originally," Langdon said, "Christianity honored the Jewish Sabbath of Saturday, but Constantine shifted it to coincide with the pagan's veneration day of the sun." He paused, grinning, "To this day, most churchgoers attend services on Sunday morning with no idea that they are there on account of the pagan sun god's weekly tribute - Sunday."

Sophie's head was spinning. "And all of this relates to the Grail?"

"Indeed it DOES," Teabing took over. He was catching his second wind. "The Grail is proof positive that the Christian faith is a lie." Then he grinned and looked directly over to Mathis, "Are you keeping up with this, James?"

Mathis was tired. Teabing had always been a hero of his. "I don't want to argue with you, Leigh." He smiled sincerely at his old friend, with genuine respect, getting up to warm his coffee.

"Come on, Professor," Langdon encouraged him, "Really, Professor, you DO look to me like a man who has something to say."

"Thank you, Robert." Mathis collected his thoughts, "Look, obviously we disagree. Look, it's the nature of our academic profession to draw connections. That's our job. But we must always be careful to refrain from drawing connections that are simply NOT there." He added, "I must say, Professors Teabing, and Langdon, you have me at a disadvantage. I can scarcely remember all the various points you made, upon which I might comment."

"James, I'm surprised at your lack of intellectual curiosity for these matters," Teabing said, "But of course you're entitled to your viewpoint."

"I really have no interest in intellectualism, or viewpoints - I'm interested in truth, Dr. Teabing. And most of the connections you and Robert have drawn are simply NOT there."

"Truth, James? All truth is relative," Teabing opined in his cerebral tone, "Certainly you understand that!"

Looking the older man in the eye, Mathis smiled sadly, "I'm sorry you believe that, Leigh, but it does explain your point of view." He reasoned, "If there really is no objective truth, then we are free to make up whatever evidence we can for whatever we feel like believing, facts be damned." He mumbled, mostly to himself, "We become a culture of lies."

"All right," He took up the challenge, "Okay, Whatever you say...Let's see. You said, I think, Halos come from Egyptian sun-disks, right? I don't doubt that. It's probably true. So what? Christian artists are free to use whatever symbols they like. There is nothing about "halos" in the Bible. Christian artists using symbols from their culture, pagan or otherwise, is no different from the Christian rock music we have today. What a Christian chooses to do with the art of his culture says nothing, one way or the other, about the truth of the Bible.

You talked about Isis, too, right? You said pictograms showed the goddess Isis with her son, Horus - and they became the so-called 'blueprint' for Mary and Jesus. Well, that pictogram also shows Isis turning into a BIRD after having Horus. I don't think Mary did THAT, did she? Of course you can find similarities in almost any set of stories. It doesn't mean anything, unless they really are almost identical."

Mathis illustrated his point: "If you want a REAL connection, look for details that are identical. Look at the Quran, for example. In Sura 19:29-31, there is a story about Jesus speaking to people in adult terms, while still an infant in the cradle. Well, this story, the exact same story, in all its details, came from one of those Gnostic gospels, 'The Gospel of the Infancy,' which was written in about AD 150. The Gnostic story from AD 150, and the Quranic story from about AD 630 – are identical. Now that is a real problem."

"What else was there? Oh yeah. Mithras was born on December 25th, you say. Good for him. Actually Jesus was probably born in April or May, since the New Testament documents state that the shepherds were spending their nights in the fields. This is common knowledge among Christians. The December 25th date is not mentioned anywhere in the Christian scriptures. It's just our custom -- which was probably started as a way to compete with some other festivals, pagan celebrations, that took place around that time of the year. As you said, there were quite a few of them."

"You forgot about all the parallels we can draw with Mithraism," James," Robert offered. "Those may not be so easy to explain."

Mathis wasn't dissuaded, "There are two distinct versions of Mithraism known to history. The older version was Persian and dates back at least to B.C.1400. The later version is Roman. Roman Mithraism was Christianity's number one

competitor in the early Christian era. The earliest information we have about Roman Mithraism is from AD 100, about 70 years AFTER Christianity began.”

“What are you saying, Dr. Mathis?” Sophie asked, looking a bit bewildered.

“I’m saying that **If any doctrinal borrowing did occur, it was probably the Mithraites who borrowed from the Christians.** That’s because Christianity’s teachings were all anchored into the prophecies of the Jewish scriptures, making it very difficult for them to incorporate new, non-Jewish traditions. Roman Mithraism, on the other hand, was completely different from its earlier, Persian form. The Roman Mithraites were therefore free to change their teachings in any way they chose.

Now, during the third and fourth centuries, in their ART, the Christians DID sometimes copy from their Mithraic competitors. But, again, so what. This has nothing to do with the origin of their beliefs. The Christian teachings, and the Christian scriptures are original, and unique to the Christian community.”

“But according to my source there are real connections,” Robert Langdon protested.

“And your source is probably another novel, right?” James smiled.

Langdon did not smile.

“None of these assumed connections of yours are surprising,” James continued. “I’ve heard about them before, but a lot of them are out-and-out FALSE. They’re completely made up. I often marvel at how many spurious claims are made, and how they just keep coming. It’s like Jesus said: People will keep trying to find ANYTHING they can, rather than believe this message.”

The pre-Christian god Mithras was called the “**Son of God,**” you say, and the “**Light of the World**”. There’s no record of ANY title like that EVER being used for that deity. You say he was buried in a rock tomb. Well, according to the myths, he was BORN out of solid rock. But that’s as close as you can get. Resurrected in three days? Complete fabrication. Nothing like that in any of the ancient documents.”

“That’s hard to believe, James,” Teabing rolled his eyes.

“It’s true. It’s a case of very biased authors quoting from old, discredited texts, and often just making things up.

The newborn Krishna idea is another good example. You said Krishna was given gold, frankincense and myrrh, right? You probably got that one from, ... I

forget her name, it sounds something like 'Ash-Tray.' Anyways, she writes that same sort of stuff, making up history to fit with her opinions. But there is absolutely nothing to it. Real history has evidence to back it up. There is no evidence behind this particular Krishna parallel."

"Mr. Mathis," Sophie asked, "Is there anything that Robert or Dr. Teabing said that you DO believe might be true?"

"Oh sure," James was glad to be able to find some common ground for a change. "You said that a lot of the elements of Catholicism came from pagan origins. Oh that's absolutely true. But then again - that's ALSO common knowledge among Christians. After all, that's what the REFORMATION was about. Some anti-Christian, partly pagan, beliefs had crept into the church. Men like Wycliffe, Huss, Tyndale, Luther, and Calvin finally brought the church back to the Bible - the REAL Bible - the Old Testament, and the 27 books of the New Testament. Some of them were killed for it."

He kept on, "As far as the Doxology, well - name me another ancient religion that has the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. No, the Doxology's all ours."

"Just a moment, James," Teabing said slowly, as something dawned on him.

James didn't hear. He kept going: "In fact, if you think about it, if somebody were to MAKE UP a religion, a new religion, who in their right mind would say they believe in one God, but that "God" is three "persons"? It makes no sense. Who would ever make up the idea of Jesus being completely human, but completely God. Again, makes no sense. So, if no human being would ever make up such an illogical teaching, then where did it come from? Maybe, well...

Well, think about this: The God who designed this whole entire universe, as vast as it is, MUST be so high above, BEYOND our puny little intellect, it is perfectly logical that we would NOT be able to really UNDERSTAND his nature. Wouldn't you say so, Leigh? Robert, Sofie, what do you think?

"YOU are a CHRISTIAN, James," the Doctor shouted out, accusingly. He pointed his finger at his old friend. "You used the word, "our," a minute ago. Earlier, you said "we." The truth had finally hit Professor Leigh Teabing. "You ARE a Christian, aren't you, James?"

"Oops," James said, as he stood there, frozen for a second.

Teabing smelled blood. He dove in for the kill, "So, Professor Mathis, it turns out the only reason you seem to enjoy disagreeing with us is that we've exposed your new imaginary friend." He almost laughed out loud.

But Mathis was not about to lose his focus. “Okay. Sure. Fine. I’m a Christian. How about Sunday, OUR day of worship? You say it was from the ‘official’ Roman religion of sun-worship. One small problem with that -- the official Roman religion was NOT Sun worship. Emperor worship was the only real state religion, aside from the old pantheon. Secondly, Christians had begun using Sunday as their special day of worship already as far back, almost, as AD 70, when the Jews were thrown out of Jerusalem. That’s well attested by the the writings of the earliest Christian historians. But again, look at Romans 14. The Bible itself says that which day we pick for worship is unimportant.”

“So you really DO believe he is GOD?? I’m amazed James. I thought you were a scientist.” Teabing wasn’t even listening now.

“I am a scientist. Therefore, like a good scientist, I evaluate ALL the evidence - not just the evidence I LIKE. And Leigh, when I looked at the evidence for that first Easter - I found that the resurrection most likely DID happen, pretty much in the way the writers described. I found that Jesus probably IS the true GOD.”

He was on a roll, now: “Oh yeah, Nicaea, where you claim that Constantine changed the Bible and the church voted on Jesus being the Son of God. Well, I’ve already proven that the Bible we have now IS the SAME Bible we had then - because we still have the same COPIES we had then. I mentioned p46, remember? That’s the Beatty Papyrus, 10 of Paul’s letters, from A.D. 85 to, maybe, 95? These old copies were written out, by hand, 200 years before Constantine was even born. And guess what?”

“Oh, please do spit it out, James.” Teabing remarked dryly. He was no longer even remotely interested in any of what James said. Just the mere fact that James was a Christian, in Teabing’s mind, invalidated everything he said.

“Well,” Mathis was smiling now. “The scribes had a special way to write any reference for God. They would contract the name, and draw a line over the top of it. And on the pages of p46, one of our oldest copies, the name of Jesus is always written this way. Obviously, the belief that Jesus was God goes all the way back to the very start of the Christian church. And again, Paul constantly calls Jesus the Son of God, in ALL his letters, like I said earlier.”

“Hey, would you like to hear how I became a Christian -- Doctor Teabing? Robert?”

“Not really.”

“No, I don’t think so, thanks.”

“Okay, I’ll tell you. There were a lot of questions that kept popping up in my mind. Like, for example: If this were just a story cooked up by the disciples, then why did they have a WOMAN, Mary, being the first eyewitness to the resurrection. Women’s testimony was not even acceptable in law courts in those days. And why did the disciples make THEMSELVES look so bad, in the gospels, if they were making up stories. And Jesus was buried near Jerusalem, but it is a historical fact that the population of Jerusalem became about 30% Christian within a few years AFTER Jesus was killed. Why didn’t the Jewish leaders just STOP this spread by showing Jesus’ body - UNLESS they didn’t HAVE it. Besides that.....”

“Jesus’ establishment as the ‘Son of God’ was officially proposed and voted upon by the Council of Nicaea, under Constantine’s supervision,” Teabing interrupted with an air of authority.

“Hold on,” You’re saying Jesus’ divinity was the result of a vote?” Sophie asked.

“A relatively close vote at that,” Teabing added.

Sophie glanced at Langdon, and he gave her a soft nod of concurrence. She looked over at James then, and he was actually grinning.

“And of course you got that information directly from the historians and records of that period, right, Doctor?”

“No,” Teabing answered, “As you know, the documentation of the meeting was kept secret.”

“No, Doctor, actually there is a lot of documentation. And I’ve read it. They kept meticulous records, and those records still exist today. The vote was not so much on whether or not he was God – it was on HOW his dual nature should be understood. And the vote on the Nicene Creed which says very directly that Jesus IS God was 218 to 2 -- Not exactly a cliff-hanger. As I said before, those Christians of that day had the same faith that I do.”

“Alright, James, we’ve heard just about enough of your EVANGELIZING. What is it about Christians? You are never interested in anyone else’s point of view. You are a bunch of annoying know-it-alls. You make all these accusations and offer no evidence at all.”

Now Teabing avoided James and turned his eyes to Sophie, *“Besides the vote, my dear, 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.”*

“Any questions James?” Teabing glared at him.

“Those texts that you are trying to pass off as the ‘real’ Bible, Leigh, were written about a hundred years AFTER the Bible we use today. You cannot escape that fact.”

“Jesus was a MORTAL man !!” Teabing bellowed, red-faced now.

“Doc, calm down, all right? Of course he was mortal. He died, didn’t he?”

“AHAA !!” So you concede. Well, that’s not what your New Testament teaches.”

“Doc really, here, I’ll brew up a fresh cup of tea. Come on. Let’s just forget about it.”

“Changing the subject, Ey?” The professor looked up from his chair. “You KNOW I’m right! The church is AFRAID of Christ’s human nature. That’s why they want to CHANGE the Bible !!”

“Well Doc, I guess you haven’t read it.”

“Teabing looked straight into Sophie’s eyes. “The Grail, ...Do you know what it is.”

Sophie was not sure what he wanted. She searched for the right answer, “I don’t know...I s’pose..... a CUP?”

Teabing smiled, “The Holy GRAIL,” He looked at Mathis and grinned, “Is the secret that could put an END to your CHURCH, Mr. Mathis. If you knew, it would DESTROY your FAITH!”

James was busy adding a creamer to his third cup of coffee.

“Wouldn’t you like to know what I’m talking about??” he asked, expectantly.

“You mean the thing about Mary Magdalene being Jesus’ wife?” James replied, without looking up.

“The actual Grail is” -- Teabing paused, looked around with wide eyed anticipation at everyone in the room, and then loudly proclaimed -- “The Grail is MARY MAGDALENE !!”

“Yeah, Doc, I know. Hey, you’re really taking this all way too seriously.”

“You don’t believe, ey? For your information, Leonardo Da Vinci was a”

“... a Grand Master of the Priory of Sion. Yes, I’ve heard that, Doctor.”

Now it became clear to the doctor: “You’re one of them. You’re in the Priory of Sion!”

“Leigh,” James was worried now, “Look at me, Leigh. There IS NO ‘Priory of Sion.’ That was a HOAX organized by a guy named Pierre Plantard in the 1950s.”

“Alright,” Teabing relaxed a bit. “Don’t believe it. But I have PROOF. There is a LIST of former Grand masters in the Bibliothec Nationale in Paris.”

“You mean the one that is supposedly under the file number: 4o 1m1 249? Ask anyone at the Bibliothec Nationale. They’ll tell you that the documents are all forgeries, made by this Plantard guy. This nut was trying to prove he was the King of France. He himself confessed to the hoax in 1991. But your ‘source,’ Dan Brown, ignores all this. Your source is a STORY-TELLER!”

“How did you KNOW the number of the file? – Ah! You ARE one of them!”

“DOC, LEIGH, It’s all a hoax - a joke. The Da Vinci JOKE, right? It’s NOT REAL, Doc. There was never any Priory of Sion, so DaVinci was never a ‘Grand Master’ of anything except painting. You actually BELIEVE that stuff?”

“But,” The Doctor was stammering, “But, next to Jesus ... in the painting, ‘The Last Supper’ ... It’s MARY.”

“It’s John, Doctor.”

“But it LOOKS like Mary.”

“Doctor, look at the next page in your picture-book. See, here. It shows another painting by Leonardo. The painting’s name is ‘John the Baptist.’ Does John the Baptist look like Mary?”

“He looks like Mary too!”

“Yes, well, in those days, Doctor, when this painting was produced, most artists portrayed young men -- especially students, academics -- as having long hair and being slightly effeminate.”

“He’s Mary.”

“No Doctor, He’s John the Baptist.”

“Then where’s Mary.”

“She’s not in the painting.”

“But how do you know for SURE, James?”

“Because the name of the painting is ‘John the Baptist,’ And because he’s the only one in the painting, Doctor.”

Just then, Teabing’s personal servant appeared instantly at the doorway, as though he had been expecting this. “I’m sorry sirs. Madam. He gets this way when he becomes overly excited.”

Sophie felt a bit embarrassed for the older man.

Teabing suddenly stood up. “But it says so in my BOOK! And that’s not all. WALT DISNEY was a Grand Master TOO! The LITTLE MERMAID was MARY. It’s true!! Dan Brown said so in his book, on page 283!! And the first page of the book says it’s all FACT !!”

“Yeah, what about Disney’s depiction of the Little Mermaid as Mary Magdalene, Professor Mathis?”

“Oh **for GOD’S SAKE**, Robert !!!” Sophie had heard enough.

James tried one more time. “Robert, Doctor Teabing’s source is a paperback novel. It’s the DaVinci JOKE, Robert. Come on!”

“But Professor Teabing is a great man of learning!”

“A great man of learning who is apparently a couple cans short of a six-pack, Robert.” Sophie said.

“But Sophie, what about the Priory of Sion?”

Turning to James, she spoke her feelings, “I think he’s like a lot of people. He doesn’t want to know the REAL truth, so he’ll believe anything - even a paperback novel or a Hollywood movie.”

“But John DOES look like Mary, Sophie. And is it just a coincidence that the Little Mermaid is named Ariel?”

“Matthew six, verse 23,” James agreed with Sophie, “If the light that you THINK you have is really DARKNESS, how DEEP that darkness will BE.”

She just nodded, sadly.

Robert kept asking, "But what about MARY, Sophie? In 'The Last Supper' It looks like Mary, doesn't it? And the Mona Lisa is a symbol of the 'SACRED FEMININE!'"

She stared at him, blankly, for a moment, just studying him.

Then she turned away.

"Hey, I'm really starved, James, and it's morning already. " How about breakfast at Denny's?"

"Sounds good. And afterward, I'll buy you a cup of coffee."