

Lord, give us the docility and trust to follow your ways, so that we can reach eternal happiness with you.
Help us to follow our personal vocation, and to be open to your continued guidance every day. Amen.

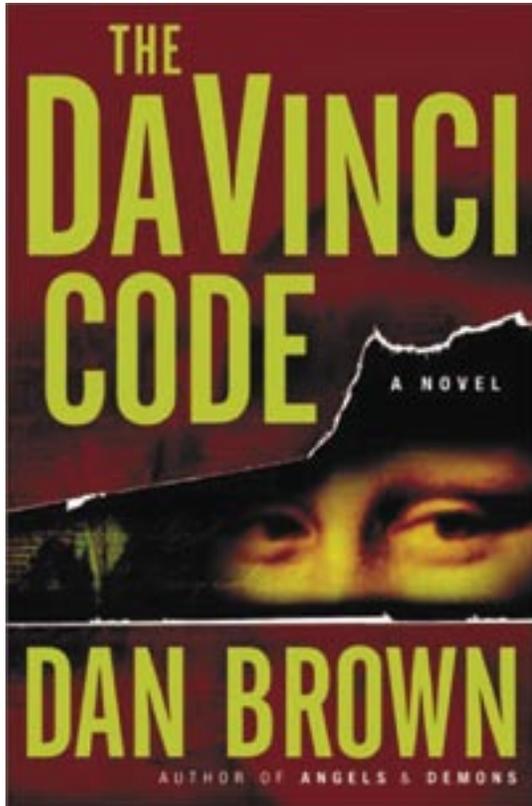
4. 2006 Our Faith *In Action*

CONNECTING FAITH TO CURRENT EVENTS FOR OUR YOUTH

APRIL 2006

The Da Vinci Doubt A doubt can be powerful. The devil used it against Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. He tried to make them doubt that God loved them. It worked. We're paying for it. SEE PAGE 2





The *Da Vinci Code*, written by Dan Brown, may not be as smart a **hoax** as the devil's lie in the garden, but it has confused many people. Now the novel is coming out as a movie. The good thing is that many Christians are uniting in a strategy to respond: **education** on what our faith in Christ is really about. In this lesson we present a few ideas you can use to educate others about some of the *The Da Vinci Code's* mixed-up ideas.

THE CONSPIRACY PLOT

Everyone loves a conspiracy story, and the book immediately captures the reader by opening with a mysterious murder. The clues to this puzzle are hidden in the paintings of the Renaissance artist Leonardo Da Vinci, and are revealed little by little to keep the reader's interest. In the meantime, an explanation unfolds of a secret plot by the Catholic Church to cover up the "true" story of Jesus through murder and deceit.

Ultimately, Brown uses this story to present his idea of the "real Jesus". This Jesus was a prophet, but not God, and was married to Mary Magdalene. He wanted to start a new religion dedicated to appreciating the "**sacred feminine**" in the world, and he intended Mary to head it up.

Brown claims that Jesus never rose from the dead,



Bible Blurbs

"I too have decided, after investigating everything accurately anew, to write it down in an orderly sequence for you, ... so that you may realize the certainty of the teachings you have received."
(Luke 1:3-4)

"Mary of Magdala went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord," and what he told her." (John 20:18)

"Now I am reminding you, brothers, of the Gospel I preached to you... Through it you are also being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you, unless you believed in vain."
(1Corinthians 15: 1-2)

"I am amazed that you are so quickly forsaking the one who called you by the grace of Christ for a different Gospel (not that there is another). But there are some who are disturbing you and wish to pervert the Gospel of Christ.
(Galatians 1:6-7)

and that he could do nothing when Peter stole the power from Mary Magdalene, and forced her to flee. Thus, the apostles built the Church on their own ideas, making up a story about Jesus' divinity and covering up the marriage. Da Vinci was one of the few who passed on Mary's secret through the ages through codes in his paintings.

FACT OR FICTION?

Dan Brown's book has a strong effect, because the opening page of the book claims that all of the descriptions are true. The main characters, Robert Langdon (played by Tom Hanks in the movie) and Dr. Leigh Teabing (played by Sir Ian McKellan), use phrases throughout the book such as "historians have always known ..." and "scholars know ..." to make the reader think that the ideas are the fruit of serious research.

Yet, many of the "facts" are actually disproved by scholars in art, history, architecture and theology.

Some "facts" are so easily disproved that you hardly have to be a scholar at all to find the flaw. For example, the story claims that Jesus does not have a cup (chalice) in Leonardo's painting of the Last Supper. But if you count the chalices in the painting you will see that Jesus does have a cup.

However, the average reader is not going to spend time looking up the details, and Dan Brown banks on this. Brown did use sources for his research, but they are mostly make-believe stories which twist the truth in an inaccurate or **hypothetical** way.

IS JESUS REALLY GOD?

The Da Vinci Code claims that early Christians saw Jesus as only a mortal, but they voted 300 years later to call him God, only for the sake of political unity under Emperor Constantine.

Not true. Look at the Gospels. The Gospels were written between AD 50-100, shortly after the death and resurrection of Jesus (approximately AD 30). They show in many different verses that Christians always believed Christ was the Son of God, equal to God.

One central example is Peter's profession of faith in Jesus: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God," (Mt 16:16) Christ confirms that Peter has understood correctly when he says "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father" (Mt 16:17)

The Council of Nicea was actually called in AD 325 by Constantine in response to Arius, one man who was creating turmoil by proposing his own idea that Jesus was not really equal to God. He had a clever way of phrasing things that confused some people. But he was going against what the Church already believed.

Brown claims that it was a close vote. In fact only two bishops voted for Arius, while at least 218 voted to affirm what Christians had always believed. Close? Check your facts, Mr. Brown.

The fruit of the Council was the “Nicene Creed” which Catholics recite every Sunday, professing that Jesus is “God from God, light from light, true God from true God.” The Council simply **clarified** what the New Testament teaches and the Church always believed. The Council didn’t invent anything.

CAN WE TRUST THE SCRIPTURES?

Another claim that *The DaVinci Code* makes is that Constantine destroyed “thousands” of other reliable texts that show the human Jesus, and that there were 80 other Gospels that showed a different truth about Christ. In other words, our New Testament is not the truth about Christ, but rather someone’s personal opinion in a sea of other opinions.

It is easy to conjecture. But *The DaVinci Code* “scholars” don’t seem to have studied very seriously. Over 200 years before Constantine, Christians were already referring to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as the only reliable ones. They were the ones used in Mass, and they were the ones quoted by the bishops and saints.

One element in the Gospels that inspires trust is their **honesty** about the weakness of the apostles. They show clearly how the apostles abandoned Christ during his suffering. If the apostles were going to fake their authority they would not have said this. Yet the Gospels are honest in telling the story as it really happened.

OTHER GOSPELS?

The other texts that *The DaVinci Code* calls gospels were writings produced by groups that did not believe what the Christians believed or mixed Christian ideas with non-Christian ones. They were **heretical** texts. Many were produced much later than the Gospels. Recently some of these texts have made publicity again, such as the “Gospel of Judas.” They do not show the true Jesus, and they are being used



Pope Quotes

“Jesus yes, Church no”, is totally irreconcilable with the intention of Christ. This individualistically chosen Jesus is an imaginary Jesus. We cannot have Jesus without the reality he created and in which he communicates himself. (Pope Benedict XVI, March 15, 2006)

“The Jesus of the Gospels is quite different, demanding, bold. The Jesus who makes everything okay for everyone is a phantom, a dream, not a real figure. The Jesus of the Gospels is certainly not convenient for us. But it is precisely in this way that he answers the deepest question of our existence...” (Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI), *On the Way to Jesus Christ*, p. 8)

again today to confuse people about Christianity.

MARY MAGDALENE

The DaVinci Code claims that Mary Magdalene was hated by the Church, and was therefore thwarted in her mission to begin a different religion to honor the “sacred feminine”. In fact, the book proposes that we should abandon Christianity and adopt a more **pagan** worship of the creature rather than the Creator.

But it is hard to say that Mary Magdalene is hated by the Church if she is honored as a saint. She has her own feast day. She has inspired **devotion** throughout the centuries. She is mentioned in the Gospels as the first person to see the risen Christ. She is sent to tell the apostles about the resurrection. She has a prominent place. She is not hated.

WAS JESUS MARRIED?

Although he has no real evidence, Brown concludes that Jesus must have been married because Jews and Jewish rabbis had the custom of always marrying.

A real Scripture scholar would be able to name several men in the Bible who did not marry in order to dedicate themselves to God: Jeremiah, John the Baptist, St. Paul. A Scripture scholar would also tell you that around the time of Jesus there was a Jewish group called the Essenes whose members did not get married. **Celibacy** (not getting married) did exist, and gained more popularity throughout the history of Christianity.

It is in the example of Christ that a priest takes the solemn promise of celibacy, to be fully dedicated to God’s work and to serving others as he was.

IS THE CHURCH TRUSTWORTHY?

The DaVinci Code accuses the Catholic Church of being a type of murderous mafia that despises women and sexuality and is only concerned with keeping its power.

It is one thing to accuse a human organization of being corrupt, but in accusing the Church as a whole, Brown is forgetting the millions of martyrs



who gave their lives for others, the history of female leaders and saints, and the status given to the sacrament of **matrimony**. The Church has an amazing history. Becoming familiar with Church history and **doctrine** can inspire a sense of awe at its greatness, and can be a convincing testimony of God's hand working within it.

And it is hard to say that the Church despises women if Mary the mother of Jesus has such a strong role in the Church. She is already present in the Gospels. She had to say "yes" in order for Jesus to become a man. She and Mary Magdalene are among the few brave souls that do not abandon Christ when he is captured and condemned to death. She is treated with tremendous veneration by every Christian generation throughout history.

DECODING DA VINCI

The real-life conspiracy of *The Da Vinci Code* is a plot to challenge Christianity, make some people lose their faith, and confuse many who do not know otherwise.

For those who can decode it, who can pick out the important details and the inaccurate half-truths, it is a chance to **evangelize**. It is a chance to start up a conversation around a hot issue and talk about Christ and his Church. It is a chance to **educate** ourselves so as to educate others. People need to know what the Gospels teach. They need to know about Christ, the real Christ.

We can start by reading the Gospels. We can continue by reading some of the other resources available. We can be especially effective by trying to be like Christ: both bold and humble, loving yet courageous.

He is here to help us. With him on our side, we have nothing to fear.

Catechism Quotes

"The Church holds firmly that the four Gospels, whose historicity she unhesitatingly affirms, faithfully hand on what Jesus, the Son of God, while he lived among men, really did and taught for their eternal salvation, until the day when he was taken up." (n. 126)

"What Christ entrusted to the apostles, they in turn handed on by their preaching and writing, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to all generations, until Christ returns in glory." (n.96)



ST. MARY MAGDALENE:

Contrary to Dan Brown's claims that she is despised, Mary Magdalene is honored as a saint. Her feast day is celebrated on July 22. She was healed of seven demons by Christ, and stayed close to Christ during his crucifixion, when almost all the apostles abandoned him. She was the first one to see Jesus after he rose from the dead and was then sent to tell the the apostles. Tradition has it that she lived with Mary, Jesus' mother, in Ephesus until she died. Centuries later her relics (her bones) were apparently brought to France.

ST. PETER CANISIUS:

(1521-1597) St. Peter lived in a time of controversy. He helped bring back much of southern Germany to Roman Catholicism after the spread of Protestantism He was born into an important family in Holland. While he was doing university studies in Belgium he went on a retreat directed by St. Peter Fabre, a Jesuit priest, and decided to become a Jesuit himself. He gave everything to the poor and dedicated himself totally to his vocation. During his lifetime he traveled constantly, preached many retreats, founded Catholic schools and colleges, participated in many debates with Protestants, and wrote a very large number of books. His most influential book was a Catechism which was very highly read and was reprinted numerous times. He is often called "the Second Apostle of Germany." He was declared a Doctor of the Church in 1925.



Vocabulary

- Celibacy** – Not having sexual relations; usually done in order to dedicate oneself more completely to God and others
- Clarify** – Make more clear and explicit
- Devotion** – Reliance on or invocation of a saint or holy person
- Doctrines** – Official teaching
- Educate** – Teach; instruct; develop the knowledge
- Evangelize** – To teach and spread the good news of Christ to others.
- Heretical** – Religious teaching that is incorrect or opposed to Church doctrine
- Hoax** – Deceit, deception, lie
- Honesty** – Speaking and acting in the truth
- Hypothetical** – Only in theory; make-believe
- Matrimony** – Marriage; sacrament in which a man and a woman give themselves to each other out of love.
- Pagan** – Non-Christian; ungodly
- "Sacred feminine"** – Worship of women as goddesses

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Instructor Resources



LESSON GOALS:

1. Show students the importance of responding to this book and movie, *The Da Vinci Code*
2. Educate students in some of the principle deceptions of the book, and the truths within Catholic teaching: about the divine nature of Jesus Christ, the question of his alleged marriage, the person of Mary Magdalene, the veracity of the Gospels and the trustworthiness of the Church.
3. Motivate students to pursue further reading about the deceptions in *The Da Vinci Code*. Motivate them to seek knowledge about the Catholic Church and general culture, to be serious scholars engaged in seeking the truth.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Encourage students to answer these questions in their own words, building on each other's ideas, drawing from this lesson or their previous knowledge:

1. Where would you find sources of fact, fiction, or something in between? How do you know, for example, if something you read on the internet is fact or fiction?
 - a. First we need to ask ourselves if the author/source is claiming to be fact or fiction. In the case of the book *The Da Vinci Code*, you will find the book in the "fiction" section of libraries and books—although on one of the 1st pages of the book, Dan Brown presents a "facts" page, which itself has untruths. The devil can take a kernel of truth and spin/manipulate it as a tool of deception.
 - b. As for how do we know if something we read- whether it be on the internet, newspaper, etc. is actually true and not a slanted version/half truth, here are several tools to decipher a writing's credibility:
 - i. Is it a trustworthy source? If you don't know for sure yourself, ask someone who you trust and who has in depth knowledge on the topic
 - ii. Cross check the information with other reliable sources
 - iii. If possible, go to original documents/sources (in this case the Bible and Catechism, for example) to find the raw data, or original material-not someone else's reporting/interpretation of the material
 - iv. Don't assume just because you read something, that it is true.
2. How can you say that Jesus is really God?
 - a. He did miracles
 - b. He taught with authority. He claimed to be God.
 - c. He forgave sins, which only God can do.
 - d. He was totally unselfish, dying for us on a cross
 - e. He was holy, not committing any sin
 - f. Death could not defeat him. He rose from the dead. He has power over life and death, which only God has.
3. How do we know that we can trust the

Scriptures?

- a. Because God guarantees their truthfulness through the Church
 - b. Because the Gospels are honest about the failings of the apostles.
 - c. Because the teachings of the Bible, especially the New Testament, help to make us the best human beings possible: more compassionate, unselfish, holy, courageous, centered on God and the important things, generous, etc.
4. What kind of a person was Mary Magdalene, and what kind of relationship did she have to Christ?
- a. Mary Magdalene was cured of seven demons by Christ. After that she followed him wherever he went. (Luke 8: 1-3) She was constantly learning from Christ and she was faithful to him even when he was abandoned by the others. (Matthew 27: 55-61; Mark 14: 40-47; Luke 23: 49-56)
 - b. Some saints thought she might have been the same woman in the Gospels who was caught in adultery (John 8:1-11) or who cleansed Jesus' feet with her tears. (Luke 7:36-50) Some thought she might also be Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha. (Luke 10:38-42) This is possible, but the Gospels don't explicitly say these women were Mary Magdalene, so one is free to think either way. The Christian tradition from the Middle East and from the Orthodox Church does not identify her with the adulteress or the woman who cleansed his feet with her tears.
 - c. Mary Magdalene is called "the apostle to the apostles." She was given the task of telling the apostles about Christ's resurrection before the apostles actually saw the risen Jesus. (Matthew 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-11; Luke 24:1-11; John 20:1-18)
 - d. Her relationship with Christ was one of faith. She believed in him. She loved him in a spiritual way, not a physical way, since she understood that he was holy, the Son of God.
5. How can we really say that Jesus was not married?
- a. Because he was totally dedicated to his Father and to the spiritual good of souls.
 - b. He taught clearly that some people can choose to remain celibate for the sake of God and for dedicating all their heart and soul to save souls. It is clear by his lifestyle that he chose this.
 - c. If he were married, the Gospels would have said this. They tell about the other

people who were close and important to him. They never talk about a spouse because his spouse was the Church.

- d. He needed to be totally open to everyone, so he did not have an exclusive relationship.
6. How do we know that the Church is trustworthy?
- a. Because so many martyrs have given their blood to defend the truth she teaches.
 - b. Because so many saints have given such tremendous examples of charity and holiness
 - c. Because the Church has not been afraid to proclaim the truth even when this has brought her misunderstandings and persecutions.
 - d. Because the Church has preserved its doctrine down through the centuries without changing.

JOURNAL WRITING:

1. Nobody likes to be lied to and to be seen as gullible. Describe a time when someone took advantage of your ignorance, and how you felt afterwards. Or, describe a time when a movie you saw affected your life and the way you thought about things.
2. Imagine that you are in the Gospel scene with Jesus when he asks his Apostles "Who do you say that I am?" Write about who Jesus is for you. Do you know the real person of Jesus? Write at least one way you can get to know him better.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Plan a movie night as an alternative to *The DaVinci Code*. Take a group of friends to see another movie, and go out for pizza to discuss it. (*Over the Hedge* is a good one).
2. Put together a classroom special reserve collection of books in the school library related to these topics: Constantine, the Council of Nicea, Lives of the Saints (with Mary Magdalene, etc.) Offer extra credit for the students who read one of these books and present a short summary report to the class.
3. Invite a visiting speaker to the class to bring a copy of Leonardo DaVinci's painting of "The Last Supper" and to talk about the artistic significance of it. Or, have someone bring the painting in, and present the facts from the USCCB website (below) about the artist and his intentions behind the painting.
4. Establish a weekly time in which students can ask questions about the faith and receive answers. Encourage the students

to bring up the questions that others may have asked them, even if they think that they gave a sufficient response, so that the rest of the class can benefit from knowing the answers. The teacher can invite a guest speaker or the pastor to answer the questions, or correspond by email to other scholars if necessary.

FURTHER FORMATION

From the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 126 "We can distinguish three stages in the formation of the Gospels:

1. The life and teaching of Jesus. the Church holds firmly that the four Gospels, "whose historicity she unhesitatingly affirms, faithfully hand on what Jesus, the Son of God, while he lived among men, really did and taught for their eternal salvation, until the day when he was taken up."99
2. The oral tradition. "For, after the ascension of the Lord, the apostles handed on to their hearers what he had said and done, but with that fuller understanding which they, instructed by the glorious events of Christ and enlightened by the Spirit of truth, now enjoyed."100
3. The written Gospels. "The sacred authors, in writing the four Gospels, selected certain of the many elements which had been handed on, either orally or already in written form; others they synthesized or explained with an eye to the situation of the churches, the while sustaining the form of preaching, but always in such a fashion that they have told us the honest truth about Jesus."101

RESOURCES:

- Amy Welborn,
 - *De-Coding Da Vinci: The Facts Behind the Fiction of the Da Vinci Code*
 - *De-Coding Mary Magdalene: Truth, Legend and Lies*,
 - *The Da Vinci Code Mysteries: What the Movie Doesn't Tell You*all from Our Sunday Visitor Publications.
- Steven Kellmeyer, *Fact and Fiction in the Da Vinci Code*, Bridegroom Press
- Carl Olson and Sandra Miesel, *The Da Vinci Hoax*, Ignatius Press
- Mark Shea and Ted Sri, *The Da Vinci Deception: 100 Questions About the Facts and Fiction of The Da Vinci Code*, Ascension Press. (www.DavinciAntidote.com)
- www.JesusDecoded.com (USCCB website about the book and movie)