

What are the claims made by the popular novel *The Da Vinci Code*?

For two hundred years the primary Western assault on Christianity was the rationalism of the Enlightenment, the claim that traditional religion was simply a set of fairy stories believed by the gullible in the face of growing evidence to the contrary. Because of this critique, until fairly recently it seemed necessary to choose between religious faith and a rather sterile rationalism. But the “counterculture” of the 1960s inevitably discovered “spirituality”, which is now touted even in the business world.

The historical forms of Christianity stand in the way of this new spirituality, however. Creeds require individuals to rise above themselves, to submit to a truth much greater than themselves, to become real disciples. By contrast, contemporary New Age religion is simply the worship of self, or at best the worship of deities the self has created. *The Da Vinci Code* invites people to invent their own history, to replace the Gospel of Jesus Christ with scriptures that cater to contemporary preoccupations like feminism and to convince readers that Christianity is nothing less than a gigantic fraud perpetrated over two thousand years.

The Da Vinci Code challenges beliefs that are central to Christianity: The celibacy and divinity of Jesus, the place of the apostles, and the purpose of the Church. The novel insists that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and had children, that Mary Magdalene—not Peter—was the head apostle, that the Catholic Church has kept these “facts” hidden through force and terror, and that Jesus was, not truly divine, but merely a good man, “deified” by Emperor Constantine in 325 AD.

The Da Vinci Code draws heavily on gnostic themes such as suspicion of tradition, distrust of authority, dislike for dogma and objective statements of faith, and the pitting of the individual against the institution. There is also the promise of secret knowledge, which is one of the reasons for the novel’s success. Readers believe that they are being let in on a secret that has been hidden for centuries—a bloody and damning cover-up by an ancient and powerful institution. This has always been the promise of gnosticism: freedom from authority, insight into reality, and enlightenment that goes beyond normality.

Another key concept embraced by many gnostic groups and an idea that is popular among modern feminists is that of an androgynous God, a deity who is a perfect balance of feminine and masculine. Thus, Jesus would require a female counterpart who would make him complete; in Gnostic writings that woman is Mary Magdalene.

The Da Vinci Code raises questions as to the Divinity of Christ. However, if the first followers of Jesus did not believe he was divine and if they thought that he had not risen again from the dead, why did so many of them willingly die as martyrs? Why would these followers, who are so clearly confused and distraught when Jesus is taken away to be executed, re-emerge a few weeks later and begin boldly proclaiming their belief in their fallen leader? If Jesus had remained in the tomb where he was placed after his death, could the authorities not have shown his body and stopped once and for all the audacious teachings of the suddenly confident Christians?

The novel also asserts that the Catholic Church, alarmed by Mary Magdalene’s position as chief apostle, slandered and defamed her by labeling her a prostitute. Also that the Church dislikes and fears sexuality; that Jesus was a feminist who was intent on creating an egalitarian community free from male authority; that Jesus fulfilled his humanity by being married; and that global peace will be realized only when there is a return to the ancient worship of “the goddess”.

As Francis Cardinal George, archbishop of Chicago, remarked upon reading the novel, “Jesus isn’t God but Mary Magdalene is a goddess? I mean, what does that mean? If he’s is not God why is he married to a goddess?”

In many ways this helps to explain the dislike that many feminists have for the Virgin Mary. She is perceived as weak, docile and submissive, the embodiment of subordination. For feminists Mary Magdalene is far superior to the Mother of Jesus for she is not tied to any notions of order. Hence, for women who are becoming more independent, the model is not Mary but Mary Magdalene.

The modern mind resents motherhood as the proper fulfillment of female sexuality. The absence of sexual experience disqualifies Mary for admiration—and the traditional Jesus as well. The manic enthusiasm for Mary Magdalene as wife or at least sexual partner of Christ requires the dethronement of the Blessed Mother as Queen of Heaven. *Source: All text taken from the book The Da Vinci Hoax by Carl Olson and Sandra Miesel*

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