

A Christian Psychologist Looks at *The Da Vinci Code*

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Understanding the Agenda behind *The Da Vinci Code*

A number of scholarly, thoughtful responses to *The Da Vinci Code* have already been produced by other members of the Christian community. These other responses, though, tend to concentrate on historical and factual errors, and the false conclusions these errors can produce. This response is different. While this response also highlights several historical/factual errors in the text of *The Da Vinci Code*, this response attempts to go to the conceptual and spiritual essence of the book. Instead of focusing on mistakes, and what is obviously distorted and deliberately left out, this response focuses on what is actually being presented and sold in the book. It is the thesis of this review that what is being presented and sold in *The Da Vinci Code* is Wicca – Neo-paganism, modern Witchcraft, “the Wiccan Way.” People need to make up their own minds on this important issue, however. A comparative chart, and numerous other quotations / examples are employed to present the evidence, and make the case.

The Da Vinci Code is not just a novel. If that is all it was or is, there would be no need for the page boldly labeled “FACT” (all capital letters). The FACT page is page 1 in the book, the last printed page before the Prologue, the true beginning of the story. On the FACT page, the author(s) try to convince you that they have done a good job of researching and fairly representing both the Priory of Sion and Opus Dei, and then go on to boldly proclaim: “All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate.” This “novel” is really a deconstructionist, post-modern attempt to re-write history, with a hidden agenda deeply embedded within the deconstructionist effort.

In *The Da Vinci Code* Dan Brown and his wife Blythe (it is a shared project from the start) teach us about “the sacred feminine” and the “chalice” containing the royal “bloodline” of Christ. They do this in the context of pentagram/pentacle embracing, neo-pagan Goddess worship, where males must literally and repeatedly obtain “carnal knowledge” from pagan women – lots of them – in order to experience God. In *The Da Vinci Code* there are problems larger than the historical and factual errors housed in the text. Whether we realize it or not, Dan Brown and his wife Blythe throughout the book are covertly attempting to introduce and convert us to neo-paganism, modern witchcraft, “the Wiccan Way” – or, at least, that is the thesis of this review. Those who read this review with an open mind will likely come to know more about the essence of *The Code* than they really want to know. But, they may also come to understand that such knowledge is intellectually valuable, and practically useful in dealing with the cultural impact of the book and the movie.

The Da Vinci Code: The Wiccan Way?

While serving as a practicing psychologist in a far northern state, I had a few clients who embraced Wicca as a way of life. These were young women in their twenties, training in different local covens, at different times, to become witches. I was surprised they wanted to see me as a psychologist, since I was very open about my Christian beliefs and value system. The agency I worked for was also openly Christian.

When I asked them why they chose to come to me with their mental health needs, each of them replied that they heard that I was a good therapist, could and

would help those who had different beliefs and values. It also helped that my agency was smaller and more private than the other mental health outlets in town. Typically, these young women were struggling with anxiety disorders, with a lingering depression underneath. Usually, they would stay for only few to several sessions, gain some immediate relief from their anxiety and/or depressive symptoms, and then suddenly stop coming – before the obvious difference in values began to more directly challenge their thinking and lifestyles.

While I had limited exposure to these young followers of Wicca, I learned quite a lot about “the Wiccan way” from them. They viewed Wicca as an original, pre-Christian, pagan, nature-based belief system that could and would teach them the ancient magic, or “magick” (their preferred spelling). The philosophy behind their “witchcraft” sometimes focused on gender balance in nature, but more often focused on the role and power of the feminine or “the Goddess” in nature.

These young followers of Wicca, or, “the Wiccan way” told me that they used the pentacle / pentagram (a five-pointed star with a circle around the perimeter) as their symbol, but that they claimed they did not associate this with Satanism or Devil worship. In fact, they said they did not believe in a Satan or Devil, except as the “darker side” of nature and themselves. They also made clear they did not believe in Jesus Christ as a divine being, or in the Christian concept of redemption. None of them (and no one in their covens) believed that sexual intercourse should be confined to marriage, since it was part of the “creative force” they wanted to learn to harness and “channel.”

Over the past two and a half years three of my grown sons and several of their college-aged friends have read Dan Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code*, as have millions of other readers. When some of them started to quote this well-written but rather bizarre conspiracy novel *as fact*, I knew I needed to read it. As I did, the similarities between the underlying thought stream in the novel and the Wiccan beliefs that I had encountered in therapy sessions several years before began to leap out at me. By the time I was about a third of the way through the book, it was clear to me that this work of fiction is essentially an apologetic and promo piece for “the Wiccan Way,” complete with a Wiccan interpretation of the New Testament and early Christian history. Reading the rest of the book only reinforced these beliefs. Wicca is just one form of Neo-Paganism. But, it is thoroughly oriented toward “the sacred feminine,” and followers of Wicca claim all of ancient/medieval paganism that orients toward the feminine as their own.

I do not expect readers to simply take my word for it, however. Below is chart detailing Wiccan beliefs (from some of their official sources), and quotations from Dan Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code*. Note that I have quoted extended passages from both the followers of Wicca and from *The Da Vinci Code* -- whole

paragraphs, and usually multiple paragraphs. (I would have included more, but I do not want to infringe on anyone's intellectual property rights, or be accused of any copyright violations.) I do not appreciate it when people take phrases or single sentences out of context, in an effort to make their point, so I have tried to avoid doing that here. Compare both the vocabulary and concepts in the five sections of the chart, and come to your own conclusion about the similarity of Wiccan Beliefs and the ideology/agenda behind *The Da Vinci Code*. Don't be put off by the relatively long Wicca section or the relatively short *Da Vinci* section offered under the first point. The proportions will more than balance out and hopefully make sense by the end of the chart.

After presenting the chart, I will share a few thoughts about what I think may have motivated Dan Brown (and his wife, Blythe) to write this novel this way. According to the ABC Writers Network: "Dan's wife Blythe — an art historian and painter — collaborates on his research and accompanies him on his frequent research trips, their latest to Paris, where they spent time in the Louvre for his thriller, *The Da Vinci Code*."

Some interesting facts about and features of *The Da Vinci Code* have recently emerged from the copyright infringement lawsuit in England, brought by the authors of *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*, published in 1982. Below are excerpts from the AP article released on 03/13/2006. Note Dan Brown's description of Blythe's involvement:

'Da Vinci Code' Author Brown Takes Stand

By JILL LAWLESS, Associated Press, 03/13/2006

Almost three years to the day that "The Da Vinci Code" was first published, American author Dan Brown found himself on a witness stand in courtroom 61 of London's High Court on Monday, denying accusations he copied from others to produce his huge best-seller.

Authors Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh are suing "Da Vinci Code" publisher Random House for copyright infringement, claiming Brown "appropriated the architecture" of their 1982 nonfiction book "The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail."

Both books explore theories — dismissed by theologians but embraced by millions of readers — that Jesus married Mary Magdalene, the couple had a child and the bloodline survives.

If the writers succeed in securing an injunction to bar the use of their material, they could hold up the scheduled May 19 release of "The Da Vinci Code" film starring Tom Hanks and Ian McKellen.

With his book an international sensation, Brown has rarely spoken to the media over the past couple of years and has made few public appearances, spending much of his time in his rural New Hampshire home, working on a new novel...

In a witness statement released Monday as Brown took the stand, the writer said it was "absurd to suggest that I have organized and presented my novel in accordance with the same general principles" as the earlier book.

Responding to questions from the plaintiffs' attorney, Brown said much of the research for the book was done by his wife, Blythe.

"She was deeply passionate about the sacred feminine," Brown said.

The Da Vinci Code: The Wiccan Way?

WICCA: Wicca as Pre-Christian Paganism

[http://www.magicwicca.com/wicca/wiccan_beliefs.html]

The 13 Wiccan Principles

The following set of thirteen principles was adopted by the Council of American Witches, in April, 1974.

1: We practice rites to attune ourselves with the natural rhythm of life forces marked by the phases of the Moon and the seasonal Quarters and Cross Quarters.

2: We recognize that our intelligence gives us a unique responsibility toward our environment. We seek to live in harmony with Nature, in ecological balance offering fulfillment and consciousness within an evolutionary concept.

3: We acknowledge a depth of power far greater than that apparent to the average person. Because it is far greater than ordinary it is sometimes called supernatural, but we see it as lying within that which is naturally potential to all.

4: We conceive of the Creative Power in the universe as manifesting through polarity ~ as masculine and feminine ~ and that this same Creative Power lies in all people, and functions through the interaction of the masculine and feminine. We value neither above the other, knowing each to be supportive to each other. We value sex as pleasure, as the symbol and embodiment of life, and as one of the sources of energies used in magickal practice and religious worship. . . .

[Principles 5 and 6 have to do with "magickal exercises" of American witches and their rejection of any "authoritarian hierarchy."]

7: We see religion, magick, and wisdom in living as being united in the way one views the world and lives within it ~ a worldview and philosophy of life which we identify as Witchcraft ~ The Wiccan Way.

8: Calling oneself "Witch" does not make a Witch, but neither does heredity itself, not the collecting of titles, degrees, and initiations. A Witch seeks to control the forces within her/himself that make life possible in order to live wisely and well without harm to others and in harmony with Nature. . . .

[Principles 9 and 10 have to do with the "development of consciousness," and their belief that Christianity has "sought to deny freedom to others."]

11: As American {Or World-Wide!} Witches, we are not threatened by debates on the history of the Craft, the origins of various terms, the legitimacy of various aspects of different traditions. We are concerned with our present and our future.

12: We do not accept the concept of absolute evil, nor do we worship any entity known as Satan or the Devil, as defined by the Christian tradition. We do not seek power through the sufferings of others, nor accept that personal benefit can be derived only by denial to another.

13: We believe that we should seek within Nature that which is contributory to our health and well-being

History

Wicca is a neo-pagan religion based on the pre-Christian traditions of England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. Its origins can be traced even further back to Paleolithic peoples who worshipped a Hunter God and a Fertility Goddess. Cave paintings found in France (and dated at 30,000 years old) depict a man with the head of a stag, and a woman with a swollen, pregnant belly. They stand in a circle with eleven mortals. These archetypes of the divine are worshipped by Wiccans to this very day. By these standards, the religion that is now called Wicca, is perhaps the oldest religion in the world.

THE DA VINCI CODE: Description and Defense of Pre-Christian Paganism

From Chapter 6: Nowadays, the term *pagan* had become almost synonymous with devil worship – a gross misconception. The word's roots actually reached back to the Latin *paganus*, meaning country-dwellers. "Pagans" were literally unindoctrinated country-folk who clung to the old, rural religions of Nature worship. In fact, so strong was the Church's fear of those who lived in the rural *villes*, that the once innocuous word for "villager" – *vilain* – came to mean a wicked soul.

From Chapter 28: . . . SO DARK THE CON OF MAN . . . "Sophie," Langdon said, "the Priory's tradition of perpetuating goddess worship is based on a belief that powerful men in the early Christian church 'conned' the world by propagating lies that devalued the female and tipped the scales in favor of the masculine." . . . "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."

WICCA: The Pentacle / Pentagram in Wicca / Witchcraft

The Witches Pentacle [<http://www.witchvox.com/basics/pentacle.html>]

by Sharynne NicMacha

The Pentacle, the symbol of Witchcraft, is a bold and fascinating statement about our place in the Universe. The pentagram represents an ancient concept that can be found in philosophical thought in both East and West. Although over 8,000 years old, the image of the pentagram is applicable in our modern world. The pentagram tells us that we have the ability to bring Spirit to Earth; this applies to every area of practical day-to-day living, as well as spiritual thought. The ability of bringing Spirit to Earth is what makes us whole ...

In the tale of Adam and Eve, the apple signified hidden knowledge which was forbidden to human kind The apple signified that which we should not attempt to know, and many attempts over the centuries to obtain knowledge of the Universe (and therefore, ourselves) were suppressed. The pentagram in its modern guise as the pentacle was also a target of this subjugation.

For modern-day Pagans, the Pentacle contains many wonderful layers of symbolism. The five points symbolize the four directions with the fifth point as the sanctity of Spirit, within and without. The circle around the star symbolizes unity and wholeness. It represents the quest for Divine Knowledge, a concept which is ancient in origin and universal in scope from the earliest written ritual texts in Babylonia, to the Celts, to the Native American traditions. Similar to other figures which are made of a single unbroken line, this symbol is used to mark off magical enclosures or ritual areas, especially when used for invocation of deities or spirit.

The pentagram is one of the most powerful and popular symbols used by many Neo-Pagans, including those involved in Wicca and Ceremonial Magic. In working magic, Pagans may draw the shape of the pentagram in the air with the athame, or sacred blade, sometimes in the four directions as part of the ritual. A physical pentacle in the form of a flat disc is often the a main feature of the altar and is a widely used ritual tool. The symbol is used to decorate magickal tools or items such as a chalice, cauldron, or the handle of the athame itself. For some it represents feminine energy relating to the Goddess and may be used to bind elemental spirits of the earth as well as to hold consecrated objects such as herbs, amulets and crystals. The spoken or chanted text of a spell or invocation may be repeated five times to help insure its effectiveness. (3, 5, 7, 9 and 13 being some of the most commonly used repetitions in this context). The pentacle is worn both ornamentally and symbolically by many Pagans for protection and to signify that they are involved in the world of magick and divine wisdom.

THE DA VINCI CODE: Description and Defense of the Pentacle / Pentagram in the text

From Chapter 6: Just below Saunier's breastbone, a bloody smear marked the spot where the bullet had pierced his flesh. The wound had bled surprisingly little, leaving only a small pool of blackened blood.

Saunier's left index finger was also bloody, apparently having been dipped into the wound to create the most unsettling aspect of his own macabre deathbed; using his own blood as ink, and employing his own naked abdomen as a canvas, Saunier had drawn a simple symbol on his flesh—five straight lines that intersected to form a five-pointed star.

The pentacle . . .

It's a pentacle," Langdon offered, his voice feeling hollow in the huge space. "One of the oldest symbols on earth. Used over four thousand years before Christ."

"And what does it mean?" . . .

[Here Langdon explains that the same symbols can have different meanings to different people groups.]

"Symbols carry different meanings in different settings," Langdon said. "Primarily, the pentacle is a pagan religious symbol."

Fache nodded. "Devil worship."

"No" Langdon corrected; immediately realizing his choice of vocabulary should have been clearer . .

"The pentacle," Langdon clarified, "is a pre-Christian symbol that relates to Nature worship. The ancients envisioned their world in two halves — masculine and feminine. Their gods and goddesses worked to keep a balance of power. Yin and yang. When male and female were balanced, there was harmony in the world. When they were unbalanced, there was chaos." Langdon motioned to Sauniere's stomach. "This pentacle is representative of the *female* half of all things — a concept religious historians call the 'sacred feminine' or the 'divine goddess.' Sauniere, of all people, would know this."

"Sauniere drew a *goddess* symbol on his stomach?"

Langdon had to admit, it seemed odd. "In its most specific interpretation, the pentacle symbolizes Venus — the goddess of female sexual love and beauty."

Fache eyed the naked man, and grunted.

"Early religion was based on the divine order of Nature. The goddess Venus and the planet Venus were one and the same. The goddess had a place in the nighttime sky and was known by many names — Venus, the Eastern Star, Ishtar, Astarte — all of them powerful female concepts with ties to Nature and Mother Earth." . . .

[Here Langdon talks about the appreciation ancient astronomers had of the planet Venus.]

"Mr. Langdon," Fache said abruptly. "Obviously, the pentacle must also relate to the devil. Your American horror movies make that point clearly."

Langdon frowned. *Thank you, Hollywood.* The five-pointed star was now a virtual cliché in Satanic serial killer movies, usually scrawled on the wall of some Satanist's apartment along with other alleged demonic symbology. Langdon was always frustrated when he saw the symbol in this context; the pentacle's true origins were actually quite godly.

"I assure you," Langdon said, "despite what you see in the movies, the pentacle's demonic interpretation is historically inaccurate. The original feminine meaning is correct, but the symbolism of the pentacle has been distorted over the millennia. In this case, through bloodshed."

"I'm not sure I follow."

Langdon glanced at Fache's crucifix, uncertain how to phrase his next point. "The Church, sir. Symbols are very resilient, but the pentacle was altered by the early Roman Catholic Church. As part of the Vatican's campaign to eradicate pagan religions and convert the masses to Christianity, the Church launched a smear campaign against the pagan gods and goddesses, recasting their divine symbols as evil."

WICCA: "The Goddess" / "the sacred feminine"

[http://www.magicwicca.com/wicca/wiccan_beliefs.html]

The following is not universally accepted by all Wiccans and Pagans, but as a general rule, these are representative of the Wiccan belief system. This list was borrowed from *Our Lady of the Woods*, Copyright 1983 . . .

1. The divine Spirit is present in all creatures and things: people, animals, plants, stones...
2. The ultimate creative force manifests in both feminine and masculine modes; therefore it is often symbolized as the Goddess and The God.
3. In some covens, both are celebrated equally. In others, The Goddess is given precedence or even celebrated without reference to the God.
4. All Goddesses and Gods are aspects of The Goddess and The God. The aspects most popular in Wicca are the Triple Goddess of the Moon (Maiden, Mother and Crone) and the Horned God of death and rebirth. ...

THE DA VINCI CODE: The Sacred Feminine and Wicca in the text

From Chapter 4: "I was looking forward to learning his thoughts on the topic."

"I see. And what is the topic?"

Langdon hesitated, uncertain exactly how to put it. "Essentially, the manuscript is about the iconography of Goddess worship -- the concept of female sanctity and the art and symbols associated with it."

Fache ran a meaty hand across his hair. "And Saunière was knowledgeable about this?"

"Nobody more so."

"I see."

Langdon sensed Fache did not see at all.

Jacques Saunière was considered the premiere goddess iconographer on earth. Not only did Saunière have a personal passion for relics relating to fertility, goddess cults, Wicca, and the sacred feminine, but during his twenty year tenure as curator, Saunière had helped the Louvre amass the largest collection of Goddess art on earth - labrys axes from the priestesses' oldest Greek shrine in Delphi, gold caducei wands, hundreds of Tjet ankhs resembling small standing angels, Sistrum rattles used in ancient Egypt to dispel evil spirits, and an astonishing array of statues depicting Horus being nursed by the goddess Isis.

WICCA: Jesus Christ in Wicca

[http://www.magicwicca.com/wicca/wiccan_beliefs.html]

"The concepts of original sin, sacrifice, redemption, confession, the divinity of Jesus, sinfulness of sex, Judgment, Heaven and Hell, denigration of women, bodily resurrection, and the Bible as divine revelation are not part of Wicca.

Neither are Satanism, the Black Mass, desecration of cemeteries, the sacrifice of animals, etc."

THE DA VINCI CODE: Jesus Christ in *The Da Vinci Code*

From Chapter 55: "I thought Constantine was a Christian," Sophie said.

"Hardly," Teabing scoffed. "He was a lifelong pagan who was baptized on his deathbed, too weak to protest. In Constantine's day, Rome's official religion was sun worship—the cult of *Sol Invictus*, or the Invincible Sun—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 A.D., 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. By fusing pagan symbols, dates, and rituals into the growing Christian tradition, he created a kind of hybrid religion that was acceptable to both parties." . . .

[Here Sir Teabing and Professor Langdon explain several of the objects, rituals, and holy days that were absorbed into Christianity from Paganism.]

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

"Indeed," Teabing said. "Stay with me. During this fusion of religions, Constantine needed to strengthen the new Christian tradition, and held a famous ecumenical gathering known as the Council of Nicaea."

Sophie had heard of it only insofar 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. 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?"

"Right," Teabing said. "Jesus' establishment as 'the Son of God' was officially proposed and voted on by the Council of Nicaea."

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

"A relatively close vote at that," Teabing added. "Nonetheless, establishing Christ's divinity was critical to the further unification of the Roman empire and to the new Vatican power base. By officially endorsing Jesus as the Son of God, Constantine turned Jesus into a deity who existed beyond the scope of the human world, an entity whose power was unchallengeable. This not only precluded further pagan challenges to Christianity, but now the followers of Christ were able to redeem themselves *only* via the established sacred channel—the Roman Catholic Church."

Sophie glanced at Langdon, and he gave her a soft nod of concurrence.

"It was all about power," Teabing continued. "Christ as Messiah was critical to the functioning of Church and state. Many scholars claim that the early Church literally *stole* Jesus from His original followers, hijacking His human message, shrouding it in an impenetrable cloak of divinity, and using it to expand their own power. I've written several books on the topic."

"And I assume devout Christians send you hate mail on a daily basis?"

WICCA: The Wiccan View of Sex

[<http://www.magicwicca.com/wicca/principals.html>]

We conceive of the Creative Power in the universe as manifesting through polarity ~ as masculine and feminine ~ and that this same Creative Power lies in all people, and functions through the interaction of the masculine and feminine. We value neither above the other, knowing each to be supportive to each other. We value sex as pleasure, as the symbol and embodiment of life, and as one of the sources of energies used in magickal practice and religious worship . . .

[<http://www.magicwicca.com/wicca/definition.html>]

Sin. In Wicca, we do not have a specific concept of sin. There is no heaven or hell that souls will go to based on their worldly actions. Wrong-doing is governed and determined by the individual conscience. With the belief in the Law of Return, one's actions will determine one's future. The individual is therefore responsible for his or her own fate, based on what he or she chooses to do internally and externally in the world . . . The only law that the Ten Commandments express that is not covered by the Wiccan Law is that of marriage and adultery. In Wicca, love itself is sanctified, with or without government authorization. As long as two individuals share a sincere bond of love that does not harm either party, it does not matter if they are legally joined, if they are heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, or interracial.

THE DA VINCI CODE: The View of Sex Presented in *The Da Vinci Code*

From Chapter 74 . . . Langdon felt uncertain how to proceed. "The rift between you. The reason you haven't spoken to him in ten years. I think maybe he was hoping I could somehow make that right by explaining what drove you apart."

Sophie squirmed in her seat. "I haven't told you what drove us apart."

Langdon eyed her carefully. "You witnessed a sex rite. Didn't you?" . . .

"Were both men and women present?"

After a beat, she nodded.

"Dressed in white and black?"

She wiped her eyes and then nodded, seeming to open up a little. "The women were in white gossamer gowns . . . with golden shoes. They held golden orbs. The men wore black tunics and black shoes." . . .

It's called Hieros Gamos," he said softly. "It dates back more than two thousand years. Egyptian priests and priestesses performed it regularly to celebrate the reproductive power of the female." He paused, leaning toward her. "And if you witnessed Hieros Gamos without being properly prepared to understand its meaning, I imagine it would be pretty shocking."

Sophie said nothing.

"Hieros Gamos is Greek," he continued. "It means sacred marriage."

"The ritual I saw was no marriage."

"Marriage as in union, Sophie."

"You mean as in sex."

"No."

"No?" she said, her olive eyes testing him.

Langdon backpedaled. "Well. . . yes, in a manner of speaking, but not as we understand it today." He explained that although what she saw probably looked like a sex ritual, 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. Since the days of Isis, sex rites had been considered man's only bridge from earth to heaven. "By communing with woman," Langdon said, "man could achieve a climactic instant when his mind went totally blank and he could see God."

Sophie looked skeptical. "Orgasm as prayer?"

Langdon gave a noncommittal shrug, although Sophie was essentially correct. Physiologically speaking, the male climax was accompanied by a split second entirely devoid of thought. A brief mental vacuum. A moment of clarity during which God could be glimpsed. Meditation gurus achieved similar states of thoughtlessness without sex and often described Nirvana as a never-ending spiritual orgasm. . . .

The Hieros Gamos ritual is not a perversion. It's a deeply sacrosanct ceremony." . . .

"For the early Church," Langdon explained in a soft voice, "mankind's use of sex to commune directly with God posed a serious threat to the Catholic power base. It left the Church out of the loop, undermining their self-proclaimed status as the sole conduit to God. For obvious reasons, they worked hard to demonize sex and recast it as a disgusting and sinful act. Other major religions did the same."

[Back in Langdon's college class, a similar description/discussion prompts this student question] . . .

“Professor Langdon?” A male student in back raised his hand, sounding hopeful. “Are you saying that instead of going to chapel, we should have more sex?”

Langdon chuckled, not about to take the bait. From what he'd heard about Harvard parties, these kids were having more than enough sex. “Gentlemen,” he said, knowing he was on tender ground, “might I offer a suggestion for all of you. Without being so bold as to condone premarital sex, and without being so naive as to think you're all chaste angels, I will give you this bit of advice about your sex lives.”

All the men in the audience leaned forward, listening intently.

“The next time you find yourself with a woman, look in your heart and see if you cannot approach sex as a mystical, spiritual act. Challenge yourself to find that spark of divinity that man can only achieve through union with the sacred feminine.”

The women smiled knowingly, nodding.

The men exchanged dubious giggles and off-color jokes.

Langdon sighed. College men were still boys.

Everyone needs to draw his or her own conclusions about the parallel belief systems above. Personally, I think the Browns have done a masterful job of encoding their Wiccan beliefs. Talk about hiding your secret in plain sight! The Browns lay out their alternative to Catholicism and Christianity, the Wiccan belief and value system, clearly and right away, but they do it in way that makes you think you are going to learn some fascinating “insider information” about Catholicism and Christianity, instead of actually learning about Witchcraft (the Wiccan way), and the Wiccan interpretation of the New Testament and early Christian history.

Harvard professor Robert Langdon, the story's main character, has just arrived in France to discuss with the Louvre's Curator, Jacques Sauniere, certain ancient symbols – ancient symbols related to goddess worship, Wicca, and “the sacred feminine.” A member of the ancient secret society, the Priory of Sion, Jacques Sauniere is seen as the world's leading expert on Goddess worship and all matters pertaining to “the sacred feminine.” On his very first night back in Paris, Langdon is awakened in the middle of the night by a police commissioner telling him Jacques Sauniere has just been murdered – a murder he (Langdon) will falsely be suspected of committing.

The Browns take the third-person-omniscient literary point-of-view in telling their story (seeing all the actions and all the thoughts of all the characters, all the

time – a most interesting literary point-of-view for a couple who seems to struggle with the concept of the omniscient Judeo-Christian God). Partially because they take this third-person-omniscient point-of-view, we know “who done it” right away. The compelling mystery in *The Da Vinci Code* is not “who done it?,” but rather, “why did he (they) do it?”

From the beginning we know that it is the albino monk, Silas, a member of the ultra-conservative Roman Catholic organization, Opus Dei, who has murdered Curator Sauniere – with the *apparent* consent and blessing of the Spanish Bishop, Manuel Aringarosa,. Bishop Aringarosa serves as president-general of Opus Dei in New York City. As the story unfolds, we are led to believe that Silas has murdered the Louvre’s Curator, Sauniere, because he might expose dangerous, ancient secrets – dangerous, ancient secrets about Jesus and Mary Magdalene known almost exclusively by members of the Priory of Sion. Up to the moment of his death, Curator Sauniere secretly serves as not only a member, but the current Grand Master of the Priory of Sion. If widely known and accepted, the content of the *Priory’s secrets* could undermine the Roman Catholic Church, and for that matter, all of Christianity.

In the story, there is also a mysterious “Teacher” in the background, who is pulling strings, manipulating people and events. We do not find out who he is, and all the people he has directly and indirectly manipulated and/or murdered, until the story is almost over. The “Teacher” is an aging former British Royal Historian and Knight of the Empire, Sir Leigh Teabing. Teabing is living on inherited wealth just outside of Paris.

Those who write about “the Browns” as a couple write that Dan Brown is the consummate technician, the somewhat retiring, but gifted wordsmith, while his wife, Blythe, is the feminist art historian, and perhaps the stronger personality. In this novel, it appears that he provided the engaging frame of the story, while she supplied much of the essential content.

They both seem driven by a clear hatred of the Roman Catholic Church, and they find a lot of company in contemporary culture. Some of this is understandable, because the Roman Catholic Church is full of sinful, flawed human beings -- just like all organized churches, and for that matter, all other enduring corporations and social organizations. These sinful, flawed people may have -- by the grace of God -- performed millions of acts of kindness, and performed incredibly helpful and wonderful things through the centuries. But, certainly, they sometimes do evil things, too. The Roman Catholic Church has done many evil, truly reprehensible things over the decades and centuries, including recently, the cover-up and otherwise inadequate response related to the widespread sexual abuse of children by Catholic priests.

This hatred of the Roman Catholic Church, widespread in contemporary culture, particularly among the liberal elite in the U.S. and Western Europe, helps propel sales of this book. Members of the liberal elite, of course, not only hate the Roman Catholic Church for its very real sins and failures, but also because it directly challenges their greed, promiscuity, bisexuality, and their sacred commitment to abortion-on-demand. The Browns should donate two thirds of their profits to the Roman Catholic Church, since the Roman Catholic Church is the real and necessary antagonist, the “Evil Empire” in this story. Without some of the more obvious sins and failures of the Roman Catholic Church piled on top of its multi-layered bureaucracy, and legendary secrecy, the whole conspiracy theory side of the book would never have gained traction. It is the conspiracy theory thread in the story that provides the intrigue, and ultimately holds the story together.

But, the Browns are not content to just bash the Roman Catholic Church, they have broadened out their attack onto all of Christendom. They attack the divinity of Christ, the veracity of the Gospels and the Epistles, and the work of the early church fathers who guided Christianity long before there was any “Vatican” or “Roman Catholic Church” as we know it today.

And, they do all this in a most ingenious, yet disingenuous way. They label their work a “novel,” because they know their content could not possibly stand up to a serious scholarly review. But, they want you to believe that the essential content is “accurate” – like the content of a history text or a newspaper article.

The “Prologue” is the real beginning of the story. This is where Curator Sauniere is shot and killed by Silas, the albino monk. We are told right away that Silas is a faithful member of Opus Dei. On the page right before the “Prologue,” Blythe and Dan Brown have a page prominently and boldly labeled “FACT” (all capital letters). On this page they describe some of their sources of information concerning the Priory of Sion and Opus Dei, the two opposing organizations that figure so prominently in their story, immediately followed by this amazing statement: “All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate.”

“All – accurate.” Really! I didn’t know such absolute accuracy/perfection existed on planet Earth! The Browns clearly want to have it “both ways” – i.e. – they claim the content of their book actually and accurately describes artwork, documents, secret societies (and, by implication, *the historical events* surrounding the artwork, documents, and secret societies), and yet, maybe it doesn’t do all that, because the book is after all just a novel. Thus (wink, wink), there would be

no point to mounting a serious and probing scholarly review of the content. Well, Blythe and Dan, which is it?

The Browns really can't ride down both sides of the street, and go opposite directions, at the same time. As much as they would like to, they really can't have it both ways. Either this book provides actual and "accurate" descriptions of artwork, documents, secret societies, and historical events, or it is just another bizarre fantasy novel (one more wild conspiracy theory) served up as pure amusement / mindless entertainment in a culture already saturated by such dribble and babble. Which is it, Blythe and Dan, or should I say, Witch – is it?

To return to the title of this critique: the Browns are not content to just bash the Catholic Church and the whole of Christendom in their book. They (in capsule form) give us their chosen and supposedly better alternative: Wicca. They not only want to "free" us from Catholicism and Christianity, they want us, like themselves, to embrace Witchcraft, the Wiccan way, the pre-Christian paganism that consistently orients toward "the sacred feminine."

To help us make the switch from Christianity to Wicca, they serve up for us something like a Wiccan interpretation of the New Testament and early Christian history, complete with a sexual relationship between Mary Magdalene and Jesus, and the daughter they produce together. Mary Magdalene, according the Browns, is pregnant with their daughter ("Sarah") at the time of the crucifixion. After Jesus' unfortunate and essentially meaningless death, Mary takes this daughter to live with her in southern France. Mary Magdalene, of course, is herself the *Sangreal*, the "Holy Grail," the *chalice* containing the royal *bloodline* of Christ. She is the very embodiment of the "sacred feminine," and thus say the Browns, the end-point of the eternal quest.

These are the among the ancient and most dangerous "secrets" the Priory of Sion attempts to harbor — and Opus Dei tries desperately to hunt down and destroy throughout the story – to the point that some of its members are willing to commit murder. After all, write the Browns, Pope Clement V had the Knights Templar (knights of the Priory of Sion) rounded up, tortured, and slaughtered in an attempt to suppress and control these same secrets on Friday, October 13, 1307. This is why we still think of Friday the 13th as an "unlucky" day. But, the ancient secrets persist, and the battle to control them rages on.

According to the story the Browns tell, early Christians did not consider Jesus to be divine until the Nicene Council in 325 AD, when the Emperor Constantine engineered and demanded this change for political purposes. Any knowledge of the former (Christ as mortal prophet) understanding of early Christianity is then viciously suppressed by the new state-sponsored church, which

the Browns, immediately after the Council at Nicaea, call “the Vatican.” The fact that the four early, original gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John *all* give us a picture of Jesus Christ as Lord (the divine Son of Man / Son of God) does not matter to the Browns, because, according to them, there are “thousands of ancient documents” that provide “scientific evidence” that the New Testament is “false testimony.” (Ch. 82) Remember that the Browns have already told us that as a matter of “fact” that “all” descriptions of ancient documents given in their novel are “accurate.”

Wow! Talk about over-reaching! It is just so kind of the Browns to offer up their revisionist history, their wild re-interpretation of all of Western history for us, without meaningful verification. Several wild claims, backed up by a few filtered and enhanced quotations drawn from fragments of the Gnostic Gospels don’t serve as very compelling evidence. And, make no mistake about it, this is the core of their “evidence” – a couple of filtered and enhanced quotations from the Gnostic Gospels. This is the only *primary* evidence the Browns put forward. Their other “evidence” is mostly *secondary* in nature (interpretations of interpretations).

Let’s take a close look at the quality of their *primary* “evidence.”

Most scholars of ancient literature accept that the many Gnostic Gospels found at Nag Hammadi in northern Egypt in 1945 were written a century (or two or three) *after* the Gospels of New Testament. The texts of the library can be viewed online. [<http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/nhl.html>] This small library, this collection of texts, contains the “Gospel of Philip,” briefly quoted as *proof* that Mary Magdalene was “married” to Jesus. The Browns quote the Gospel of Philip *in a filtered and enhanced way* to try to make their point. Below are two selections -- first, the manipulated “quotation” from the Gospel of Phillip, as it appears in the Browns’ book, and then, the actual section of the Gospel of Philip from which the Browns are drawing their material. The actual material from the Gnostic text includes the first sentence in the paragraph, a rather bizarre, typically Gnostic sentence, indicating that Mary Magdalene is “the mother of the angels.”

The Browns “quotation” from the Gospel of Phillip in ***The Da Vinci Code***:

And the companion of the Saviour 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?"

Actual text from the Gnostic ***Gospel of Philip***:

As for the Wisdom who is called "the barren," she is the mother of the angels. And the companion of the . . . Mary Magdalene . . . loved her more than all the disciples, and used to

kiss her often on her mouth. The rest of the disciples . . . They said to him "Why do you love her more than all of us?"

Apparently, keeping sentences in context (even inside the same paragraph), and declaring instances of word-insertion, are not part of the "all – accurate" description of documents the Browns promised us back on their "FACT" page.

Another Gnostic Gospel, The Gospel of Mary (Magdalene), is also briefly quoted by the Browns, again in Chapter 58, to supposedly show that Mary Magdalene wrote out her own intimate record of the life of Jesus. According to the Browns, while Mary Magdalene had her own memories and written record of the ministry of Jesus, she had to contend with the jealousy of Peter and his attempts to suppress her feminine voice. In their quest to make their point, the Browns leave out several phrases in their “quotation” of the text from the Gospel of Mary, a whole verse at one point, and change a word or two along the way.

Yet, the more serious problem with the Browns’ thesis that Mary Magdalene wrote a whole, worthy, reliable gospel of her own is that there is a whole lot *less* to the Gospel of Mary than one might think. The whole Gospel of Mary as it exists today consists of only several paragraphs of text fragments -- 1147 words, total (not including chapter breaks or verse numbers). In the text, the voice that is supposed to be Mary Magdalene's tells of odd metaphysical musings about the nature of matter (earthly substance), supposedly attributed to Jesus. Mary Magdalene then encourages the disciples to overcome their fears, and talks in typically Gnostic fashion about being released from the earth and bodily existence. This is followed by her speaking of achieving “spiritual rest in silence” for an “aeon” (similar to the Hindu/Buddhist concept of Nirvana). Andrew then says, “I at least do not believe that the Savior said this. For certainly these teachings are strange ideas.” Peter’s supposed jealousy and sexism consists of him asking Mary Magdalene why Jesus would reveal this to her, a woman, and not to them. This leads in the text to a rebuke of Peter by Levi (Matthew), a rebuke Peter and the disciples apparently accept as legitimate. This then frees them all to go out and preach. But, that’s it – no call of the disciples, no parables in Galilee, no healing of the blind, the lame, the spirituality disturbed or weak, no dialog with religious leaders in the synagogues or Temple, no celebrated entry into Jerusalem, no Last Supper, no Garden of Gethsemane, no crucifixion, no resurrection. The very limited content in the text fragments which compose the Gnostic Gospel of Mary (Magdalene) cannot legitimately be considered an alternative gospel. The Gospel of Mary (Magdalene) tells us *almost nothing* about the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

"The Gospel of Mary" was acquired by a German scholar in Cairo, Egypt, in 1896. All website protests aside, this document – from the beginning – must not have been considered a “gospel” of any great significance, because it was not even

completely translated and published until almost 60 years later, in 1955. Scholars believed then (and still do) that its date of origin is roughly equivalent to the Nag Hammadi documents -- *at the earliest*. Many date it much later. Like the Gospel of Philip, the content of the Gospel of Mary can be read and studied online, courtesy of the Gnostic Society. [<http://www.gnosis.org/library/marygosp.htm>]

In the second and third centuries, early Christians viewed Gnostic manuscripts and teachers as presenting a very different understanding of Jesus Christ, and proclaiming a very different message and gospel from what they found in their oral tradition and the Gospels of the New Testament. Thus, readings from the Gnostic Gospels are *not* included in early records of Christian worship, some of these worship records dating from the *second century*. The Gnostics tried to hijack the message in the second and third centuries, but the Church, generally speaking, would have none of it.

[<http://www.catholicherald.com/saunders/03ws/ws031023.htm>]

The Church's turning away from Gnosticism / rejection of Gnosticism was almost complete well before the birth and reign of Constantine, and the Council he called together in 325 AD. The Council (composed of 318 bishops meeting at Nicaea in August of 325 AD) was specifically called together to deal with one of the last vestiges of the Gnostic heresy – the teachings of Arius (260-336 AD), a presbyter in the Church of Alexandria. Arius taught that Jesus was a created being, something similar to the demigods that ancient people groups were very familiar with from their old pagan philosophies and religions, including those who followed Gnosticism. A "demigod", literally a "half-god," is meant to designate a super-powerful person whose one parent was a god and whose other parent was human, such as the heroes of Greek mythology (e.g., Hercules). Contrary to the claim made in *The Da Vinci Code*, the "vote" on the doctrine of Arius was not close. All bishops present, apart from Arius and two of his friends, understood/accepted the divinity of Jesus Christ from the outset, and endorsed the Nicene Creed. [<http://ancienthistory.about.com/cs/godsreligion/p/aa082499.htm>], [http://tatumweb.com/churchrodent/terms/arius.htm?azl_m=books&azl_Go.x=10&azl_Go.y=10&azl_t=Arius]

The Nicene Council simply made official the understanding of orthodoxy that had been building since the first and second centuries. Celebrated Yale Divinity School historian, Kenneth Scott Latourette, writes in his wonderful two-volume set *A History of Christianity* that the classic statement of faith we know as The Apostle's Creed was known earlier as the Roman Symbol. The Roman Symbol as a creed and statement of faith – in slightly briefer form – probably originated from a first-century baptismal affirmation and covenant. The Roman Symbol was known to Irenaeus and Tertullian. It was regularly recited from the end of *the second century* onward, particularly as new converts joined the Community of Faith. There are no major conceptual clashes between the Roman Symbol / The Apostles' Creed (employed since the second century,) and the

Nicene Creed (developed in the fourth century). The Nicene Creed mostly adds phrases to the Roman Symbol/Apostles' Creed to strengthen perspectives and positions already established and expressed therein.

Those who believe that the thick volumes of Yale Divinity School scholar, Kenneth Scott Latourette, may be “just another layer” in the grand conspiracy “to cover-up of the truth about Christian origins,” should consider the New York Times (hardly a bastion of conservative thought) had to say in their review of his two-volume set: “Rewarding reading not only for the religious leader, but for anyone interested in the forces that have moved mankind. A definitive work.” Many may laud the Browns’ novel as a best-selling fictional thriller, but do you think any credible literary and investigative news organization is going to write *that* about *The Da Vinci Code*?

Emperor Constantine did not “invent” the divinity of Christ. It is ridiculous to claim, as the Browns do in Chapter 55 that “Constantine turned Jesus into a deity.” Christians believed in the divinity of Christ from the time the Church began. If they did not believe in His divinity, the members of the early Christian community would not have lived for Christ, and then willingly suffered and died for His Kingdom.

The truth of the matter is that the early Christians, from the beginning, believed that Jesus Christ had – before their eyes – defeated death, and gone on before them into eternity. Any fair reading of first and second century documents and history will confirm that early Christians really, actually believed this. Even those who believe that Christians were and are hopelessly deluded nevertheless acknowledge that they did (and do) really believe this.

One of the most public figures of the first century was Saul of Tarsus, who became the man we know as the Apostle Paul. He was an educated Jew, whose moderately wealthy merchant family had been able to purchase Roman citizenship. Early in his public life he tried to destroy the followers of Christ, who he thought were perverting Judaism. But, he was dramatically converted on the road to Damascus, and he joined these very same followers of Christ he once hated. He participated in at least four separate missionary journeys, all beginning from Antioch. His public Christian ministry began in 46 AD, and lasted until 68 AD, when he was beheaded by Nero’s soldiers, on Nero’s order. Nero, a vicious and many say mentally unbalanced Emperor of Rome, wanted to rebuild a section of Rome, so he had his soldiers set fire to a portion of it. The fire got out of hand, and he had a large portion of the city furious with him in the winter of 64/65 AD. He needed a scapegoat. He blamed the Christians who were seen as responsible for a strange social movement among the poor. “Christians” were already unpopular and somewhat feared by the elite of the city. The shifting of blame

worked. Thus began the well-documented, vicious persecution of Christians that resulted in large numbers of them being driven from their homes, and many of them being martyred. Many were impaled, dipped in oil or tar, and lit as torches for house parties, and many others were thrown to the lions in the Coliseum, for sport.

Because of his widespread ministry to Gentiles, including prominent Gentiles, in the *first century* centers of power (Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, Rome, etc.), historians, using objective sources, know quite a lot about the life and times of the Apostle Paul. Geography, Archeology, Political History, date sequences, and corroborating documents all point to the same Saul/Paul we have in the New Testament. Many of these objective sources of verification extend to his pastoral letters (epistles), written to several communities of Christians in several locations. One of his best known and well-verified letters was the letter to the Philippians, written to the believers at Philippi in northern Greece (named after King Philip, father of Alexander the Great). The letter was written sometime between 51 and 61 AD. In this letter, the Apostle Paul clearly expresses his view of Jesus Christ.

From Chapter 2:

- 5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:
- 6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:
- 7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:
- 8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.
- 9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:
- 10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;
- 11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. [KJV]

You know, that really doesn't sound like homage to a "mortal prophet" to me. Suffice it to say, Christians did not have to wait until the reign of Constantine in the fourth century to get a divine Jesus. Constantine did not "turn Jesus into a deity," as the Browns claim. Jesus was declared and worshipped as Lord – from the beginning of Christianity and the Church.

As Professor Philip Jenkins, Distinguished Professor of History and Religious Studies at Pennsylvania State University, has pointed out in his article *Hidden Gospels*, the Nag Hammadi documents have acquired an importance far beyond their historical value. [<http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/hiddengospel.htm>] Dr. Jenkins writes that with their wild assertions about the Gnostic Gospels, some writers have taken us deep into "X-Files" territory. Apparently, there really was an episode of The X-Files television series about a Roman Catholic cardinal who shoots an antiquities dealer in a vain effort to suppress earth-shattering discoveries

emerging from the Gnostic Gospels. Sound familiar? As Dr. Jenkins and other Church historians have consistently pointed out, the contents of the Gnostic Gospels most often appeal to liberal theologians, feminists, and New Age devotees. With the publication of *The Da Vinci Code*, I would add to Dr. Jenkins' list those who, like the Browns, are committed to "the Wiccan Way."

But, the Browns aren't yet done with their wild re-interpretation of history. As a brilliant member/Grand Master of the Priory of Sion, Leonardo Da Vinci in the late 15th century supposedly knows all this, and cleverly encodes this forbidden knowledge into many of his works – including the works he is was paid to produce for the Roman Catholic Church. Thus, the title of the book: *The Da Vinci Code*.

This is particularly true of Da Vinci's famous painting, The Last Supper. In this painting, the young apostle John does not have a beard, but does have longer hair and softer features than several of the other disciples, so, according to the Browns, he is not really the Apostle John after all – despite all New Testament descriptions of the Last Supper to the contrary. He (the young Apostle John) is really *a she* (Mary Magdalene) in the Browns' re-interpretation of the fresco. This is important to the Browns, because in this painting, as in nearly all documents and artwork filtered through their worldview, they feel the need to find symbols of the "sacred feminine." According to the Browns, this new understanding of the picture is greatly strengthened by the fact that John dramatically leans away from Jesus, forming a deep "V" near the center of the picture. This is symbolic of the spread legs and open womb of a woman in the act of sexual intercourse. Many generations of art historians before the Browns said that the young Apostle John's lean away from Christ showed shock at the message that one of the disciples would betray him. And, it helped set Christ apart in the painting, making *him* the focal point of the fresco. But, none of this matters to the Browns. They need to find "the sacred feminine" in the picture, and so they do.

The Last Supper, contend the Browns, is really all about the presence and sexual power of a woman – Mary Magdalene. Many artists and art historians (including the Browns themselves) contend that Leonardo Da Vinci was a homosexual, and exhibited his primarily *homosexual/gay* orientation through much of his artwork. If this is true, then I seriously doubt that he was so enamored with the sexual power of a woman that he felt he needed to paint it into The Last Supper – no matter what he believed about early Christian history. Da Vinci may have been a whole lot less enamored with "the sacred feminine" than the Browns, writing more than 500 years after the fresco was completed. I am tempted to call the Browns' re-interpretation of The Last Supper their "Fresco Fiasco."

Once the Roman Catholic Church, “the Vatican,” mysteriously and instantaneously sprang up out of the Nicene Council in 325 AD, it then, according to the Browns, set about to eradicate all pagan (true) knowledge of “the sacred feminine.”

In declaring that the Roman Catholic Church set about from the beginning to systematically and brutally destroy any awareness of “the sacred feminine,” the Browns choose to ignore the intense veneration of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Jesus. This veneration of the Mary has characterized the Roman Catholic Church from its beginning. This veneration of Mary has been so intense through the centuries that it has often become a contentious issue, producing doctrinal divides with the Eastern Orthodox and the Protestant branches of the Church. Suffice it to say that it is *patently ridiculous* to say that the Roman Catholic Church has been devoid of feminine references and influence.

But, the Browns aren’t going to let such glaring omissions / inconsistencies in their novel trouble them. The Virgin Mary cannot possibly serve as a worthy symbol for “the sacred feminine,” because she is not sexual enough. Committed Wiccan apostles and apologists that they are, the Browns are all about the veneration of the female that involves men obtaining “carnal knowledge” from women – multiple women. Even today, all of true religion, if you are male and want true knowledge of the divine, is through sexual intercourse with women – lots of them. As we’ve seen, the Browns let us in on this little secret through their main character, Professor Langdon. This “Johnny one-note” obsession of the Browns is very Wiccan in its nature, since (as we’ve already seen) the followers of Wicca write that they value sex primarily as pleasure, and as a way to work their “magic(k).”

The Wiccan interpretation of the New Testament and early Christian history is served up for all of those who really, really hate the Roman Catholic Church, and for all of those who desperately want to slide away from the morality and responsibility embedded in the New Testament and early Christian history. I am not surprised the Browns have found millions of eager readers. These readers should, though, count the costs. When they flee the morality and responsibility of the New Testament and early Christian history, they also abandon the transforming love, the abiding truth, and the hope of the New Testament and early Christian history.

People have the right to think for themselves. I just believe they really should think for themselves, and not glibly quote portions of the Browns’ agenda-driven conspiracy novel *as fact*. I believe people have the right to make their own choices. I just believe their choices should be independent, enlightened, and well

informed, not allowing their choices to be directed (“crafted”) by the Wiccan beliefs deeply embedded in the Browns’ work of fiction.

Before signing off, I believe, as a mental health professional, I need to offer some further comments concerning the false and irresponsible claims about sex rites/rituals/orgies made in Chapter 74 of the novel. I also feel I need to comment on the ritualistic abuse of persons involved in Wiccan initiations into covens.

The idea that sex rites/rituals in secret societies are not at all about eroticism, but rather all about godly spirituality is nonsense, and dangerous nonsense. The Browns through their main character, Professor Langdon, make these extraordinary claims:

He explained that although what she saw probably looked like a sex ritual, 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. Since the days of Isis, sex rites had been considered man's only bridge from earth to heaven. "By communing with woman," Langdon said, "man could achieve a climactic instant when his mind went totally blank and he could see God."

There are several serious problems with the Browns’ point of view:

1. Generally speaking, it is not possible to have sexual experiences without physiological excitement and erotic feelings being involved. Anyone claiming otherwise does not know very much about the operation of male and female genital organs, or the structures of the limbic system in the brain, particularly the hypothalamus and medial forebrain bundle, that largely direct their operation -- at least at the physiological level. Whenever genital organs are stimulated and put together, there will naturally and routinely be sexual excitement, intense erotic / sexually aggressive feelings and sensations, and significant emotional responses.
2. There *may* also be intense, positive spiritual experiences coming from sexual foreplay and intercourse (these experiences more directly associated with the prefrontal cortex of the brain), but this happens most often and most completely when there is an abiding interpersonal relationship, a deep trust, and complete safety between a man and woman -- as in *a committed marriage*. To believe you are going to have positive and enduring spiritual experiences by repeatedly having sex with multiple persons in some kind of orgy, is pure nonsense – a dangerous self-delusion.

3. The late Rollo May was a world-renown therapeutic psychologist and author who often wrote about love and sex. One of his articles was entitled, “Too Much Sex, Too Little Love?” In it, he clearly made his case that meaningful lovemaking (involving positive spiritual union) is never achieved by simply linking up genitalia – particularly when the genital linking is with multiple persons within a short period of time.

4. This kind of mindless promiscuity is clearly destructive to the human spirit. Over time, it will not fill your soul with anything other than a more profound loneliness and self-loathing. The point of view propagated by the Browns in *The Da Vinci Code* is dangerous and foolish in an era filled not only by rampant and potentially deadly venereal diseases, but also by the spiritual diseases of gnawing loneliness, anxiety, self-abuse, and the abuse of others. As educated people, the Browns should know better.

5. To suggest, as the Browns do through Langdon, that pagan sex rites are the *only* means/bridge by which men can experience God is not only blasphemous to the extreme, spiritually dark and empty to the extreme, but exceedingly narrow and mean-spirited – to the extreme. The Browns through Langdon rail against Catholicism, and really all forms of conservative Christianity, and then turn around and lay down these gemstones. Apparently Jesus Christ and his Church cannot possibly be the means/bridge by which men can be reunited with God, but pagan sex orgies *are* the means – the *only* means? How arrogant! How damaging, ridiculous, and absurd! Apparently, all forms of Catholicism and religious conservatism are over-reaching, blindly aggressive, prone to initiate vicious attack, intellectually suppressive, and therefore, finally *evil* – except for *their forms* of “Wiccan catholicism” and “Neo-Pagan conservatism.” The exceedingly narrow / exclusive mindset and message of *The Da Vinci Code* seems to be: “No one has the right to set any limits, and/or define matters of the spirit – except *me*, and people who agree with *me*.”

I only wish that throughout their book the Browns had shown a little more intellectual humility, honesty, and consistency.

Finally, lest anyone think from the Wiccan websites that “maybe Wicca really isn’t so bad after all,” it’s “just another/interesting spiritual alternative,” he or she needs to thoughtfully consider the following description of a standard initiation into a local coven. Initiation into a coven involves having one’s clothes cut off him or her (usually a her) -- by a sword, no less -- until (s)he

stands completely naked. (S)he then has the sword pointed directly at her heart. (S)he is then bound, blindfolded, fondled/washed by everyone present, kissed and marked on several parts of her body, including her breasts and genitals -- in a five-fold (pentacle/pentagram-inspired) pattern. (S)he is then pressed face down into the ground, and has blood drawn from her. Through this process her whole being is offered up to spiritual powers ("the dread Mighty Ones") specifically *not associated* with the Judeo-Christian God.

Note that the extended sections that are quoted here are quoted *in their entirety* (including the mistakes in grammar) -- without any editorial comments or manipulations whatsoever, except those offered by the authors themselves. I would present the whole Initiation, save for fear of violating intellectual property rights. Also note that this description is not offered by those who hate or oppose Wicca, but by those who love and advocate it.

Coven Initiation [<http://www.magicwicca.com/wicca/coven.html>]

Candidates for initiation should be in good mental and physical health. They should also be of legal age and sought out the Craft of their own free will. [Modify or tone this down as your coven sees fit.]

Before being accepted into the Coven (s)he should spend sometime learning about the Craft and magic and such. (S)he should know about practices that most people get uptight about. She should be told that initiations are perfectly safe and voluntary. Also, if at any time prior to taking the oath she wants to back out, she can do so without fear or other recriminations.

The candidate must chose a Craft name. This name should not be a common American name and must have personal meaning to the candidate. . . .

[After saying that the apprenticeship for the witch-to-be should be for a year and day, and indicating that the vote to initiate the candidate must be unanimous, the description continues]. . .

This ritual is written for use in the woods. There has to be a path leading from the staging area to a clearing where afire can be lit. To save time, the fire should be setup but not lighted.

The bathtub should be set up along the path and filled with warm water and the other ingredients. The water will also have to be consecrated.

The candidate should be brought to the staging area by their sponsor. She should be wearing clothing that can be cutaway easily by a sword without undoing buttons or stepping out of pants legs. The candidate should be lead down the path by the sponsor. After a little ways a member of the Coven, the Challenger, should step onto the path. They might want to wear a mask. They take the sword that they carry and say:

"Who comes to the gate?"

The candidate, coached before hand, answers:

"It is I, (new Craft name), child of earth and starry heaven."

Challenger:

"Who speaks for you?"

Sponsor:

"It is I, *name*, who vouches for her."

The Challenger holds the point of the sword up to the candidates heart, and says:

"You are about to enter a vortex of power, a place beyond imagining, where birth and death, dark and light, joy and pain, meet and make one. You are about to step between the worlds, beyond time, outside the realm of your human life. You who stands on the threshold of the dread Mighty Ones, have you the courage to make the essay? For know it is better to fall on my blade and perish than to make the attempt with fear in thy heart!"

The apprentice answers:

"I tread the path with perfect love and perfect trust."

The Challenger replies:

"Prepare for death and rebirth."

And the Challenger takes the sword and cuts off the apprentices clothing till she is standing naked. The Challenger grounds their sword to the Earth. The Challenger should then blindfold the candidate and tie a cord around their wrists and one ankle while saying:

"And She was bound as all living things must be, who would enter the Kingdom of Death. And Her feet were neither bound nor free."

The candidate is led to the tub and bathed, while still blindfolded, by the rest of the Coven. While being bathed, she must remain quiet. She is helped from the tub and dried off. The candidate is then carried to the Circle. Everyone in the Coven, starting with the High Priest (Priestess in the case of a man), kisses her and says:

"Thus are all first brought into the world, and thus are all first brought into the Coven." . . .

"Hail Guardians of the Watchtowers of the East and all the Mighty Ones of the Craft. Behold *new name*, who will now be made Priestess and Witch."

The candidate is brought back to the altar. The High Priest kneels and gives her the Five Fold Kiss; that is, he kisses her on both feet, both knees, womb, both breasts, and the lips, starting with the right of each pair. He says, as he does this:

"Blessed be thy feet, that have brought thee in these ways.
Blessed be thy knees, that shall kneel at the sacred altar.
Blessed be thy womb, without which we would not be.
Blessed be thy breasts, formed in beauty.
Blessed be thy lips, that shall utter the Sacred Names."

For the kiss on the lips, they embrace, length-to-length, with their feet touching each others. When he reaches the womb, she spreads her arms wide, and the same after the kiss on the lips. The candidate is then measured with the other piece of cord, from head to toe. The cord is cut. She is then measured around the head and chest and knots are tied to mark these lengths. The High Priestess rolls up the cord, and asks the candidate:
"Are you willing to swear the oath?"

The candidate answers:

"I am."

The High Priestess asks:

"Are you willing to suffer to learn?"

The candidate answers:

"Yes."

The High Priestess takes the apprentice's hand, and with a needle properly purified by fire and water, pricks her finger, squeezing a few drops out onto the measure. The candidate then kneels, and places one hand on her head and the other beneath her heel and she repeats what is read to her. The High Priest says:

"This is the Charge of the Coven:

That I will keep secret what I am asked to keep secret, and never divulge the names or dwelling places of our people unless by their consent.

That I will learn and try to master the Art Magical; but ever remember the rune: "What good be the tools without the inner light? What good be magic without wisdom sight?"

That in due course I will strive to find a worthy pupil in magic, to whom in future years I can hand down the knowledge I acquire. . . . [After the candidate promises to never use the Art Magical to simply impress foolish souls, the vows and descriptions continue] . . .

I consider these vows taken before the Elder Gods; and that if I betray this Charge I accept as my just reward that retribution of destiny which overtakes those who basely betray the trust and confidence that others have placed in them. Know that none can escape the fate, be it curse or blessing, which they make for themselves, either in this life or in another life.

The High Priestess says:

"Repeat after me: 'I, *name*, do of my own free will most solemnly swear to protect, help and defend my sisters and brothers of the Art and to keep the Coven's Charge. I always keep secret all that must not be revealed. This do I swear on my mother's womb and my hopes of future lives, mindful that my measure has been taken, and in the presence of the Mighty Ones.' All between my two hands belongs to the Goddess."

The candidate repeats the oath. The Coven shouts:

"So mote it be!"

The High Priest says:

"Arise and be anointed"

The High Priest then makes an X mark on the initiates forehead, breast and genitals while saying:

"May your mind be free. May your heart be free. May your body be free. I give you the Craft name of new name"

The rest of the Coven members grab her suddenly, lift her if possible and carry her three times around the Circle, laughing and shrieking. They then lay her face down before the altar and press her into the ground. Gradually the pressure changes to stroking. They chant her new name, raising a Cone of Power over her. The blind fold is removed and she is told:

"Know that the hands that have touched you are the hands of love. Thus are all first brought into the world, and thus are all first brought into the Coven."

The Charge of the Goddess is spoken and any other myths, mysteries, and secrets are revealed. She is also told the Coven names of all the members. The High Priestess returns the measure, saying:

"In the Burning Times, when each member of the Coven held the lives of the others in their hands, this would have been kept and be used against you should you endanger the others. But in these more fortunate times, love and trust prevail, so take this, keep it or burn it, and be free to go or to stay as your heart leads you."

The service goes on as usual, be it New or Full Moon or Sabbat. Before the Circle is opened, the new initiate is taken to the four corners again and introduced to the Guardians again.

Those who voluntarily submit to this abusive, intrusive ritual in an open, naïve, and accepting manner may very well experience profound emotional and spiritual damage in the innermost reaches of his or her person. This trauma/damage may very well congeal into a Post Traumatic Stress Disorder over time. But, let me comment on the ritual from a different, legal point of view. Despite the website's instruction to not bring the psychologically vulnerable, or minors, into a Wiccan initiation, we all know sometimes, even frequently, this happens. If any vulnerable person is ever brought into this kind of Wiccan initiation in a coercive manner – including an emotionally / psychologically coercive manner – or, if any minor is ever brought into this form of Wiccan initiation (under any set of conditions), then, the practitioners of Wicca in that local coven would and should face felony charges for physical and sexual abuse. To the psychologically vulnerable, and/or the young, this Wiccan initiation, this initiation into witchcraft, is nothing less than a highly destructive form of *ritualistic abuse*.

It may surprise readers to know just how direct the references are in *The Da Vinci Code* to Wicca, and the practices of witches:

Ch 4 -- Jacques Sauniere, the Louvre's Curator, the Grand Master of the Priory of Sion, and the murdered Wiseman of the book, is the world's greatest collector and expert on "the sacred feminine" – including objects related to fertility, goddess worship, and Wicca.

Ch 28 -- Here the Browns present a long defense of witches and their practices. They write that witches were (and are) innocent practitioners of the pagan arts

related to the sacred feminine. According to the Browns, these innocent practitioners of the pagan arts have been mercilessly persecuted through the ages by an oppressive Church.

Ch 72 -- As they look for the password that will give them access to the Grail, Sir Teabing, Professor Langdon, and Sophie Neveu look for an ancient word of five letters, a word of wisdom. Among other places, they look into astrological prophecies, secret society inductions, and Wiccan incantations.

The Da Vinci Code ends in a manner consonant with the adoration of the Goddess taught in witchcraft and Wicca. After Princess Sophie Neveu, the direct descendent of the bloodline of Christ through Mary Magdalene, offers herself sexually to Professor Langdon right at the end of Chapter 105, the Epilogue tells us that Langdon finally locates what he believes are the remains of Mary Magdalene, the true Holy Grail. He locates her remains in France, in the Louvre, right next to the area in Paris that was once devoted to nature/goddess worship and fertility festivals. Once he locates these remains, lovingly brought to the Louvre by Jacques Saunier, he (Langdon) falls to his knees and worships the Goddess:

Turning, he felt his feet again tracing the invisible path of the ancient Rose Line, carrying him across the courtyard to the Carrousel du Louvre – the enormous circle of grass surrounded by a perimeter of neatly trimmed hedges – once the site of Paris's primeval nature-worshipping festivals . . . joyous rites to celebrate fertility and the Goddess.

Langdon felt as if he were crossing into another world as he stepped over the bushes to the grassy area within. This hallowed ground was now marked by one of the city's most unusual monuments. There in the center, plunging into the earth like a crystal chasm, gaped the giant inverted pyramid of glass that he had seen a few nights ago when he entered the Louvre's subterranean entresol . . .

At the end of the tunnel, he emerged into a large chamber. Directly, before him, hanging down from above, gleamed the inverted pyramid – a breathtaking V-shaped contour of glass.

The Chalice.

Langdon's eyes traced its narrowing form downward to its tip, suspended only six feet above the floor. There, directly beneath it, stood the tiny structure.

A miniature pyramid. Only three feet tall . . .

Illuminated in the soft lights of the deserted entresol, the two pyramids pointed at one another, their bodies perfectly aligned, their tips almost touching.

The Chalice above. The Blade below.

The blade and chalice guarding o'er Her gates.

Langdon heard Marie Chauvel's words. *One day it will dawn on you.*

He was standing beneath the ancient Rose Line, surrounded by the work of masters. *What better place for Sauniere to keep watch?* Now at last, he sensed he understood the true meaning of the Grand Master's verse. Raising his eyes to heaven, he gazed upward through the glass to a glorious, star-filled night.

She rests at last beneath the starry skies.

Like the murmurs of spirits in the darkness, forgotten words echoed, *The quest for the Holy Grail is the quest to kneel before the bones of Mary Magdalene. A journey to pray at the feet of the outcast one.*

With a sudden upwelling of reverence, Robert Langdon fell to his knees.

For a moment, he thought he heard a woman's voice . . . the wisdom of the ages . . . whispering up from the chasms of the earth.

It seems fairly obvious that the Browns in *The Da Vinci Code* have not told us much of significance about Christianity. Rather, they have introduced / re-introduced us to Neo-paganism and “the Wiccan Way.” Sometimes the Browns do this boldly, as in Robert Langdon’s descriptions of the ancient pagan sex rituals. Sometimes the Browns do this much more subtly, through *their code words* of “the chalice” and “the sacred feminine.” They have also served up for us with a surprisingly elaborate Wiccan interpretation (re-interpretation) of the New Testament and early Christian history.

If any significant part of the thesis of *this critique* is true, then some of us will understand that we have important work to do. We will recognize and consistently reveal *The Da Vinci Code* for what it is – almost pure Wicca, “Witchcraft for the New Millennium,” a well-developed, yet popular and modern “Introduction to the Wiccan Way.” It will then fall to us to repeatedly challenge these beliefs and practices, and to help set the record straight.