

THE DA VINCI CODE: WAS JESUS HUMAN OR DIVINE?

Millions of moviegoers will watch—no doubt sitting on the edge of their seats—as the fast-paced Dan Brown thriller, “The Da Vinci Code,” plays out on the big screen.

“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.”¹

Over thirty-five million copies of the astoundingly popular best seller have already been printed. In addition to being one of the most popular books of our time, it is also one of the most controversial. The controversy stems from the fact that the book portrays Jesus as being human rather than the commonly accepted idea that he was divine. In the story, Jesus marries Mary Magdalene and has a child that begins a secret blood-line—the “true Holy Grail”—which is carried down through the centuries.

CONTROVERSY MAKES US THINK

Controversy forces us to better define what we believe. Those that believe in the divinity of the man Christ Jesus find the idea of Jesus as merely human a repulsive idea. But for those that always had gnawing doubts about the validity of the Trinity, the “secret” of Jesus’ humanity is appealing. Further investigation into issues raised in The Da Vinci Code may point to the true nature of Jesus—as the “Son of the Blessed” (Mark 14:61, 62)—but raise serious questions on the purpose and history of Jesus’ life on earth.

THE FAULTY FOUNDATION OF THE DA VINCI CODE

In the crucial scene quoted above, Sir Leigh Teabing, a gentleman scholar and expert on the “Holy Grail,” with the help of the book’s hero, Robert Langdon, a Harvard “symbolology” professor, explains his understanding of the Holy Grail to Sophie Neveu, a Parisian police cryptographer. Teabing explains that for political reasons the first Christian Emperor “Constantine needed to strengthen the new Christian tradition [so he]... held the famous ecumenical gathering known as the Council of Nicaea [where] many aspects of Christianity were debated and voted upon—the date of Easter, the role of the bishops, the administration of sacraments, and...the divinity of Jesus.”²

In the story, after being thrown together in a harrowing chase through Paris and into the countryside, Langdon and Neveu find themselves in Teabing’s estate discussing the “secrets” behind the true nature of Jesus and the Holy Grail. This is just one stop on their fast-paced scavenger hunt for codes and clues that promise to lead them to the “Holy Grail.”

While the book is clearly a work of fiction, it does claim at its very beginning—on page one, “All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate.” So, while the events described in this “novel” are fictitious, the entire foundation of the book is claimed to be true. But is it?

HOW TO CONSOLIDATE POWER

The Council of Nicaea was the first great ecumenical council of the early church. This unprecedented gathering was called together by the newly converted Christian Emperor, Constantine, at the recommendation of a trusted envoy, Hosius of Córdoba (Spain). Indeed, the Emperor was looking for a way to consolidate his power. To do this he needed

unity. Coming from a pagan background where organization and uniformity were most important,³ Constantine could not tolerate a diversity of viewpoints on the nature of Jesus.

For years, Christians had been persecuted by the state; now the state was embracing them and even inviting its leaders into its summer home! Constantine desired to use the church to unify his power. The problem was that the Church itself was not united on many fundamental issues.

EXTREME VIEWS ON THE NATURE OF JESUS

How did Christians before the Council of Nicaea view the nature of Christ? Influenced by Hellenistic Gnosticism, there were those who viewed Jesus as human with no pre-human existence. One sect of Gnosticism was known as “Adoptionists” who believed Jesus was a human being like anyone else, conceived and born to natural parents—Joseph and Mary. According to The Da Vinci Code, the “discarded gospels” showed Jesus marrying and having a child. Sir Teabing presents a mixed-up view of Jesus to Sophie Neveu. He states that the divinity of Jesus was not accepted until 325 CE, but he also states that Constantine only selected gospels for canon which showed Jesus as divine. What were the facts?

The Adoptionists taught that Jesus had no pre-human existence—meaning that before he was born on earth he never knew God and did not exist. What made Jesus special, the Adoptionists believed, was that Jesus was more righteous than everyone else. Because Jesus is able to obtain this distinction, he is then recognized by God and adopted as his “Son.” Only after his baptism by John the Baptist, God said of Jesus, “Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” (Mark 1:11) In the end, Jesus obtained a position at the right hand of God because of his great faithfulness to Him. Clearly, this view was at odds with plain statements in scripture of Jesus’ pre-human existence and virgin birth.

DOCETISTS—HE ONLY LOOKED HUMAN

Then there were those who lurched to the other extreme and said he was not only divine, but God Himself. In this direction, there was another group of Gnostics who believed that Jesus was so completely divine that he could not be considered human in any sense of the word. Believers in this idea were often called docetists—based on the Greek word *dokeo* which means “to appear” or “to seem.” In other words, these early Christians believed that Jesus only seemed to appear human. He only appeared to have emotions, he only appeared to suffer and he only appeared to bleed.

Focusing on the word “likeness,” docetists might have cited Romans 8:3: “God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh,” or Philippians 2:7: “But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.”

APOSTLE JOHN’S WARNINGS AGAINST GNOSTICISM

However, the Apostle John addressed this form of Gnosticism. He gave clear warnings in scripture against this view. In 1 John 4:2-3, we read, “Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.” Also in 2 John 1:7 we read, “For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.”

In *The Da Vinci Code*, Dan Brown's Teabing would probably have us believe that all Christians were Adoptionists. On the contrary, the majority of Christians rejected the belief that Jesus was only human. Most Christians actually believed that Jesus was both human and divine. But how could he both at the same time? It seemed pagan to admit that there was more than one God. How could Christians keep their monotheistic faith, but still hold that Jesus was divine? But then most Christians, like Gnostics, left understanding and reason to the "Mysteries"—not needing to be explained.

TWO OPPOSING VIEWS: ARIUS AND ATHANASIUS

At the time that the Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity in 312 CE, there were two leading explanations of the nature of Christ. One of the leading ways of understanding this dual nature of Jesus was taught by a popular theologian from North Africa named Arius. It is difficult to put together the pieces of Arius' life and ministry—most surviving writings were by those that opposed him and branded him a heretic. But we do know that he was popular in Egypt and was a man of great integrity.

Arius taught that in the beginning there was only one God (Jehovah) who at some point brought his "Son" into existence. Through this Son, God created all things. (1 Cor. 8:6: "But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.") However, the Son, being created by God, was subordinate to God. (John 14:28: "I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I.) The Son, or Christ, became human by being born of the Virgin Mary. (John 1:14: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us...") While on earth, Christ then died for the sins of the world and was raised from the dead. (1 Cor. 15:3-4: "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.") Because of his obedience to God, he was granted divine status to sit at the right hand of God. (Phil. 2:8-9: "He [Jesus] humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name.)

Arius' understanding was popular in certain areas because it logically explained how Jesus could be first human, then divine. However, the Arians were a political problem to the stability of the Roman Empire. The Emperor Constantine saw the wisdom of solidifying Christian belief as a means of solidifying his empire and called for a council in 325 CE to rule on the true nature of Jesus.

A charming, bold deacon from the Church of Alexandria named Athanasius championed the opposing view that Christ was both human and divine at the same time—an oxymoron. Not only did Christ have a pre-human existence as Arius believed, but Athanasius advocated Christ never had a beginning! He always existed and was always divine. Pushing the distinction even further, Athanasius believed that Jesus Christ was the same essence (Greek *homoousios*) as God the Father.⁴ Athanasius' view became the basis of what is later became known as the doctrine of the Trinity. It was not till 381 CE at the Council of Constantinople that the holy spirit was ruled in as part of the trinity of a three-in-one God—co-equal and co-eternal. These three were not three gods, but one—made manifest in three persons. It was only a matter of time when the trinity as a basic doctrine of the Papacy was ensconced in Rome at the defeat of the Arian Ostrogoths.

WHAT DO THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS VALIDATE?

"Fortunately for historians," Teabing said, "some of the gospels which Constantine attempted to eradicate managed to survive."⁵ However, the Dead Sea Scrolls—which were found in 1947 (not in the "1950s" as Sir Teabing states) hidden in a cave near Qumran in the Judean desert—do not contain any "gospel" narratives about Jesus. About 15,000 fragments from 500 manuscripts were found from every book of the Old Testament canon—except Esther.

The Isaiah scroll, found relatively intact, is 1000 years older than any previously known copy of Isaiah. In fact, the scrolls are the oldest group of Old Testament manuscripts ever found. What does Isaiah prophesy about the coming Messiah, who would first have to die for our transgressions? He prophesied that the coming Savior of mankind would die without any children. Isaiah 53:8: "By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken" (NIV).

Truly, Isaiah's testimony discredits *The Da Vinci Code's* premise of Jesus having had a child before he was crucified. Sir Teabing also mentions the texts found in the Nag Hammadi Library as some of the Gospels Constantine rejected. These ancient Christian books, discovered in 1945, nowhere state that Jesus married Mary Magdalene.

JESUS—FIRST HUMAN, THEN EXALTED TO DIVINITY

So yes, Jesus was first human! He was made flesh because he sacrificed his flesh for the world! John 6:51: "...My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." He was put to death in the flesh, but resurrected as spirit—divine! 1 Peter 3:18-19: "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit."

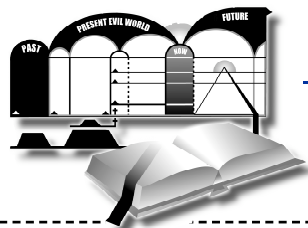
THE TRUE MARRIAGE AND CHILDREN

Jesus' Bride is still in preparation, but soon will be ready. Rev 19:7-8: "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints." Their children? Revelation 22:17: "And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!'" Jesus and his Bride will give life to "whosoever will" to "take the water of life freely." The whole world will be given an opportunity to become their children!

For a comprehensive study of the Scriptures on this subject please send for a FREE copy of the booklet, "THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST" or take advantage of our free download of this booklet at www.bibletoday.com.

Endnotes:

1. Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*, p. 233.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 233.
3. Richard E. Rubenstein, *When Jesus Became God* (New York: Harcourt, 1999), p. 85.
4. Bart D. Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction in The Da Vinci Code: A Historian Reveals What We Really Know About Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and Constantine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 22.
5. Brown, p. 324.



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