

THE DA VINCI CODE AND THE NEW CHURCH BY THE REV. DR. RAY SILVERMAN

“Have you read *The Da Vinci Code*?” Over the past three years I have been asked this question innumerable times and, until this spring, I always shook my head and said, “No.” My reason was simple: I was repelled by what I had heard to be the underlying theme of this book, so I chose not to read it. But this spring, as interest in the book continued to grow and as the movie was about to be released, I realized that this book was having a larger impact than anyone had ever imagined. I decided to read it and discovered that it could actually be quite helpful in opening the way for the New Church.

To date, over fifty million copies of the book have been sold. It is now a major motion picture, and many people are beginning to ask questions about things that they always took for granted. Is Jesus God’s only son? Are the Four Gospels the only authentic gospels? Was there really a church-wide conspiracy to suppress free-thinking women?

The Da Vinci Code claims to be historical fiction, but many who have read it go away with the feeling that they have been exposed to historical truth. Originally published by Doubleday in 2003, Dan Brown’s novel has quickly become a worldwide phenomenon.

The book does read well. It is an exciting story, a real “page turner,” as many people say. But there must be more to it than that. My hunch is that it touches on some of the most important questions of the day and piques interest in matters of fundamental concern—the nature of God, the role of the church in people’s lives, and the status of women.

In a nutshell, the central premise of *The Da Vinci Code* is that the Lord Jesus Christ, whom we worship and revere as our Creator and Redeemer, was married and fathered a child. As the story is told, evidence for this comes from the Gnostic gospels

(alternative accounts of Jesus' life and teachings) which were originally suppressed by the church but were rediscovered in 1945. In addition, some claim that a close examination of Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting, *The Last Supper*, shows that the person sitting next to the Lord is not the disciple John, as it has been traditionally believed. It is a woman; Mary Magdalene.

Remember, this is all historical fiction. After all, it's just a novel. But the more the reader becomes engrossed in the plot, the more the line between fact and fiction begins to blur, and one begins to wonder. Could it—or some of it—after all, be true?

The book is based on the idea that the Lord's Divinity is a fiction created by the church leaders. It was a secret plot masterminded by the Roman Emperor Constantine in collusion with church leaders, to secure their power base, and to deny the "Divine Feminine." According to the story line in *The Da Vinci Code*, Jesus was a radical spiritual leader who had a wife and who fathered a child. His wife was Mary Magdalene, co-equal to Jesus, and an early leader of the radical spiritual movement which they both began.

Again, the author speculates that the idea of a divine Messiah who did not engage in sexual union was concocted to suppress the truth that Jesus was a human being who had a wife, a child, and a blood line that continued after him. This is, according to the novel, the Big Secret which the church had successfully suppressed ever since the Council of Nicea in 325 AD—a council of church leaders convened by the Roman Emperor Constantine to consolidate his political power base and to secure male domination in the church. From this point onward the sacred union of male and female, called "Hieros Gamos," would have no place in the church.

As I said in the beginning of this article, I found this whole fictitious idea repulsive and profane. But I also saw, mixed in

with the profanity, some glimmers of truth. I also saw that millions of people were reading the novel, including many of my students at Bryn Athyn College, and raising important questions about the premises of the book. I felt that it was my professional responsibility as a minister, as a college professor, and as a father, to read this book for myself to better understand why it was so intriguing for our young people.

After reading the book for myself, I came to see that the book is not only a highly entertaining work of fiction, but that it also raises vital questions. In fact, I began to feel that *The Da Vinci Code*, when properly dealt with, can help to open the way for the coming of the New Church. Here are three examples:

1. The book appeals to our love of freedom in spiritual things. No one wants to have his or her belief system dictated by some corrupt, power-hungry church authority. We hunger and thirst for the truth—all of it, and are therefore understandably outraged when it seems that those who have a responsibility for sharing that truth deliberately withhold it, or change it, or suppress it to serve their own self-interest. The Writings speak eloquently about the importance of freedom in spiritual things. We are taught that when the internal feels itself being compelled, or manipulated, especially in matters of worship, “it turns away and averts itself” (*Divine Providence* 136). The whole purpose of the Writings is to *disclose* the secrets of heaven, not to suppress them!

2. The book appeals to our desire for a complete spirituality which incorporates “The Lost Bride”—a balanced union of masculine and feminine. According to *The Da Vinci Code* the gospels seem too masculine, with little emphasis on the “Divine Feminine.” We get the Father and the Son, but not the “Mother” and the “Daughter”—except for the mistaken notion of Mary as the holy mother of God. So the idea that Jesus was married appeals to those who want to see some balance between the masculine and the feminine. This is entirely understandable, especially when people have no idea that Jesus was God incarnate.

The solution is to very simply explain that there is no “Lost Bride.” The “Bride” and “Wife” represent the church—everyone who is willing to receive the seeds of goodness and truth from the Bridegroom and

Husband of the church. The heavenly marriage of the Lord and the church, the marriage of good and truth within an individual, the marriage of one man and one wife—all these marriages, as explained in the Writings, really do restore the needed balance to spirituality. This is the true "Hieros Gamos"—the sacred marriage.

3. The book appeals to our innate sense that there is a God and He is one (*True Christian Religion* 8). The Gnostics are correct in this: God cannot have a Son. The Muslims say the same thing: God cannot have a Son. Every reasonable thinker would agree. God cannot have a Son. That's one of the reasons the novel is so popular. It asserts that the Catholic Church, under Constantine, made up the idea that God had a Son, and that this Son is also divine. The fact is, there is only One God, and no other. Everyone knows this intuitively: "There is an influx into the soul of all people that there is a God, and that God is one" (*True Christian Religion* 8).

The idea that "God gave His only begotten Son" may indeed stem from a form of pagan ritual. Nevertheless, when understood spiritually it makes perfect sense. The Divine Love (the Father) came forth as Divine Truth (the Son). The infinite, invisible God (the Father) gave us the truth (His only begotten Son). This is New Church Christology. It is beautiful and new. It is the only form of Christianity that an increasingly rational humanity will accept. It's a New Christianity for a New World. Let's deliver it!

To sum up: *The Da Vinci Code* can be seen as an important breakthrough for the New Church—not because all of its premises are correct, but because it will encourage people to rethink their faith, question authority, and seek for meaningful answers. *The Da Vinci Code* raises almost all of the important questions. I believe that we can be there with real answers that will help people to see the Lord in the fullness of His Divinity, marriage in its purity, and religion as a way of life leading to the greatest happiness we are capable of receiving.