



# ***KEEPING YOU INFORMED***

*An Occasional Letter from Pastor Nelson*  
*April, 2006*

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We would like to email the *Keeping You Informed* newsletter to as many homes as possible. If you currently receive *Keeping You Informed* through the post office, you can help us save cost if you would be willing to be added to our list. Please email [cirving@sgc.org](mailto:cirving@sgc.org) or give us your email address when you sign the Focus on Friendship folder on Sunday. Thank you!

## **Summer Teaching/Preaching Series**

July 9 through September 3. "The Great Prayers of the Bible"

This summer the teaching in our Adult Communities and the preaching in our Morning Worship services will focus on nine great prayers of the Bible from both the Old and New Testaments. We hope you will participate in an Adult Community (Adult Sunday School Class) to get the added benefit of both a different perspective and good discussion on the prayers we are studying.

## **Two New Churches Meeting at SGC**

- The Spanish language Calvary Evangelical Free Church meets on Friday evenings and Sunday afternoons.
- The Arabic language Sudanese Fellowship meets on Sunday afternoons.

We welcome these congregations as they get established. It would be encouraging to them for you to meet with them and pray with them.

## **New Adjunct Staff Member**

We welcome Mr. Bob Wilbraham to our adjunct staff. "Adjunct staff" means they work 20+ hours per week for specific ministries of SGC and we thank them (no pay is involved). Bob has a lifetime of experience in evangelism and discipleship and is still active with the Navigators. He will be encouraging evangelism and discipleship in our Adult Communities and Small Groups and among any others who will receive him. Thank you, Bob! We are delighted you are with us!

## **Baptism—April 30**

Baptisms will be conducted in the morning services on April 30. A half hour information meeting for those desiring to be baptized will be held at 12:00 noon on Sunday, April 23 in the Conference Room. (The next baptism after April 30 will be Sunday, June 4.)

## **Baby Dedications—June 18**

The next dedication service will be held on June 18 (Fathers' Day). Please contact Julia in our office for more information ([jgrauberger@sgc.org](mailto:jgrauberger@sgc.org) or 303.986.1527, Ext. 216).

**Financial Update**

\$422,000 Needed by June 30 to accomplish this fiscal year's ministry plan.  
\$28,000 Average income per week January through March.  
\$32,461 Needed each week (on average) April through June (the end of the fiscal year)

You can see that we need your help to complete our ministry plan for this year.

**Meet the Elders of SGC**

Seven men serve as Elders of our church. They are elected by the congregation at its annual meeting and serve three year terms (maximum of two terms). Our by-laws state:

"Consistent with the scriptures the elders are responsible to shepherd the flock, lead through example, teach and exhort, refute those who contradict truth, manage the church of God, and pray for the sick. The Board of Elders shall be responsible for determining the overall direction of the CHURCH. In that the CHURCH is the highest governing body, decisions of the Board of Elders shall remain subject to approval by the CHURCH. The Board of Elders shall have ultimate authority and responsibility for decisions on behalf of the CHURCH made between business sessions, except as otherwise specified in the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws. The Board of Elders shall also be responsible for the overall spiritual well-being of the CHURCH and the implementation of its goals and objectives..."



**Chairman Mr. Jon Klimchalk**

Jon is married to Karla, they have two adult children and Jon is an executive with Developmental Pathways, a not-for-profit service agency for the developmentally challenged.



**V-Chairman Dr. Lloyd Carlton**

Lloyd is married to Pat, they have three adult children and Lloyd is principal in the Jefferson County Public Schools.



**Secretary Mr. Bob Knapp**

Bob is married to Claire, they have two adult children (missionaries of our church) and Bob is a consultant with ServiceMaster Corporation.



**Members Dr. Steve Loomis**

Steve is married to Kathy, they have three young adult children and Steve is an optometrist.



**Dr. Larry Donnithorne**

Larry is married to Fran, they have four adult children and Larry is President of Colorado Christian University.



**Mr. Tom Melton**

Tom is married to Julie, they have two young adult children and Tom is an engineer with PBS&J, Inc.



**Dr. Jerry Nelson**

Jerry is married to Barbara, they have three adult daughters and an 8-year-old son and Jerry is pastor of SGC.

**Many Missionaries Home This Summer**

Many of our staff missionaries will be with us much of this next year. We welcome them home for an extended time to refresh their souls and to strengthen relationships. If you desire to host a family for a meal and would like to learn of their ministry, please contact Joyce Goddard at the church (303.986.1527, Ext. 220).

- From Southeast Asia, Daniel and Maria Teacher\* along with their children will arrive July 1, living with Maria's family for the summer, moving to Denver from September through December, and returning in early January, 2007. They are helping their daughter get started in college this fall.
- From Southeast Asia, Steve and Joy Sellers\* along with their daughter arrive June 25, and will be here until August 6. If you have an interest in business as missions, then set up a time to talk with Steve regarding your future. We are also putting together a team to go to the Sellers in 2007. Please contact Joyce Goddard to find out about this opportunity.
- Jon and Kathy Haley arrive on June 8th from Spain. They will be bringing their foster son, Nacho. Jon and Kathy will be here for the year and would welcome any opportunity to speak of the theological education they are involved in there in Spain and the Latin American world.
- From Mongolia, Keith and Kathy Principle\* and their children arrive June 15th, and will return June, 2007. If you are wondering about the ministry needed for the children of missionaries, Keith and Kathy can relate the exciting things God is doing through educating "Missionary Kids".
- From the earthquake zone of Central Asia, David and Mary Shepherd\* along with their children arrive May 2. David's mother has a recurrence of cancer and they will be visiting her in Texas throughout their time in the States.
- John and Abigail Singer\* with their children arrive from Central Asia on July 3. They will be traveling at the beginning of their time in the States and then will be at Southern Gables the months of September and October.
- Joel and Christina Smith along with their two children will be in the States from June 24th to July 30th. They are involved in a seminary in Ukraine as well as a church plant in their city of Donetsk.

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\*Not their real names. To protect our missionaries working in creative access countries, names of people and places have been changed.

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- Wayne & Melody Hala will be coming off the field of Japan this fall. They are seeking medical and dental help for their daughter, Annette, who is battling TMJ. Pray for the Halas in this time of transition.
- Kirk and Dawn Wilson along with their two boys will be in Colorado from mid-July to the end of August. Kirk's work on the Logos Hope ship is progressing, and we anticipate sending three short-term teams to the ship in the next year.

Many of these returning have most of their needs covered, but some are still in need of housing and transportation. Please let us know if you are able to help in either of these big needs. Also, please consider having one or more of these missionaries in your small group, Bible study or men's huddle to give a report.

### **Missions Reports**

- **India**

On March 4th of this year we graduated our first five students from TEEC. They had begun their studies in TEEC in 1998 when the program began. Along with these five, over 700 others have taken at least one course and over 300 have taken at least five courses. To all who have prayed and supported this exciting missional work—Thank You! We look forward to future graduates serving in the Evangelical Free Church of India.



- **Nigeria**

On April 15, thirteen people returned from a two-week trip to Nigeria. While on the trip they cared for and ministered to individuals orphaned by the AIDS epidemic. They also cared for women widowed due to AIDS. Mike and Jane Stead led this trip and will be giving a full report on Sunday evening, April 30. Thank you for your prayers and support of this team.



- **Mexico**

On April 12, eighteen people set out in our church vans for Juarez, Mexico. They constructed a house in two days and returned on the 15th. While building the house they cared for and showed the love of Jesus to the Mexicans and each other. For those who participated in this trip and those who supported them—Thank You!



**The Da Vinci Code: A Novel (Book and Movie)**

The April, 2006 release of the movie based on the book, *The Da Vinci Code: A Novel*, probably means many more people will be exposed to this fascinating but fictional story. The following reviews (of the book) may help you in your own understanding and in any discussions you may have about the book or movie. Remember, attacks on the truth of Christianity ought not to elicit counter-attacks (that is not the way of Jesus) but should call forth "light" from us who are Jesus' followers.

What follows are critiques of *The Da Vinci Code: A Novel* by two evangelical scholars. The first is by Dr. Albert Mohler and the second is by Dr. Craig Blomberg.

**"Deciphering *The Da Vinci Code*"**

**Albert Mohler, Ph.D., President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary**

The summer publishing season seems always to include a thriller that leaps to the top of the best-seller charts and stays there until the fall--when readers get serious and return to school and work.

*The Da Vinci Code* is this year's winner (2003), sitting at the top of the Amazon.com ratings this week and listed at second place in the *New York Times* hardcover fiction list. The book was on the top of that list last week, and it has made the list for 18 straight weeks. Not bad for a book with a seemingly unmanageable mix of plot structure, conspiracy theories, and mountains of detail about Catholic orders, renaissance art, theological heresy, and theoretical mathematics. Hooked yet?

I was forewarned about the heresy in the book, and so I started reading with a determination to force my way through an unpleasant read. It wasn't hard. As a matter of fact, the plot was so engaging, and the content of the book was so rich, that I had a hard time putting it down. Dan Brown may or may not actually believe what he writes, but he writes so well in this genre that the average reader will not even care. That is the problem.

Devotees of suspense novels read for the sheer pleasure of the intellectual engagement--not so much with big ideas, but with the conspiratorial mind. Brown took a big risk in this novel, betting his narrative on a conspiracy involving virtually everyone even remotely connected with Christianity throughout the last 2,000 years. The forces arrayed in this conspiracy include the Knights Templar, the Masons, the Roman Catholic Church, Interpol, and a secret society known as the Priory of Sion, which is claimed to have included as Grand Masters no less than Sandro Boticelli, Isaac Newton, and, of course, Leonardo Da Vinci.

Sorting all this out for the reader are characters ranging from Robert Langdon, a Harvard art historian, to an albino monk/assassin, who is sent by Opus Dei, a Catholic order close to the papacy. The murdered director of the Louvre has a mostly silent part, speaking primarily through secret codes and ciphers left written in his own blood as he died. A cast of other characters is necessary for the narrative to work and the plot to unfold.

But the human characters take a back seat to the grand conspiracy that gives the book its plot, and in that conspiracy is the

heresy. *The Da Vinci Code's* driving claim is nothing less than that Christianity is based upon a Big Lie (the deity of Christ) used by patriarchal oppressors to deny the true worship of the Divine Feminine. Still hanging in there? If you thought *The Last Temptation of Christ* was explosive, *The Da Vinci Code* is thermonuclear. The book claims that Jesus Christ was married to Mary Magdalene, that a child was born of this marriage, and that Mary and her child fled after the crucifixion to Gaul, where they established the Merovingian line of European royalty.

Art historians may quibble with Dan Brown's details, and mathematicians may take issue with his summary of the Fibonacci Sequence, but as a theologian, my problem is the author's toying with such an easily dismissed heresy. **Brown has crossed the line between a suspense novel and a book promoting a barely hidden agenda, to attack the Christian church and the Gospel.**

In order to deliver on his conspiratorial plot, Brown has to lay the groundwork by having his **main characters deny the inspiration and authority of the biblical text and replace Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John with the gnostic gospels found just after World War II at Nag Hammadi.** The gnostic texts are called the "unaltered gospels," and the New Testament texts are dismissed as propaganda for the goddess-bashers. One character (hint--watch him carefully) explains that all this is "the greatest cover-up in human history." Jesus ("the original feminist") had intended for Mary Magdalene to lead the church after His death, but "Peter had a problem with that." So, Mary Magdalene hit the apostolic "glass ceiling" and was sent off to Gaul, taking with her, not only her child, but--you guessed it--the Holy Grail.

Heard this all before? The main contours of this plot have been found in many books published in the occultic literature. *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* by Michael Baigent, Henry Lincoln, and Richard Leigh (1983) made the same claims, but in what claimed to be a non-fiction expose--not a suspense novel. *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* sold by the thousands. *The Da Vinci Code* will likely reach millions. Never underestimate the commercial potential of a heretical conspiracy packaged in a seductive novel. Brown will take his millions to the bank.

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I said that the book's [hereafter TDC] heresies are easily dismissed, and they are--at least to anyone with a real interest in the identity of Jesus and the history of the church. **Calling the Nag Hammadi texts "unaltered" gospels is like reading the official Soviet histories as objective fact--complete with leading figures airbrushed out of the photos.** TDC claims that the New Testament is simply the result of a male-dominated church leadership inventing Christianity in order to control the Roman empire and subsequent world history and then to oppress women and repress goddess-worship.

In TDC the heretics are the heroes and the apostles are unindicted co-conspirators. The Great Satan is Emperor Constantine, who, it is claimed, never even became a Christian, but knew a good marketing plan when he saw it. Constantine supposedly called the Council of Nicaea in 325 in order to invent the idea of Christ's divinity (and celibacy) and then turn out the heretics, thus burying the real story of Jesus (and Mary Magdalene) forever. "It's all about power," one character explains. That's why Constantine "upgraded Jesus' status."

And the Council of Nicaea? There, TDC reveals, the Emperor led the bishops to declare Jesus as the Son of God by a vote. "A relatively close vote at that," the text elaborates.

The real Council of Nicaea adopted a creed in order to reject the heretical teachings of one Arius, who taught that Jesus was not of the same substance as the Father. Brown weaves fact and fiction with such recklessness that the average reader will assume all these claims to be factual.

The Council of Nicaea did not "invent" the divinity of Jesus. This was already the declaration of the Church, claimed by Jesus himself and proclaimed by the apostles. The council boldly claimed this as the faith of the Church and named Arianism as a heresy and Arians as heretics. A close vote? Only two out of more than 300 bishops failed to sign the creed. Not exactly a cliff-hanger.

**The Nag Hammadi texts as the real gospels? Not on your life. The texts are easily identifiable as gnostic literature peripheral to the Church.** The early Church did *not* establish the canon (official set of New Testament writings) at Nicaea, though a general consensus was already evident at that gathering. The New Testament writings were recognized and set apart because of their authorship by one of the apostles and by their clearly orthodox content--in harmony with the other New Testament writings as recognized by the churches spread throughout the Greco-Roman world.

Much more could be considered, but the main issue is this: How plausible is such a conspiracy? The threshold of credibility for this conspiracy requires us to believe that the entire structure of Christian theology is a sinister plot to fool the masses. Further, we must believe that the leaders of this conspiracy *knew* that Jesus was not the Son of God, but were willing to die for this cause by the millions. As C. S.

Lewis once argued, people might be willing to be martyrs for a lie if they are innocently deceived, but very few will die for what they *know* to be a lie.

Credibility for this conspiracy requires belief in the claim that the truth, known by millions, has been kept secret from the world until now. Specifically, until the release of *The Da Vinci Code*.

What about the atheists--the rationalist opponents of Christianity? What about the liberal theologians who dismiss the deity of Christ as mythological baggage? They must be greeting *The Da Vinci Code* with excitement, right? Not hardly. The strange and unsustainable logic of this conspiracy theory has not impressed the skeptics. Shirley MacLaine might take the argument seriously, but not Richard Dawkins.

The book's thesis requires the reader to believe that virtually every major work of western art includes an embedded code, and that this code is evident all around us if we will just see it. Of course, to pull this off Brown has to see symbols (especially phallic symbols) everywhere. Freud was a rank amateur.

A late night conversation with a close friend reminds me of the attraction of a conspiracy theory--with or without evidence. This brilliant friend, holding a Harvard doctorate, told me that he was absolutely certain that President John F. Kennedy was the victim of a great international conspiracy including world communist leaders, the Mafia, J. Edgar Hoover, and various Hollywood celebrities. After laughing out loud, I realized my friend's utter seriousness. My rational faculties were in full outrage despite the lateness of the hour, so I simply asked my friend what evidence would be required to prove or to disprove his thesis. He looked me straight in the eye and told me that the evidence was so hidden that the truth would never be known in our lifetimes. So--hold onto your theory without the evidence and be unmoved, regardless of the facts.

Those who want to believe the heresies of *The Da Vinci Code* will hold to them tenaciously--whatever the evidence. Clearly, the book attacks the Gospel, but the truth is unshaken.

*The Da Vinci Code* will soon fall from the best-seller lists, be remaindered to the outlet malls, show up in paperback, and may even interest Hollywood. The faith of the Church remains intact.

G. K. Chesterton reminded us that orthodoxy is not only true; it is infinitely more interesting than heresy. It is alive and compelling and life-changing. Heresies come and go by fashion. The truth is unchanged and unchangeable.

*Caveat Emptor.*

Craig L. Blomberg, Ph.D., Distinguished Professor of New Testament, Denver Seminary

The most important word in this entire book is the noun in the subtitle; this is a "novel"-a work of fiction. That is important to remember, especially after the statements on page 1, which move the work slightly into the arena of historical fiction, but only slightly. It is true that there are such organizations as the Priory of Sion and Opus Dei. It is true that the author has worked hard to describe accurately the contemporary European locations, including city layouts, buildings, and artwork, in which the plot is set. **The statement that "all descriptions of...documents ...in this novel are accurate" is, however, highly inaccurate!**

It didn't take me very long in reading this book to understand why it was the #1 bestseller on the New York Times list of fiction for a large portion of 2003. It is well-written, fast-paced, with surprising turns of plot and intrigue regularly shocking readers, especially when they start to think they have things figured out. It contains all the elements of a good murder mystery, enough vivid portrayals that one can imagine the events depicted on location, especially if one is familiar with France and Britain, and bite-sized chapters that regularly end with a "cliffhanger" begging one to read more. Couple all that with regular implicit criticism of organized religion, especially traditional European Catholicism, along with explicit feminist and even goddess-worship ideology, and one understands why many post-Christian readers will approve of the message and virtually all readers will find the plot riveting. I could hardly put the book down myself, wanting to know what would happen next.

This is the first novel that has been reviewed in the six years of the *Denver (Seminary) Journal's* existence. I am not presumptuous enough to claim to be an expert critic of contemporary American fiction. And more than the barest description of the plot would destroy the fun for prospective readers. The following will have to suffice. The main character, Professor Robert Langdon, a supposed expert in "symbolology" from Harvard, while in Paris as a guest lecturer, has plans to meet with the curator of the Louvre, Jacques Saunière. Before the meeting can happen, Saunière is murdered under bizarre circumstances, and Langdon is seemingly about to be charged with his killing. Strange codes scrawled at the murder scene bring on stage one Sophie Neveu, an expert cryptographer, who turns out to have secret messages for Langdon, leading the two to flee on a trip that begins as an attempt to save Langdon's life and eventually enmeshes them in the famous medieval "quest for the holy grail"-except that the grail is not the chalice that Jesus used at the Last Supper but...Well, I really can't tell you any more than this without spoiling too much. (Hints of a possible romance between Langdon and Neveu remain only that until the very end of the book and the only sex scene in the novel is a briefly described flashback in Sophie's mind of a grotesque ritual she observed as a young woman.)

Much of what could mislead the careless reader involves the history and contemporary manifestations in Brown's narrative of the two societies, the Priory of Sion and Opus Dei, which prove to be antagonists to each other in his story. Apart from their very general religious objectives and the names of a few famous leaders in the former,

almost everything crucial to the plot-line about these two groups is made up. A competent church historian is needed in places, however, to help people understand just where the boundary is crossed between fact and fiction. **But what concerns me most, as a New Testament scholar, are the number of people who think that the occasional comments about Jesus, his associates and the literature and events of first three Christian centuries are at all accurate. Put simply, they are not, and even very liberal biblical scholars (as in, for example, the famous Jesus Seminar) agree** (see their two books, *The Five Gospels* [New York: Macmillan, 1993] and *The Acts of Jesus* [San Francisco: Harper, 1998]).

Specifically, there is not a shred of historical evidence that Jesus ever married Mary Magdalene (or anyone else) or ever fathered children. As Darrell Bock points out in his recent *Christianity Today* review (January 2004, 62), such information would certainly have been included in 1 Corinthians 9 where Paul appeals to the fact that Peter and various other apostles had wives when they received material help from the churches. In supporting his right to receive such help, Paul would have wanted to appeal to an even more convincing example-Jesus-if it were available. I would add also that with the very early veneration of Mary, the mother of Jesus, in Roman Catholicism, largely out of a desire to have a quasi-divine female figure along with God the Father, had Jesus ever been married, such a woman could scarcely have disappeared without a historical trace. She would have been celebrated and venerated instead, especially in the very strands of Catholicism that *The Da Vinci Code* pit against the revelation of "the truth" of Jesus' marriage. Brown instead stands this logic on its head when he has Langdon allege that it was so unusual for a Jewish man not to be married that, if he were celibate, that is what the Gospels would have had to call attention to (p. 245). But in a sense that is precisely what they do, at least as Jesus counter culturally approves of a single, celibate lifestyle in Matthew 19:10-12, even if he does not explicitly apply it to himself. And numerous other features in the Gospels call attention to certain ascetic tendencies in Jesus' life (see esp. the survey in Dale Allison's *Jesus of Nazareth* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998], 172-216), making his celibacy less surprising. Moreover, it is not true that "according to Jewish custom, celibacy was condemned"-the Jewish sects known as the Therapeutae and at least some of the Essenes in fact promoted celibacy as a spiritual ideal.

**Another blatantly fictitious portion of *The Da Vinci Code* is the claim that "more than eighty gospels were considered for the New Testament."** Add up everything that was ever called a gospel in the first half-millennium of Christianity (most of which are small compilations of esoteric sayings ascribed to Jesus and not narratives of any portion of his life) and you come up with about two-dozen documents. About half of these are known only from quotations in early church fathers or small scraps or fragments that have been discovered, and there is little that is unorthodox in them. Others are clearly Gnostic and equally clearly "Christian" mutations of earlier apostolic tradition. The only apocryphal "Gospel" that any siz-

able number of scholars of any theological stripe gives serious credence to is the Coptic Gospel of Thomas, a collection of 114 sayings attributed to Jesus, of which approximately 1/3 are roughly paralleled in the canonical Gospels, another 1/3 are clearly Gnostic and non-Christian, and the remaining 1/3 are neither necessarily unorthodox nor demonstrably Gnostic. It is in this last group where intriguing questions about what else Jesus might have actually said, not preserved in the canon, primarily emerge. But Brown's characters do not appeal to the Gospel of Thomas at all! For a complete survey of the real apocryphal Gospel literature, see the standard English translation and introduction of W. Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 1 (Louisville: Westminster, 1991).

Equally false is Langdon's claim that "The Bible, as we know it today, was collated by the pagan Roman emperor Constantine the great" (p. 231). While historians do debate how serious Constantine's conversion to Christianity was, he certainly didn't remain a pagan. And he had nothing to do with the canonization of the New Testament. That was a process the roots of which can be documented as early as the mid-second century, culminating in the 39th festal letter of the bishop of Alexandria, Athanasius, delivered on Easter of A.D. 367, proclaiming the exact 27 books of the New Testament agreed on by all branches of Christianity. It is true that there was dispute from the second to the fourth centuries over seven of the NT books, for various reasons (Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, Jude, 2 and 3 John and Revelation), but there is no evidence that there was ever any proposal not to include the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke or John or to include any other Gospel (for the full story see F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* [Downers Grove: IVP, 1987]). **Brown further confuses the truth by alluding to the Dead Sea Scrolls as if they included Gospels (p. 234), when in fact they contain no Christian documents whatsoever-only Jewish (and a few Greek).**

In marshalling support for Mary Magdalene as Jesus' wife, Langdon avers "the Gospel of Philip is always a good place to start" (p. 246). Hardly, since even very liberal scholars agree that this is a late, third-century Gnostic collection. Thus there is little if anything in it that is likely to be historical. What is more, this "Gospel" exists only in Coptic, not Aramaic (and if there had been a predecessor in another language it would have been Greek not Aramaic, as is demonstrated from other Coptic Gnostic literature), so that it is irrelevant when Langdon goes on to claim that the word "companion" (which Mary is deemed to be of Jesus) means "spouse" in Aramaic. It is also worth pointing out that no Aramaic or Hebrew words for "companion" normally mean spouse! The very short collection of sayings known as the Gospel of Mary (the next plank in Langdon's platform for marrying the Magdalene to Jesus) claims only that Jesus loved her more than various apostles and it comes from an even later (fifth-century) date, though fragments of this document in third-century Greek have been found (but not of this claim).

The enigmatic "Q-document" has been a favorite among writers of fiction over the years. Scholars use it to refer to material common to Matthew and Luke not found in Mark and many believe that an

original Greek collection, largely of sayings of Jesus, called Q for the German word "Quelle" (in English, "source"), accounts for the verbal parallelism between Matthew and Luke where they are not following Mark. Scholars hypothesize many other things about Q, most of which are more speculative. None has ever argued that Jesus himself wrote it, but the Da Vinci Code does (p. 256). But even if he did, there is nothing secret or scandalous in it; we know what it would have contained by reading the relevant sections of Matthew and Luke!

**At several points in various ways Brown's novel makes the claim that Jesus was not considered divine until the fourth century. This, too, is patently false-the claims emerge already in the first-century canonical gospels, as again every biblical scholar of every stripe recognizes.** Of course, a lively debate continues as to whether those claims were deserved, but that's quite different from what The Da Vinci Code avers. Larry Hurtado's quite recent *Lord Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) in fact demonstrates in massive detail how shockingly early the claims for Jesus' divinity arose-within a few years of his life, something unprecedented in the history of world religions, and something inexplicable unless Jesus himself did and said things that gave rise to those perspectives.

**The most sweeping of all the fictitious claims in this book is the idea that the Priory of Sion has preserved "thousands of ancient documents as scientific evidence that the New Testament is false testimony" (p. 341). Such documents simply don't exist. This is part of Brown's fiction.** The apocryphal and legendary post-New Testament material that does exist has been scrutinized intensely by biblical scholars and is available in English translation (see above; the *New Testament Apocrypha* has a second volume devoted to "acts," "epistles" and "apocalypses") for all to read (published in 1992). Nothing in them undermines the New Testament. There is no hidden cache (earlier novels accused the Vatican itself of hiding such documents, not an organization fighting against the Vatican!) being suppressed from the general public.

For readers who want actual scholarship pointing to the reliability of the New Testament, I invite them to consult my books on *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1987) and *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel: Issues and Commentary* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1991). For an excellent study of what can truly be known about Jesus outside the New Testament, see the book with that title by Robert E. Van Voorst (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). For an in-depth response to the small number of scholars who do put stock in apocryphal documents besides Thomas, see Philip Jenkins, *Hidden Gospels: How the Search for Jesus Lost Its Way* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). For a survey and debunking of modern legends and fictions of various kinds (there are ample predecessors to *The Da Vinci Code*, and none of them agrees with another!), see especially Douglas Groothuis, *Jesus in an Age of Controversy* (Eugene: Harvest House, 1996).

Meanwhile, enjoy *The Da Vinci Code*. It's a fantastic novel. I'm so glad I read it. Just keep reminding yourself throughout, "It's only a novel. It's only a novel."