

DA VINCI CODE: HANDY NOTES

This is in Dialogue format, and could be used as a basis for a two-people presentation.

PART ONE

Person A: *I enjoyed Dan Brown's **Da Vinci Code**.
Why are people making so much fuss about it?*

Person B: If anyone's making a fuss, it's we Christians...

A *That's because the Church has covered-up the real truth.
Christians are just feeling guilty, so they're fighting back.*

B 'Fighting for' would be a better phrase, but the point is:
the main Christian concern is not what Brown says about the Church
but what he denies about **Jesus Christ**.

A *What does he deny?*

B Well, for starters, the truths of –
Christmas,
Good Friday and
Easter!

According to the *Da Vinci Code*, Jesus was **not divine**, so:

- Christmas cannot be about God's love - sending his Son to be born among us,
- Good Friday cannot be Jesus dying for us all and bringing us salvation,
- Easter cannot be Jesus being now raised and alive, because (according to Brown) Jesus is stone dead!

A *So what!
Many people think as Brown does.
He's under no obligation to believe what you believe. What's the fuss?*

B You're quite right, of course, about Brown's freedom to promote his unbelief if he wishes.
But there's a ground-breaking difference in the case of the *Da Vinci Code* that the public are unused to.

A *What's this almighty difference then?*

B In what is called 'fact-based fiction' there has always been a basic Code between writers and readers whereby the basic facts are recognised as basic facts and are not changed. Brown has done two things:
First: he has abolished that Code...

A *Moved the goal-posts in fact?*

B ...I like that...yes...In fact I'd say he's abolished them altogether! Er,... where was I?

A *About to tell me the second thing that Brown has done after abolishing the fiction-writer's Code...*

B Yes, once Brown dropped the Code that retains the basic facts, he replaces them with **fiction**.
Then, he tries to conceal his crime by further **lies**!

He uses impressive phrases in support which are themselves complete fiction:
'scores of historians',
and
'well-documented evidence' !

A *That's not a very nice thing to say!*

B No, it isn't! But it is important to say it if it is true!

A *Well is it true?*

B Yes, of course!
Do you remember that Brown prefaces his book with a 'FACTS' page?

A *Yes, the main ones were about the Priory of Sion being founded way back in something-or-other...*

B 1099.

A *...yes, and that there are old Parchments, with some French title...*

B *Les Dossiers Secrets...*

A *...if you say so! ... which trace Jesus's blood line through his marriage to Mary Magdalene to the present day.*

B Right. Let me fill you in first on the truth about them both, because they are both key, and then remind you of Brown's claims about them.

These facts are stranger than fiction!

First, Brown's eleventh century 'Priory of Sion' was founded in 1956 by a French con-man.

He had been pro-Nazi in the Second World War, and after serving a jail sentence in the 1950's, he founded a small society for the improvement of housing. French law required him to register it and give it a name, so he named it after a local hill (near Arnasses) called 'Mont Sion'!

A *Go on...*

B I shall! (This is more exciting than the book!)
The guy's name was Pierre Platarad.
He fancied himself as the heir to the French throne, so he invented a family-tree from Jesus via the early French Kings to himself. With a few others he then contrived to 'plant' it in the French National Library. He then suggested to two British journalists that they might uncover there the real 'truth' about Christianity!

The journalists thought it a joke at first, but became convinced that it was **true!** So much so that they wrote a book called *Holy Blood : Holy Grail*. (The story gets more incredible as you go along!)

Dan Brown **also** swallowed the hoax - hook, line and sinker, and based much of his book on it!
Indeed he was so indebted to its authors Leigh and Baigent that he used 'Leigh', and an anagram of 'Baigent' as the name of his key character:

Leigh Teabing!

A *But doesn't Brown write that 'Les Dossiers Secrets' have 'been authenticated by many specialists'?*

B Yes, that's what he does, which can so easily mislead his readers. Did I mention that the documents 'planted' in the French National Library were *typed*? So to throw readers off the scent, Brown calls them '*parchments*'!

Brown, you see, is a salesman of fiction: not a writer of fact. Just as he lies about the hoax parchments, he also lies to cover-up the non-historical Priory of Sion by saying that it is:
'one of the oldest secret societies on earth'!

Readers meet similar dishonesty in T.V. adverts, but most will not recognise it in Brown's writing unless they are told, and will therefore **believe** him.

- A** *So, what you're saying is that on Dan Brown's introductory FACTS page, his first two 'facts' (the Priory of Sion, and Les Dossiers Secrets) are actually - both lies !*
- B** Exactly!
(There are many reliable books exposing Brown's historical nonsense, and they all say the same.)
- A** *Are any of Brown's alleged 'facts' on his FACTS page true?*
- B** Yes, the Roman Catholic organisation ‘Opus Dei’ certainly exists. The group some years back probably prevented the Vatican from going bankrupt. It has its own website. It has no members who are monks, and I suspect – and hope! – that the mad albino monk, Silas, is closer to a novelist's exaggeration (as Dickens might have created) than the average member of Opus Dei!
- A** *Brown has Leonardo da Vinci very central to the book, as he was one of the Grand Masters of the Priory of Sion.*
- B** By that you must mean that his name was on the typed hoax-list planted in the library at Paris in the 1950's...
- A** *Well...er...yes...*
- B** Okay, but go on!
- A** *Well, if the Priory of Sion did **not** exist, and its list of Grand Masters was a **hoax**, Leonardo da Vinci **cannot** have put the Priory's 'secret' about Jesus marrying Mary Magdalene into his painting of the Last Supper can he?*
- B** Precisely! This brings us to the book's title. Whatever 'Code' Brown is selling, it cannot be a *Da Vinci* one for two reasons. One – Leonardo can have had nothing to do with it, and Two – *Vinci* is the name of a place (like we say Jesus of *Nazareth*). So Vinci could not have had anything to do with Brown's Code either! (Brown appears to think that 'Vinci' is Leonardo's surname!)

PART TWO

- A** *Let's move to much earlier times.
Even if we have to leave aside Leonardo, Jesus's marriage to Mary Magdalene could still have happened. Brown has Leigh Teabing quote a true early Gospel that records it.*
- B** Well, Brown being Brown, it is unlikely that what you call his 'true' and 'early' Gospel is either 'true' or 'early'! In commercial-speak remember that it is *lies* that 'rule O.K.!'

Here, in brief, is the necessary background.

The First Century:

Jesus lives and is crucified about A.D.30.

His followers experience him alive ('the Resurrection' as they call it) and, like Thomas, they soon worshipped Jesus Christ as their 'Lord' and 'God'.

From about A.D.50 written pastoral letters to Christians and accounts of Jesus's life began to appear. The most reliable were those written by authors who knew Jesus himself or his first disciples.

The Christian bombshell took some getting used to – that Jesus was both God and man; that his death had meaning for us, and that he is alive!

Little wonder that many people couldn't swallow it, and – like today – promoted various watered-down versions, or dodged the God-man difficulty by saying that Jesus was one or the other, but not both.

The *Gnostics* [pronounced with silent 'G'] re-interpreted the Cross by envisaging the 'real' Jesus in Heaven, and laughing as he viewed a spook-Jesus down below! Bizarre stuff!

There developed a wide range of Christ-related literature.

The exaggerated and legendary – like the child Jesus making clay sparrows that flew off – dropped out of Christian use, and the sober more historical accounts took on, by general Christian consensus, the status of Scripture.

Just as fish that is filleted has first to be whole, and not the other way around, so the various filleted versions of Christianity had to come *after* the genuine. They could not precede it – however convenient it may be for re-writing history!

That means that, in general terms, the legendary accounts tend to belong to the 2nd, 3rd and 4th centuries, and the most reliable accounts to the 1st.

A *What's all that got to do with the Da Vinci Code?*

B Just about everything! Because Brown, in order to create a shocking and money-making theory, juggles with the events as follows:

- The most reliable and authentic documents he shifts from the 1st century to the 4th.
- He replaces them by more unreliable writings of the 2nd, 3rd and 4th centuries.
- Having dishonestly got rid of the Gospels of the New Testament, Brown then adds insult to injury by saying that everything Christians have been taught is rubbish!

No wonder Christians are mad at him!

A *You mean Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were **not** part of the Emperor Constantine's political propaganda of the 4th century to unite his Empire and give power to the Church?*

B They most certainly were **not**! Although Constantine did call the Council of Nicaea. The Council confirmed the already-accepted standing of the New Testament, and also Christ's divinity, but it created neither of them.

A *But according to Teabing, Christ's divinity only just got voted-in...*

B That's Brown's commercial-speak again. There were at least 220 bishops (perhaps 250) representing countries from Spain to Egypt. Only **two** did not confirm the wording of Christ's divinity.

Brown interprets that momentous vote of 218 to 2 as '*relatively close*'!
Brown will claim anything to boost sales: truth seems irrelevant.

A *I agree, but he is only writing a novel...*

B Even that comment has to be queried, because Brown has not only repeatedly claimed that the book is factual, but has stated that were he to write a **history** book he would not change anything.

Everything Brown wrote and says indicates that he wants his readers (and viewers) to treat his work as factual. And this is exactly what they're doing.
As someone innocently but poignantly wrote to the BBC website:
'If so many believe it to be true – how can they be wrong?'

Folk are believing Brown – and it's earning him millions – because very few readers have the necessary historical knowledge to know he is a ruthless hoaxer.

A *Underlying your criticisms must be a worry that, in Brown's words, 'the very foundation of Christianity would be devastated' if it was revealed that Christ had married.*

B Believe me, that's not the slightest worry!
If Christ's Marriage Certificate (witnessed and signed by King Herod and Pontius Pilate to boot!) was discovered, the fact of his marriage couldn't even *begin* to 'devastate the very foundation of Christianity.'

That's just Brown's commercial-speak and hype again! Exaggeration to get attention!
Listen – and decide for yourself!

A *Who me?*

B Yes you! You don't need to be a Christian believer to draw the obvious conclusion.
Just ask yourself whether if Jesus had married it would even begin to *touch* any of these basic beliefs:

1. That Jesus was God's Son born in Bethlehem as one of us.
2. That Jesus died on the Cross as part of God's programme to 'save' us.
3. That God raised him from the dead on the first Easter.
4. That his followers experienced him alive.
5. That he sent his Holy Spirit to guide and empower his followers.

A *I can't see that his marriage could actually change any of those...*

B I've tried, but also I cannot for the life of me see how it could 'devastate the foundation of Christianity'!
It would not undermine the authority of Scripture either (for Scripture says nothing).
It would not contradict any of the Creeds which early Christians wrote to define and safeguard the Christian Faith.

The Christian tradition down the ages has usually had the wisdom to leave uncertain things as uncertain, and to distinguish between

- central Christian belief about essentials (often called 'doctrines') and
- an individual's personal opinion about non-essentials.

Brown confuses the two, and his critics must avoid slipping into the same trap.

Christ's marital status is not a central Christian belief – in fact it is not a belief at all.
Jesus Christ's bachelorhood is simply a widely-held probability and widely-held opinion, but no more than that.

It is not Brown's unfounded assertion that Jesus married that worries Christians, but his denials – as if proven – of the doctrines of Jesus's divinity and his Resurrection that upsets them.

A *Do Brown's claims, through his character Leigh Teabing, that Jesus was married carry any weight at all?*

B Teabing states that the Jews condemned an unmarried man, they didn't. Brown ignores the example and the teaching of that famous bachelor St. Paul!

Teabing then uses the third century *Gospel of Philip*, switches it to the first century, and explains that when it says that Mary Magdalene was Jesus's 'companion' it meant 'spouse', and adds: 'as any Aramaic scholar will tell you'.

It was a silly addition and a mistake, since the *Gospel of Philip* was written in Egyptian¹. The word translated 'companion' is never used in the New Testament for a close family relationship. It is the word used, for example, for Peter's '*partners*' in his fishing business, and of Titus as Paul's '*fellow-worker*'.

A *It looks as if Jesus can enjoy his bachelorhood for some time yet!
Have you any final comments on the Da Vinci Code. Do you fear for the Church?*

B I don't fear for the Church, but I do fear for **Society**.
Brown's book is very much a book of today in its complete disregard of truth. We know that dishonesty lies at the heart of much commerce. The success of the *Da Vinci Code* shows that the powerful forces in the entertainment industry (like the tobacco, pharmaceutical and other industries) **are no longer restrained by honesty**, but put profits before principles and before people.

Since it takes **trust** to hold any Society together, then anything that promotes mis-trust is not in its interests, whatever financial profits it reaps for some. Once honesty becomes widely optional then distrust and fear are inevitable –and what is there then left to hold society together?

As for the Church, firm believers in anything at all are helped by being challenged, because they have to think more clearly what they believe, why, and explain it. The *Da Vinci Code* is challenging Christians, and if they avoid overreacting it should help Christians-in-fog to get their faith into focus!

One school chaplain has said that since the *Da Vinci Code* youngsters were for the first time asking him the questions that he had always been paid to answer!

Anything is better than apathy: if people are prompted to ask questions about Jesus – that's grand! He is, after all, the Answer!

¹ i.e.Coptic.