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# Fiction plays loose with the facts in Dan Brown's conspiracy-driven world

*By Diether Haenicke  
September 23, 2009*

I finally read Dan Brown's novel, "The Da Vinci Code." I am not usually attracted by books on the best-seller list, and murder mysteries hardly ever interest me. I have not read more than two or three of them in my entire life. But this one is different, I was told by many friends. Read it, you'll like it, they said; and so I did.

And indeed, this book is different. Over 6 million copies of it have already been sold, very unusual for a work of fiction. No doubt, a movie version will follow soon, probably with Harrison Ford in the role of the professorial sleuth. And no doubt, the book and the movie will appeal to the millions of people all over the world who love a good conspiracy story, particularly if it is as skillfully crafted as this one is.

But controversy surrounds the book. Without giving away plot or ending, here are some comments on the book's basic premises on which its plot rests. Jesus, so the book states, was in fact a human being and not God. For political reasons, Constantine, the first Christian Roman emperor, wanted the world converted from pagan matriarchy to patriarchal Christianity. He therefore eliminated all references to the ancient cult of goddess and eliminated from the Bible all traits of Christ's humanness, thus inventing a male Christ-God by defrauding sacred knowledge and manipulating the Holy Scripture.

Jesus, so the book further claims, was actually married to Mary Magdalene, with whom he had a child, which was brought to France, where Christ's bloodline survived through the Merovingian kings. A secret society guards this hidden knowledge and the last descendant of Jesus into our days.

The entire book is replete with similar “facts” that are presented as accurate and allegedly based on careful research. Anyone who has studied ancient and medieval history, and church history in particular, would immediately question these “facts” and consider them part of the author’s imagination. But many readers, so some historians and Bible scholars fear, will not see through Brown’s clever manipulation of the actual historical record. The author mixes historical evidence and pure invention so seamlessly that many readers may believe that they are receiving new, revealing insights into yet another major conspiracy perpetrated against better knowledge by the Christian churches.

Is such an approach irresponsible? Paul L. Maier, the eminent ancient historian and premier researcher in the field of biblical history, considers the book outright dangerous.

Together with Hank Hanegraaff he just published a booklet in response to the novel, “The Da Vinci Code — Fact or Fiction?” I just finished reading it and recommend that everyone who found Brown’s novelistic conspiracy theory fascinating also read Paul Maier's point-by-point rebuttal of the so-called “facts” put forth by the novelist. Simply put: Paul Maier knows the actual historical record and discusses it straightforwardly. Dan Brown knows most of the historical record and distorts it in order to meet the demands of his complex plot.

Should a writer not have the artistic freedom to create his own reality? In general terms, yes. However, Brown claims that critical parts of his book are based on “research” and that they are factual and accurate. With such statements he frontally assails the basic tenets of Christian teachings and Christian faith.

Maier and Hanegraaff point to a cultural phenomenon that is hard to refute. While it is, these days, unacceptable to cast aspersions on any great world religion like Islam, Hinduism, or Buddhism, it is not only all right but politically correct to question and attack — in print, art, polemic — any and all tenets of Christianity. Christian beliefs may be freely attacked; critical remarks about all other religions are a politically correct taboo. Mel Gibson's movie “The Passion of the Christ,” which is based on biblical texts, was characterized as a “repulsive, masochistic fantasy,” “a sacred snuff film,” and “bigoted.” Dan Brown’s “The Da Vinci Code,” which negates the deity of Christ and

exposes the gospels as fabrications, is hailed as “pure genius,” “mandatory reading,” and “compelling.”

If you read “The Da Vinci Code,” you should also read Paul Maier’s response. Thereafter, make up your own mind.

*This column was first published July 14, 2004 in the Kalamazoo Gazette [mlive.com/kalamazoo](http://mlive.com/kalamazoo)*