

## Introduction to the Seminar

### A. Why do a seminar on the Da Vinci Code (DVC)?

1. The book is a novel with a captivating story that has sold millions of copies
2. The movie will be a blockbuster and thus greatly expand the influence of the basic ideas contained in the novel
3. Although it is fiction, Dan Brown claims certain things in the novel are factual. Page 1 states:

#### FACT:

The Priory of Sion – a European secret society founded in 1099 – is a real organization. In 1975 Paris' Bibliotheque Nationale discovered parchments known as Les Dossiers Secrets, identifying numerous members of the Priory of Sion, including Sir Isaac Newton, Botticelli, Victor Hugo, and Leonardo da Vinci.

The Vatican Prelature known as Opus Dei is a deeply devout Catholic sect that has been the topic of recent controversy due to reports of brainwashing, coercion, and a dangerous practice known as "corporal mortification." Opus Dei has just completed construction of a \$47 million National Headquarters at 234 Lexington Avenue in New York City.

All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate.

4. Dan Brown has consistently stated that he believes the information presented in the novel is true and accurate. (Example: *Good Morning America* and the ABC Special *Jesus, Mary, and Da Vinci*, both on November 3, 2003).
5. Many people have begun to ask questions regarding the true nature of Christ and early Christianity, and to doubt the veracity of the New Testament and historic Christian orthodoxy.

### B. My qualifications and methodology for presenting the seminar

1. I received a B.S. degree in history from the US Naval Academy
2. My masters degree from seminary included significant study in the areas of theology and early church history.
3. I will restrict my comments to the areas of the history and theology of the early church. The other areas - art, history of the middle ages

(especially secret societies), and the Catholic Church - are outside my areas of expertise and will only be tangentially covered in this seminar.

4. The novel clearly bases many of its historical claims on the book *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, which is mentioned in the book by name, and through one of the key characters Leigh Teabing, which is an anagram of two of the names of the authors of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*. However, I will restrict my comments to the claims as they appear in *The Da Vinci Code*.
5. All page references today will be to the hardback version of the *Da Vinci Code*. The ISBN data for this version is listed in the bibliography.
6. The historical and theological claims in the novel are tightly interwoven and will be difficult to extricate from one another. Consequently, some of the data may be repeated several times.

C. A brief overview of *The Da Vinci Code*

## I. The Role of Constantine in Early Christianity

### A. Constantine's role in the Da Vinci Code (DVC)

1. Constantine is really the ultimate villain of DVC
2. He is presented as a pagan emperor who only pretended to be a Christian for political purposes, and who radically altered Christianity from its original form into the form we know as orthodox Christianity today
3. Is there any historical validity to these charges?

### B. Was Constantine a Christian or a pagan?

1. DVC - A lifelong pagan – “I thought Constantine was a Christian,” Sophie said. “Hardly,” Teabing scoffed. “He was a lifelong pagan who was baptized on his deathbed, too weak to protest.” (page 232)
2. History – A pagan who converted to Christianity – A brief history of the life and times of Constantine
  - a. Diocletian and the Great Persecution (c. 300 AD)
  - b. Empire split in 4 parts; fights start; Milvian Bridge, 27 October 312 – “By this sign conquer”.
  - c. Constantine wins and becomes Emperor in the West, and apparently a Christian (though he is certainly inconsistent in his faith as all Christians!).
  - d. Constantine issues Edict of Toleration in 313 – Christians are no longer to be persecuted
  - e. In 321 Constantine outlawed labor on Sunday, as it was the Lord's Day.
  - f. Lucinius, Emperor in the East begins persecuting Christians again, so Constantine attacks him, wins and becomes sole Emperor in 324.
  - g. Called Council of Nicea in 325 AD.
  - h. He was baptized shortly before death – a common custom in that day.

### C. What role did Constantine play in Christians worshipping on Sunday's?

1. DVC – Constantine made Christians worship on Sunday as honor to the pagan sun god. “Even Christianity's weekly holy day was stolen from the pagans.” What do you mean?” “Originally,” Langdon said, “Christianity honored the Jewish Sabbath of Saturday, but Constantine shifted it to coincide with the pagan's veneration day of the sun.” He

paused, grinning. “To this day, most churchgoers attend services on Sunday morning with no idea that they are there on account of the pagan sun god’s weekly tribute-*Sunday*.” (Pages 232-233)

2. History – Christians began worshipping on Sunday from the time of the apostles, and this was universal from almost 200 years before the time of Constantine.
  - a. 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 - <sup>1</sup> Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. <sup>2</sup> On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.
  - b. Acts 20:7 - <sup>7</sup> On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight.
  - c. “No longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord’s Day, on which also our life has sprung up again by Him.” - Ignatius, *Letter to the Magnesians*, 9 (c. 117)
  - d. “On the Lord’s own day gather together and break bread and give thanks.” - *Didache*, 14 (c. 150-200)
  - e. “We keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead.” - *Epistle of Barnabas*, 15 (c. early 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD)
  - f. “But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead. - Justin, *Apology I*, Chapter 67 (c. 165 AD)

D. What role did Constantine play in the development of the Christian Bible, and especially the Gospels?

1. DVC – Constantine was a major force in determining which books went into the Bible (especially the Gospels) and he had other books burned. “From this sprang the most profound moment in Christian history.” Teabing paused, eyeing Sophie. “Constantine commissioned and financed a new Bible, which omitted those gospels that made him godlike. The earlier gospels were outlawed, gathered up, and burned.” (Page 234). “More than *eighty* gospels were considered for the New Testament, and yet only a relative few were chosen for inclusion- Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John among them.” “Who chose which gospels to include?” Sophie asked. “Aha!” Teabing

burst in with enthusiasm. “The fundamental irony of Christianity! The Bible, as we know it today, was collated by the pagan Roman Emperor Constantine the Great.” (page 231).

2. History – The Gospels and other writings of the NT were accepted long before Constantine, and he had nothing to do with the formation of the Christian canon.
  - a. “The historical reality is that the Emperor Constantine had nothing to do with the formation of the canon of Scripture: he did not choose which books to include or exclude, and he did not order the destruction of the Gospels that were left out of the canon (there were no imperial book burnings). The formation of the New Testament canon was instead a long and drawn-out process that began centuries before Constantine and did not conclude until long after he was dead. So far as we know, based on our historical record, the emperor was not involved in the process.” (Bart Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction in the Da Vinci Code*, page 74.)
  - b. Paul considered the Gospel of Luke to be Scripture on par with the OT writings: <sup>17</sup> The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. <sup>18</sup> For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages." (1 Timothy 5:17-18, quoting Deuteronomy 25:4 and Luke 10:7).
  - c. Muratorian Fragment (c. 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD) – knew of four Gospels, including Luke and John (names of first two were contained in missing part of the list): “The third book of the Gospel: according to Luke....The fourth gospel is by John, one of the disciples...”
  - d. Irenaeus (c. 180 AD) – only 4 Gospels – no more no less – “It is not possible that the Gospels can be either more or fewer in number than they are. For, since there are four zones of the world in which we live, and four principal winds, while the Church is scattered throughout all the world, and the "pillar and ground" of the Church is the Gospel and the spirit of life; it is fitting that she should have four pillars, breathing out immortality on every side, and vivifying men afresh. From which fact, it is evident that the Word, the Artificer of all, He that sitteth upon the cherubim, and contains all things, He who was manifested to men, has given us the Gospel under four aspects, but bound together by one Spirit.” (*Against Heresies*, 3.11.7). Note: Irenaeus specifically mentions all four Gospels by name throughout this section of his writing.
  - e. Tertullian (c. 160-225) – “Of the apostles, therefore, John and Matthew first instill [http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-03/footnote/fn52.htm - P5284\\_1648363](http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-03/footnote/fn52.htm - P5284_1648363) faith into us; whilst of apostolic men, Luke and Mark renew it afterwards.” (*Against Marcion*, Book 4, Chap. 2). [http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-03/footnote/fn52.htm - P5285\\_1648454](http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/ANF-03/footnote/fn52.htm - P5285_1648454)

- f. Origen (c. 185-254 AD) – “Among the four Gospels, which are the only indisputable ones in the Church of God under heaven, I have learned by tradition that first was written that according to Matthew...Secondly, that according to Mark...and thirdly, that according to Luke...after them all, that according to John.” (*Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew*, quoted in Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History, Book 6, Chapter 25*).
- g. The overall canon: “Despite the claims of Leigh Teabing, almost everyone in the orthodox church agreed that the four Gospels, the Acts, the thirteen Pauline Epistles, 1 Peter, and 1 John should be include.” (Bart Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction in the Da Vinci Code*, page 74.)
- h. “So the canon was not finalized even by Constantine’s day, even though it was agreed among all ‘orthodox’ Christians that the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were canonical scripture. Constantine had nothing to do with that decision.” (Bart Ehrman, *Truth and Fiction in the Da Vinci Code*, page 90.)
- i. Furthermore, this process was not even discussed at the Council of Nicea, and we have no knowledge of Constantine’s views on the subject whatsoever! The first complete list of NT books is from Athanasius, in 367 AD, 30 years after the death of Constantine!
- j. For more information on the development of the NT canon, see the seminar “How Did I Get My Bible?” available at our church website [www.bayridgechristianchurch.org](http://www.bayridgechristianchurch.org)

## E. Conclusion

1. Constantine was a Christian covert – not a lifelong pagan. Contrary to the assertions DVC, he appears to have experienced a real conversion, and did many things to support the growth of Christianity in the Empire.
2. Constantine did not radically alter Christian practices. For example, Christians had worshipped on Sunday since the time of the New Testament. Christian faith and practice was based upon the teachings of the Scripture, and was instituted by the Christian church leaders – not by Constantine.
3. Constantine played no role in the development of the New Testament canon. This process had begun over 200 years prior to Constantine’s time, and was not completed until after his death. Constantine had no involvement in this process, and did not order spurious books destroyed.