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Theological issues raised in the Da Vinci Code

Although this book was published as a work of fiction, claims have been made that it is “meticulously researched” and useful as a tool for theological reflection. We wish to alert readers to the fact that many of its claims about Christian history and theology are contrary to the conclusions of mainstream Christian scholarship.

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Most of the theological issues raised in the book can be divided into four themes: man and woman, the Bible, Jesus Christ, and the Church. We hope that this book will spur people to look deeper into what the Catholic Church actually teaches on these important themes. We offer the following bibliography for those who are interested in further study.

Man and woman:

The Da Vinci Code misstates the Catholic Church's teachings on women, sexuality, family, and the reservation of priesthood to celibate men: e.g., the Church is incorrectly said to teach that sexuality is bad in itself, and that marriage is bad, when in fact marriage is considered by Catholics to be one of the seven holy

sacraments. The Church's teachings are also inaccurately and unfairly portrayed as proceeding from a misogynistic stance. Further resources on the Church's teachings about women:

Letter to Women, John Paul II, 1995.

On the Dignity and Vocation of Women (Mulieris Dignitatem), John Paul II, 1988.

Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan, John Paul II, Daughters of St. Paul Press, 1997.

On Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone (Ordinatio Sacerdotalis), John Paul II, 1994.

Inter Insigniores, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Vatican City, 1976 (on priestly ordination being reserved to men).

The Church and Women: A Compendium, Helmut Moll, ed., Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1998.

Women in the Days of the Cathedrals, Régine Pernoud, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1998.

The Bible:

The Da Vinci Code distorts the historical record on the establishment of the canon of scripture, i.e., the determination of which books should be in the Bible. It says that in order to consolidate its power and its chauvinistic view of Christianity, the Church suppressed other gospels which, prior to their unjust suppression, had a following equal to that of the four canonical gospels. In fact the familiar four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are in the Bible because there was unanimous agreement among the early Christians that they presented the true teachings Jesus

had left his Apostles. The Church did not include the later Gnostic “gospels” in the canon of Scripture because they contained ideas contrary to the Christian faith (and these Gnostic gospels do not, in any event, support the ideas the Da Vinci Code says they support). Further resources on the canon of scripture:

Dei Verbum: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Second Vatican Council document), 1965.

Gospel of Mark, Introductory Essay, University of Navarre Theology Faculty, Scepter Publishers, New York, 1991.

A Companion to Scripture Studies, Vol. I, Part II, John Steinmueller, Lumen Christi Press, New York, 1969.

The Hidden Gospels: How the Search for Jesus Lost its Way, Philip Jenkins, Oxford, 2002.

Jesus Christ:

The Da Vinci Code inaccurately portrays the divinity of Jesus Christ as a politically motivated 4th century invention. It is said that prior to this invention, Christ's followers all thought of him as a great moral teacher and political leader, but not as God. Moreover, the book presents the development of the Church's teachings on Christ as a conflict between proposing that Christ was human and proposing that he is divine; the author never displays recognition that the Church actually teaches Christ as both. Further resources on the Church's teachings about Jesus Christ:

The Mystery of Jesus Christ, F. Ocariz, L.F. Mateo Seco, & J.A. Riestra, Four Courts Press, Dublin, 1994.

The Hidden Gospels: How the Search for Jesus Lost its Way, Philip Jenkins, Oxford, 2002.

Dominus Iesus: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Vatican City, 2000.

The Great Heresies, cf. chapter on Arianism, Hilaire Belloc, Trinity Communications, New York, 1993.

To Know Christ Jesus, Frank Sheed, Sheed and Ward, 1999.

The Church:

Underlying the above inaccuracies is the Da Vinci Code's presupposition that the hierarchy and Magisterium of the Church are not established by Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit, but rather are organs of political power, created and exercised by men so as to satisfy greed and ambition. The novel goes beyond saying that some Catholic Church leaders have been corrupt; the claim made here is that the very foundation of the

Church was a deliberate fabrication.
Further resources on the Church:

*Lumen Gentium, Dogmatic
Constitution on the Church* (Second
Vatican Council document), 1964.

*“Christ, the Early Church,
Constantine, and the Council of
Nicea”*C.E. Olson & S. Miesel, Envoy
Magazine, 2004.

General: *Catechism of the Catholic
Church* (1997).

*The Truth of Catholicism: Ten
Controversies Explained*, George
Weigel, HarperCollins, New York,
2001.