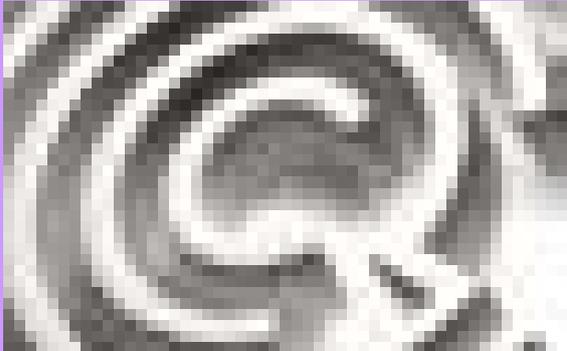




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***The Da Vinci Code* – what is all the fuss about?**

The Da Vinci Code is a best selling book by Dan Brown, the author of *Angels and Demons*, *Deception Point* and *Digital Fortress* www.danbrown.com.

The fuss stems from the plot of the novel in which the Roman Catholic Church, through a group called Opus Dei (Work of God) tries to prevent people from finding out that:

Jesus survived the Cross

Jesus was married – to Mary Magdalene

Jesus had children and his descendents are still around today

In the novel, members of Opus Dei are prepared to kill to prevent these secrets being revealed, and to stop the Church losing its power and hold over people's lives. As the plot unfolds, more of the secrets are discovered by the hero, Dr Robert Langdon, who foils all attempts to stop him, until the conspiracy is revealed and Jesus' descendents are discovered.

Another theme of the book is that the Church has acted to suppress the 'sacred feminine' and to exclude women through its commitment to patriarchy and misogyny.

All of these suggestions rewrite the Christian view of Jesus. If he survived the Cross, married and had children, and finally died, then he was just an ordinary human being, nothing more.

Could Jesus have survived the Cross?

The first thing to think about is the idea that Jesus survived the Cross. Various ideas about this have been put forward, - that he was not dead, just unconscious, when he was taken down and later his unconscious body was stolen by followers or friends. Or, that the drink he was given was a drug of some kind, which made him appear dead, or, that he simply survived crucifixion and got away.

The central tenet of Christian faith, however, is that Jesus really died, in as utter and complete a way as any creature can die, and that God raised him from the dead to new life. Jesus himself told his disciples that this would happen. The resurrected Jesus showed himself to his friends and disciples, who were shocked, disbelieving or even slow to recognise him, as well as then being overjoyed, overwhelmed and committed to doing what Jesus asked of them for the rest of their lives. This story of Jesus' death and resurrection lies at the heart of the Christian creeds and offers the promise of the same eternal life to every person. In every Christian funeral, grieving families are told that death is not the end and that Jesus showed people a vision of the ultimate destiny that awaits us. To enter that destiny, we have to accept that he was telling the truth about God, about himself and about what he was going to do. We also have to trust that the scriptures' account of the resurrection, the reports of the witnesses and the faith that inspired the birth of the Church are also true. This is where faith comes in. Christian faith means choosing this story of Jesus's death and resurrection as true.

This is important, because there can't be any ifs, buts or maybes in choosing this story as God's truth. There isn't an alternative version of Jesus' death which allows the Christian faith to remain in any coherent form.

St Paul made this very clear when he was writing to people in the early Christian church. He said, 'If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied' (1 Corinthians 15. 17-19).

What this means is that there isn't another way of understanding the crucifixion that has any effect on a person's spiritual search. If Jesus did not die on the cross, then he was not telling the truth, or was seriously deluded, and nothing he said or did can tell us anything useful about God. Moreover, the millions of people who have believed in Jesus, given their lives for him and continue to believe in the truth of the resurrection story have pursued meaning and purpose in their lives which is entirely vain.

Could Jesus have been married?

This question is related to the previous one. The primary source for information about Jesus' life comes from the New Testament and there is no mention of Jesus having a wife. There is mention of his mother and father, his wider family and his closest friends, but no mention of a wife. Other people around Jesus were certainly married, but the gospels tell us that as

the Son of God, Jesus had a particular mission to fulfil. The sources we have insist that Jesus came into the world in order to die for us on the cross and bring human beings the opportunity for salvation. His years in ministry, which are recorded in the gospels, see him quite clearly preparing to do this. This is quite a different shape of life and destiny from marriage and family. Mary Magdalene is mentioned in scripture but her relationship to Jesus is described as one of the grateful followers who have been helped by him and are devoted to him, as were many others.

Has the Church excluded women?

There has been much discussion in recent times about the place of women within the Christian religion. It is often argued that the voices and experiences of women have been excluded from Christian witness. In this argument, the Christian faith appears to reflect much of the exclusion of women from visibility and influence in the history of western society. What is interesting, however, is that Jesus himself was interested in the lives, pains and spirituality of women, even to the extent of discussing theology with a Samaritan woman at a well, much to the surprise of his followers. Moreover, women such as Julian of Norwich, have not only given wisdom and insight to the Church but spoken of God in enriching feminine imagery and language. [See the article on Julian in this site].

**You can explore even more about *The Da Vinci Code* at the Rejesus site:
<http://www.rejesus.co.uk/davinci/index.html>**