

## *The Da Vinci Code and Divine Principle*

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*The Da Vinci Code*, a “theological thriller” which purports to uncover hidden truths about Christ embedded in Leonardo Da Vinci’s paintings, has been a publishing phenomenon since its release in March 2003. It debuted atop the *New York Times* best-seller list, sparked a November 2003 prime-time ABC special entitled “Jesus, Mary and Da Vinci,” and celebrated its first anniversary as “the bestselling adult novel of all time within a one year period” with 6.8 million copies in print.<sup>[1]</sup> In late 2004, author Dan Brown’s web site claimed more than 17 million copies of the novel were in print worldwide. Sony Pictures Entertainment reportedly purchased film rights for \$6 million, and *The Da Vinci Code* “effect” raised sales of at least 90 related books on religion, history and art.

The phenomenal success of *The Da Vinci Code* was due not only to its literary merits but also to its theological content. Though expressed within the genre of a popular thriller, Brown develops a coherent, though unconventional set of religious ideas. Essentially, *The Da Vinci Code* attempts to deconstruct two millennia of interpretation as to the “true history of Jesus Christ.” Utilizing a potpourri of esoteric sources, Brown’s novel debunks the New Testament, Christ’s divinity, original sin, the church hierarchy, and the apocalypse. In their place, it substitutes Gnostic gospels, Da Vinci’s paintings, a married messiah, the sacred feminine, the Knights Templar and Priory of Sion, sacred sex (*hieros gamos*), and the Age of Aquarius.

Not surprisingly, the novel provoked polemical attacks from conservative Christians. A front-page article in the April 27, 2004 *New York Times* announced that no less than ten books were being released “with titles that promise to break, crack, unlock or decode *The Da Vinci Code*.”<sup>[2]</sup> However, efforts to marginalize, dismiss or brand Brown’s novel heretical highlight a disconnect between orthodox Christianity and popular culture or at least the mass audience to which *The Da Vinci Code* and its ideas appeal. For this reason, rather than highlighting differences, this article takes an ecumenical approach, attempting to bridge the gap between Brown’s novel and the broader Christian tradition.

As a first step, the article explores affinities between *The Da Vinci Code* and *Divine Principle* [DP], Unification theology’s core text.<sup>[3]</sup> Unification theology also deconstructs traditional views as to the true history of Jesus Christ and seeks to restore the sacred feminine. It offers similar though not identical ideas about the Bible, creation, human sexuality, the Church, and the end times. However, whereas Brown’s novel relativizes the historical record (“history is written by winners”) and classical sources (“every faith in the world is based on fabrication”), Unification theology takes the historical record and biblical texts more seriously. In this way, certain of *The Da Vinci Code*’s assertions which otherwise would be dismissed can be understood within the context of the *Principle* to have a resonance within the Christian tradition as a whole. At the same time, the seriousness with which DP takes the historical record and biblical revelation can work to curb some of the more exotic views expressed in Brown’s novel.

To this end, the bulk of the article undertakes a comparative analysis of *The Da Vinci Code* and *Divine Principle*, highlighting points of contact in seven areas:

1. The Use of Allegory and Symbol
2. The Sacred Feminine
3. Creation
4. Christ
5. Human sexuality
6. The Church
7. Eschatology, or Last Things

Having pointed out similarities and differences between *The Da Vinci Code* and *Divine Principle*, the article's concluding section offers preliminary observations intended to relate the revisionist content of both texts to the broader Christian tradition.

## **Comparative Analysis**

### **1. Allegory and Symbol**

As stated, both *The Da Vinci Code* and *Divine Principle* attempt to deconstruct two millennia of interpretation as to the "true history of Jesus Christ." In so doing, both texts maintain that much of Christ's "true history" is conveyed through allegory and symbol. *The Da Vinci Code* attempts to extract truth as to Christ's true history from Da Vinci's paintings and the Holy Grail legend by reinterpreting their core symbols. DP extracts clues as to Christ's true history by reinterpreting symbols in the Bible. Though working with different sets of materials, both texts employ similar methods of interpretation and arrive at similar conclusions, as will be shown.

The basic premise of *The Da Vinci Code*, and codes in general, is that *hidden meanings exist within familiar settings*. Thus, Brown links several of his core assertions to symbols embedded within famous paintings by Leonardo Da Vinci, notably the *Mona Lisa* and *The Last Supper*. Brown's key assertion and the lynchpin around which his novel turns is the identification of the Holy Grail with Mary Magdalene. In making this argument, Brown first attempts to deconstruct the familiar image of the Grail as "the cup Jesus drank from at the Last Supper and with which Joseph of Arimathea later caught his blood at the crucifixion." (162) He writes,

The Holy Grail is arguably the most sought-after treasure in human history. The Grail has spawned legends, wars, and life-long quests. Does it make sense that it is merely a cup? If so, then certainly *other* relics should generate similar or greater interest – the Crown of Thorns, the True Cross of the Crucifixion, the Titulus – and yet they do not. Throughout history, the Holy Grail has been the most special. (164)

Dispensing with the Grail as a literal cup, the text instead identifies it with "the ancient symbol for womanhood." Brown maintains, "The chalice... resembles a cup or vessel, and more important, it resembles the shape of a woman's womb. The symbol communicates femininity, womanhood, and fertility." The "*Holy Grail*," he states, "represents the sacred feminine." (238) The text next attempts to identify the generic symbol of womanhood and the sacred feminine with a particular woman, Mary Magdalene. Brown does this through discussions of, among other things,

- Da Vinci, “one of the keepers of the secret of the Holy Grail” who, according to Brown, “hid clues in his art,” (230) notably *The Last Supper* in which he allegedly portrays Magdalene to the right of Christ (239, 242-43);
- the vested interest of the early Church in covering up her identity (232-34);
- passages from gnostic texts such as the *Gospel of Philip* and the *Gospel of Mary Magdalene* which allegedly depict a liaison with Jesus (245-48);
- an etymological explanation of San Greal (“Holy Grail”) meaning “royal blood” (250); and
- “scores of historians” and their works, including *The Templar Revelation*, *The Woman With the Alabaster Jar*, *The Goddess In the Gospels*, and *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, all of which are cited in the novel. (253)

Having identified the Holy Grail with Mary Magdalene, the text finds confirmatory evidence virtually everywhere. The novel’s protagonist Robert Langdon, who is appropriately enough a Professor of Symbology, asserts, “Once you open your eyes to the Holy Grail... you see her everywhere. Paintings. Music. Books. Even in cartoons, theme parks, and popular movies.” (261) He states, “Legends of chivalric quests for the lost Grail were in fact stories of forbidden quests to find the lost sacred feminine. Knights who claimed to be ‘searching for the chalice’ were speaking in code as a way to protect themselves from a Church that has subjugated women.” (238-39) Disney productions, ranging from *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *Snow White* to *The Little Mermaid*, in one way or another, deal with “the incarceration of the sacred feminine.” (262)

*Divine Principle* does not use “code” language but also purports to reveal hidden truths within the familiar, in this case, not within Da Vinci’s paintings but in the Bible, specifically *The Book of Genesis*. Here, DP’s key assertion and the lynchpin around which the text turns is its identification of “the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil” with “Eve’s love.” (74) In making its case, DP, like Brown, first attempts to deconstruct a familiar image, in this case that of fruit in the *Genesis* account. Just as Brown questions whether it made sense that the Holy Grail was “merely a cup,” DP asks whether it makes sense that the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was merely “fruit of an actual tree” (66),

How could something edible be the source of sin or the cause of transmitting that... sin to the children? ... What a... [person] has eaten cannot be transmitted from one generation to the next...

We cannot understand why Adam and Eve, who were far from starvation, would disobey God's command at the risk of their lives. The fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil must have been extraordinarily stimulating and so ardently desired that fear of punishment—even death—could not deter them from eating it. (66-67)

DP concludes, “The fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was not a material fruit, but a symbol.” (67) It then undertakes a further allegorical exegesis of

scripture, identifying the Tree of Life with Adam, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil with Eve, and the serpent with Satan. (67-71) This leads to an identification of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil with “Eve’s love.” DP uses a combination of biblical sources, circumstantial evidence and common sense to make its case that “eating” the fruit symbolized having sexual intercourse. Examples include,

- Scripture passages attesting to intercourse, including sexual intercourse between fallen angels and human beings (71, 73, 77-78);
- The contrast between Adam and Eve’s original condition of being “unashamed of their nakedness” with their subsequent shame and act of sewing fig leaves together to cover their lower parts (72);
- The contention that sexual intercourse was an act humans could have performed at the risk of their lives (72); and
- Sexual intercourse provides the means by which the original sin of adultery “is transmitted from generation to generation.” (75)

Having identified the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil with “Eve’s love,” DP also finds confirmatory evidence virtually everywhere: from strictures against adultery in “every religion” to the contention that the “principal cause of the downfall of numerous nations, national heroes and patriots was adultery.” (75) More than that, it finds the “pattern” and “result” of the human fall reflected throughout human society. (83-91)

## **2. The Sacred Feminine**

Recovery of the sacred feminine is important for both *The Da Vinci Code* and *Divine Principle*. However, the texts undertake recovery efforts from different points of reference. *The Da Vinci Code*’s references ancient Goddess worship rooted in “pagan, Mother Earth-revering religions.” (95) DP’s reference point is the Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit, which it reinterprets in feminine terms. (215 ff.) Nevertheless, both texts agree that Christianity either directly or indirectly suppressed the sacred feminine and perpetuated societies centered on the “masculine logic of power” rather than the “feminine logic of love.”[\[4\]](#)

Conveniently enough, Robert Langdon, Brown’s main character in *The Da Vinci Code*, had just completed a work entitled *Symbols of the Lost Sacred Feminine*, and is at pains to lecture its content throughout the novel. For example, in the pre-Christian world, we are told,

[G]ods and goddesses worked to keep a balance of power. Yin and Yang. When male and female were balanced, there was harmony in the world. When they were unbalanced, there was chaos. (36)

The Jews, according to Langdon, “believed that the Holy of Holies in Solomon’s Temple housed not only God but also His powerful female equal, Shekinah. Even their sacred name for God—YHWH, he says, “derived from Jehovah, an androgynous... union between the masculine *Jah* and the pre-Hebraic name for Eve, *Havah*.” (309) However, Christianity suppressed and demonized the sacred feminine as “a threat to the rise of the predominantly male Church.” (238) This situation, according to Langdon, has

degenerated into “testosterone-fueled wars, a plethora of misogynistic societies, and a growing disrespect for Mother Earth.” (126)

*Divine Principle* does not traffic in speculation about ancient goddesses. Its contribution to the discussion of the sacred feminine lies primarily in its identification of the “Holy Spirit” as a “female Spirit.” (215) DP states,

There are many who receive revelations indicating that the Holy Spirit is a female spirit; this is because she came as the True Mother, that is, the second Eve. Again, since the Holy Spirit is a female Spirit, we cannot become the “bride” of Jesus unless we receive the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Holy Spirit is a female Spirit, consoling and moving the hearts of the people... She also cleanses the sins of the people in order to restore them. (215)

The risen Christ and Holy Spirit together are called the “True Parents,” through whom humankind attains “spiritual rebirth.” (216) However, it regards spiritual rebirth as a limited form of salvation. (147-49) Because the Holy Spirit failed to materialize in the flesh, humankind continues to groan in travail, awaiting the redemption of our bodies. One consequence of this is the continuance of male-dominated societies and oppression of women.

### 3. Creation

For both *The Da Vinci Code* and *Divine Principle*, creation is a gateway to the divine. Both texts develop arguments in favor of intelligent design, reflective of the divine order in nature. Brown identifies a code, known as the “Divine Proportion,” embedded not only in Da Vinci’s works, but also in the fabric of creation. DP likewise contends that the natural order mirrors the divine and cites Biblical revelation as support. Both texts utilize their views of creation to buttress arguments in favor of the sacred feminine.

Brown’s hero, Robert Langdon, claims in *The Da Vinci Code* that the “mystical mathematical” number 1.618, otherwise known as PHI or the Divine Proportion, is “a fundamental building block in nature.” As he notes, “plants, animals, and even human beings all possessed dimensional properties that adhered with eerie exactitude to the ratio of PHI to 1.” (94) Examples he cites include,

- The number of female to male honeybees in any beehive in the world;
- The ratio each spiral’s diameter to the next on chambered nautilus seashells;
- The ratio of consecutive seed head spirals in sunflowers,
- Ratios on pinecone petals, the leaf arrangement on plant stalks, and insect segmentation;
- The distance from tip of one’s head to the floor divided by the distance from one’s belly button to the floor;
- The distance from one’s shoulder to fingertips divided by the distance from one’s elbow to fingertips; hip to floor divided by knee to floor; finger joints; spinal divisions, etc. (94-95)

According to Brown, “Nobody understood this better than Da Vinci,” who “was the first to show that the human body is literally made of building blocks whose proportional ratio *always* equal PHI.” (95) He asserts that artwork of Michelangelo, Dürer, Da Vinci and others demonstrated “each artist’s intentional and rigorous adherence to the Divine Proportion in the layout of their compositions,” that PHI underlay the architectural dimensions of the Greek Parthenon, the pyramids of Egypt and even the United Nations Building in New York, and that PHI appeared in the organizational structures of Mozart’s sonatas, Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony as well as in the works of Bartok, Debussy, and Schubert.” (96) The ancients, Brown says, “were sure they had stumbled across God’s building block for the world, and they worshipped Nature because of that.” (95)

*Divine Principle* agrees that the natural order mirrors the divine but bases its position on Biblical revelation, specifically, Paul’s insistence that,

Ever since the creation of the world, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. (Romans 1:20)

Using the artist as an analogy, DP states, “Just as the work of an artist is a visible manifestation of its maker’s invisible nature... so we can perceive God’s deity by observing His creation.” (20) DP proceeds to examine “common factors” found in creation as a way “to know the nature of God’s deity.” (20) DP holds that the first of these is “Positivity and Negativity” or male and female. A second is “external form and internal character.” A third, reminiscent of *The Da Vinci Code*’s mystical mathematical numbers, is the repetition of the numbers 3, 4, and various permutations of these two numbers in creation. (31-41, 51-54) These elements of creation all contribute to Unification theology’s understanding of the divine.

Both *The Da Vinci Code* and DP utilize their creation-based theologies to buttress arguments in favor of the sacred feminine. Brown notes, “The ancients envisioned their world in two halves—masculine and feminine.” (36) As a consequence, early religion, which was “based on the Divine order of nature,” had a place for the sacred feminine and goddess. DP’s contention that “dual characteristics” in the created order, including that of male and female, reflect “dual characteristics of God” likewise establishes a foundation for upholding a feminine aspect of Deity.

#### **4. Christ**

As stated, both *The Da Vinci Code* and *Divine Principle* attempt to deconstruct two millennia of interpretation as to the “true history of Jesus Christ.” They take different approaches, but reinterpret the divinity and humanity of Christ in convergent ways. With some qualifications, *The Da Vinci Code* considers Jesus to be a “mortal prophet” (233), “married man” (245), “father” (249), and originator of a “royal bloodline.” (249) DP attempts to be more even-handed in reconciling conflicting claims as to Christ’s divinity and humanity but similarly associates Jesus with marriage. In so doing, it contends there were “dual prophecies” as to Christ’s coming as “Lord of Glory” which would have included the elements of marriage and lineage or “Lord of Suffering” which, in fact, led to his crucifixion and atoning sacrifice.

*The Da Vinci Code* qualifies the radical quality of its interpretation by a postmodernist sleight-of-hand. At several points, the novel posits a wholly subjectivist depiction of truth so that whether one accepts the orthodox or alternate versions of the Christ-story is a matter of inclination. As one of Brown's characters states, "In the end, which side of the story you believe becomes a matter of faith and personal exploration." (256) Nevertheless, the quest for the Holy Grail is a quest for certitude. The Grail-seekers in Brown's novel are convinced that the "Sangreal" or Holy Grail literally consists of documents authenticating Christ's "true history" and Magdalene's true identity. These documents, which the novel describes as "carried in four enormous chests," (256) purportedly make explicit and provable what Da Vinci and others were forced to conceal in code. As Robert Langdon, states, "There is an enormous difference between hypothetically discussing an alternate history of Christ, and... presenting to the world thousands of ancient documents as scientific evidence that the New Testament is false testimony." (341)

Brown's protagonists never gain access to this "scientific evidence." However, this does not stop them from defining Christ as "a historical figure of staggering influence... the prophesied messiah... a great and powerful man, but a *man* nonetheless." (231, 233)

In addition, as Da Vinci's "code" and the "historical record" (primarily Gnostic gospels and recent popular histories) make clear, Jesus and Mary Magdalene "were a pair." (244) Brown's Grail-seekers define Magdalene, allegedly pictured to the right of Christ in Da Vinci's "The Last Supper," as "a powerful woman... of the House of Benjamin... of royal descent." (248) Her union with Jesus, "who *also* had royal blood... of the House of David... fused two royal bloodlines, creating a potent political union with the potential of making a legitimate claim to the throne." (249) Not only was Magdalene of royal descent, but according to *The Da Vinci Code*, she "was the female womb that carried Jesus' royal bloodline." (249) That is, Magdalene was pregnant at the time of the crucifixion and fled to France, then known as Gaul, with the assistance of Joseph of Arimathea. There she gave birth to a daughter Sarah, and a line which "grew undercover in France until making a bold move in the fifth century, when it intermarried with French royal blood and created a lineage known as the Merovingian bloodline." (257)

*Divine Principle* does not engage in speculation of this sort and attempts to be even-handed in reconciling conflicting claims as to Christ's divinity and humanity. It affirms that Jesus was a "perfected man," i.e., one who had "attained the purpose of creation." (208-210) It also affirms "the attitude of faith held by many Christians that Jesus is God, since it is true that a perfected man [person] is one body with God." (209) Continuing in its effort to balance Christ's humanity and divinity, DP argues,

Jesus, being one body with God, may be called a second God (image of God), but he can by no means be God Himself. It is true that he who has seen Jesus has seen God (John 14:9-10); but Jesus did not say this to indicate that he was God himself. (211)

There is a degree of ambiguity in this position. Nevertheless, there is more resonance between DP and traditional Christologies than in *The Da Vinci Code*.

*Divine Principle* and *The Da Vinci Code* converge more in their conception of Christ's work, i.e., the inauguration of the reign of God (though *The Da Vinci Code* conceptualizes this more along the lines of a restored Davidic monarchy). As noted, DP

maintains that there were two kinds of prophecy concerning Jesus, dependent upon human response. Jesus Christ would have been able to fulfill his work “in glory” and in companionship had the people received him. According to DP,

Jesus came as the True Father of mankind, with the mission of the Tree of Life (Rev. 22:14); that is, as the second Adam. (1 Cor. 15:45) Then, it would only be logical that there should come the True Mother of mankind, with the mission of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil; that is, the second Eve. (216)

Both DP and *The Da Vinci Code* associate marriage with Jesus. *The Da Vinci Code* contends that Christ actually married Mary Magdalene and fathered her child. DP is again more nuanced. It maintains that Jesus, as the “second Adam,” was originally supposed to marry and, together with his Bride, become the second Adam and Eve. Here the text of *Exposition of the Divine Principle* is clear:

God intended to exalt Jesus and his Bride as the second Adam and Eve to become the True Parents of humanity. However, the resurrected Jesus and the Holy Spirit in oneness with God could... fulfill only the mission of spiritual True Parents. (172)

Jesus’ earthly marriage did not occur, DP maintains, because the people’s disbelief and rejection resulted in Jesus going the way of the cross. Rather than an earthly Bride, God sent the Holy Spirit who together with the risen Christ are the “True Parents of mankind” through whom fallen humanity is “born anew.” (217) Who was to be Jesus’ earthly Bride? There are tantalizing hints that Mary Magdalene was a candidate. Rev. Moon holds her in high esteem; more than any of the disciples, “It was Mary who loved Jesus most.”<sup>[5]</sup> A manuscript of *Wolli Wonbon*, the earliest version of *Divine Principle* written in Rev. Moon’s own hand, states that Mary Magdalene was Judas Iscariot’s wife or lover and that Jesus “planned to accomplish the Principle will by taking Judas’ wife,” choosing her as “Eve.” This subsequently was the underlying motivation for Judas Iscariot’s action in selling his teacher for thirty pieces of silver.<sup>[6]</sup> Rev. Moon further hints at Mary Magdalene’s role in several sermons where he refers to Jesus’ appearance to Mary in John 20:17, where Mary apparently runs to embrace Jesus and he prohibits her:

After the resurrection of Jesus, Mary Magdalene was in the position of the bride. Yet when she tried to touch him, Jesus could not help stopping her. This was because she did not have the bridal qualifications through which Jesus could receive her. Satan's accusations will be dropped only when the bride stands in the position where she indemnifies all the historical grudges.<sup>[7]</sup>

As Rev. Moon explains, Mary’s grief at being unable to touch her bridegroom epitomizes the situation of anyone who would approach Jesus:

Now we are facing Jesus with the cross placed in the middle, and someone must resolve the grief and suffering caused by the cross. Without resolving it, we cannot graft onto Jesus and call him our bridegroom. This is the reason when Mary Magdalene called out, “Oh Lord!” right after the resurrection, Jesus stopped her.<sup>[8]</sup>

## 5. Human Sexuality



In addition to the sacred feminine, both *The Da Vinci Code* and Unification theology attempt to restore the sacredness of human sexuality. Again taking his lead from Da Vinci, Dan Brown discusses, in relatively explicit terms, “The once hallowed act of *hieros gamos*—the natural sexual union between man and woman through which each became spiritually whole.” (125) Contrasting this with the view of sexuality as a “shameful act,” Brown argues that the *hieros gamos* ritual enacted by the ancients was “a deeply sacrosanct ceremony” (309), kept alive by certain secret societies today including the Grail’s guardians. Unification theology also attempts to sanctify human sexuality, or what it terms “absolute sex.” In several of his speeches, Rev. Moon refers to the sexual organs as the “palace of love” and God’s “dwelling place.”<sup>[9]</sup> He contrasts the sacredness of “absolute sex” with both celibacy and shame-inducing qualities of “free love.” Although not utilizing *hieros gamos* terminology, proponents of Unification theology consider “the Blessing” a sacrosanct ceremony, the consummation of which includes specific sexual rites for couples.

Brown’s starting point in his discussion of human sexuality is “code language” embedded in Da Vinci’s painting, this time not *The Last Supper* but the *Mona Lisa*. According to Brown, “Da Vinci was a prankster, and computerized analysis of the *Mona Lisa* and Da Vinci’s self-portraits confirm some startling points of congruency in their faces.” In short, “his *Mona Lisa* is neither male nor female... [but] carries a subtle message of androgyny... a fusing of both.” (120) Da Vinci also left a “big clue” in that the name, “Mona Lisa,” is an anagram of Amon, the horned male Egyptian God of fertility, and his counterpart goddess Isis “whose ancient pictogram was once called L’ISA.” According to Brown, this is “the reason for Mona Lisa’s knowing smile.” (121)

*Hieros gamos*, as Brown explains it, “looked like a sex ritual... [but] had nothing to do with eroticism. It was a spiritual act.” (308) He states,

The ancients believed that the male was spiritually incomplete until he had carnal knowledge of the sacred feminine. Physical Union with the female remained the sole means through which man could become spiritually complete and ultimately achieve *gnosis* – knowledge of the divine. Since the days of Isis, sex rites had been considered man’s only bridge from earth to heaven... By communing with woman... man could achieve a climactic instant when his mind went totally blank and he could see God. (308-09)

Brown claims, “The early Jewish tradition involved ritualistic sex... *In the Temple, no less*... Men seeking spiritual wholeness came to the Temple to visit priestesses—or hierodules—with whom they made love and experienced the divine through physical union.” (309) Christianity’s unwillingness to acknowledge Magdalene or the sacred feminine, Brown contends, led it “to demonize sex and recast it as a disgusting and sinful act.” (309) According to him, “more than a dozen secret societies around the world,” including the Grail’s guardians, “still practiced sex rites and kept the ancient traditions alive.” (310)

Unlike *The Da Vinci Code*, which regards original sin to be a fabrication designed to denigrate women (124), DP accepts the fall account but interprets it in sexual terms. As previously noted, DP understands the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and

Evil to be a symbol “Eve’s love” and “eating” the fruit to be code language for sexual intercourse. As pointed out by one of its leading expositors, DP’s understanding of the human fall “is largely in agreement with the historical-critical understanding of Genesis 3 as a polemic against the adulterous idolatry of the fertility cult generalized into a description of humanity’s alienation from God.” Stated differently, “The sin which disrupted the original bond between God and humanity was more than disobedience of God’s commandment; it was that act of illicit love euphemistically termed eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”<sup>[10]</sup>

Although *DP* offers a sexual interpretation of the human fall and original sin, it does not follow that Unification theology is anti-sexual. DP’s brief is against disordered and premature sexuality, not against sexual intercourse itself. In fact, Unification sources rhapsodize over the joy of sex. Rev. Moon peppers his speeches with references to male and female sexual organs (both *The Da Vinci Code* and Rev. Moon traffic heavily in concave and convex imagery), explosions of love, and admonitions that married couples overcome inappropriate squeamishness as to physical contact. The tradition goes so far as to postulate that conjugal love in the afterlife extends beyond the bedroom to fields, the beach and mountainsides.<sup>[11]</sup> As in *The Da Vinci Code*, Rev. Moon affirms that the divine is expressed and present in the sexual act. The “Blessing,” which includes ceremonial and a female superior sexual initiation rite, is the gateway to this new realm of experience and knowledge in Unification tradition. However, the sanctification of human sexual relations is confined to married couples and do not involve public ritual enactments as in *The Da Vinci Code*.

## 6. The Church

Although *The Da Vinci Code* and DP both criticize institutional Christianity, Brown’s novel is significantly more anti-clerical. Essentially, it depicts the Church as an illegitimate institution, based upon lies from its very inception. DP is critical of the Church’s shortcomings and failings. However, it regards the Church to have had a legitimate religious mission which continues. Both perceive that the Church’s proclivity toward violence derives in some measure from its glorification of the cross. Both also view the Bible through historical-critical lenses. The difference is that *The Da Vinci Code* adheres to a more materialist reading of scripture, regarding it as “a product of *man*... Not of God.” (231) DP, though not holding the Bible to be “perfect and absolute in itself,” (9) acknowledges it to be “a revelation from God.” (16)

*The Da Vinci Code* is profoundly anti-clerical. The novel’s first substantive reference to the Church refers to its “deceitful and violent history,” specifically its “brutal crusade to ‘reeducate’ the pagan and feminine-worshipping religions.” (124-25) Brown’s protagonist claims, “The Catholic Inquisition published the book that arguably could be called the most blood-soaked publication in human history, *Malleus Maleficarum*—or *The Withes’ Hammer*” which “indoctrinated the world to ‘the dangers of free-thinking women’ and instructed the clergy how to locate, torture and destroy them.” (125) “During three hundred years of witch hunts,” we are told, “The Church burned at the stake an astounding five *million* women.” (125)

These horrific methods were not exceptions to the Church’s normally good offices but rather part of an orchestrated campaign extending back to Christianity’s origins. Christ,

the novel asserts, “intended... the future of his Church to be in the hands of Mary Magdalene... And Peter had a problem with that.” (248) According to Brown’s protagonist, Da Vinci “was well aware of how Peter felt about Mary Magdalene” and depicted Peter’s animosity in *The Last Supper*. The novel claims that the figure to Jesus’ immediate right, with “flowing red hair, delicate folded hands, and the hint of a bosom” (as well as a complementary robe to Jesus) was not the beloved disciple John, as is commonly thought, but, in actuality, Mary Magdalene. This, it is said, explains why Peter “was leaning menacingly” toward Magdalene in the painting “slicing his blade-like hand across her neck.” (248) It also explains why “the Church, in order to defend itself against the Magdalene’s power, perpetuated her image as a whore and buried evidence of Christ’s marriage to her.” (254)

The Church continued its disinformation campaign, “propagating lies” that scripture eventually canonized. Collated by the pagan Roman Emperor Constantine the Great, the Bible which he “commissioned and financed... omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ’s *human* traits and embellished those gospels that made him look godlike.” (234) In other words, the Bible “was compiled and edited by men who possessed a political agenda—to promote the divinity of the man Jesus Christ and use His influence to solidify their own power base.” (234) The “long-stemmed Christian cross” used by the Romans as a “torture device” was an apt symbol of the Church’s determination to maintain its power. Brown contrasts its “violent history” with that of the square or equal-armed “peaceful” crosses which predated Christianity by fifteen hundred years, “balanced vertical and horizontal elements [to] convey a natural union of male and female,” (145) and were “symbolically consistent” with the philosophy of those who truly understood Christ.

*Divine Principle* contains anti-clerical elements but does not consider the Church to have been distorted from inception. In fact, the text’s first substantive mention of Christianity refers to “the Christian spirit which cast forth... a brilliant light of life... even in the days of persecution under the Roman Empire.” (6) DP does not take the position that Constantine was a pagan politician but holds that “Jesus influenced the Emperor Constantine spiritually, and moved him to recognize Christianity publicly in 313.” (409) Still, the text is critical of the Church’s failings. “Medieval society,” it contends, “buried ... Christianity alive.” (6) In its most memorable anti-clerical line, *DP* states,

Christianity, though it professed God’s love, had turned out to be in reality a dead body of clergy trailing empty slogans. (6)

Despite its failings, DP contends, “Jesus and the Holy Spirit,” a female spirit, “have been leading Christianity directly.” (409) Therefore, the possibility of reform continually exists.

However, *DP* asserts that Christianity’s reformation at the present time hinges on its meeting two conditions. First, the Church must evidence openness to “new truth.” (9) This, in turn, rests upon a correct view of scripture:

It may be displeasing to religious believers, especially to Christians, to learn that a new expression of truth must appear. They believe that the Bible, which they now have, is perfect and absolute in itself... The Bible, however, is not the truth itself, but a textbook teaching the truth. Naturally, the quality of teaching and the method and extent of giving the

truth must vary according to each age, for the truth is given to people of different ages, who are at different spiritual and intellectual levels.

Therefore, we must not regard the textbook as absolute in every detail. (9)

Scripture, according to DP, “can be likened to a lamp which illuminates the truth... When a brighter light appears, the mission of the old one fades.” (10) In addition to its other tasks, the mission of “new truth” is “to explain lucidly all the difficult problems of Christianity,” including “difficult Biblical mysteries which are written in parables and symbols.” (14-15)

Secondly, Christianity must take down the cross. According to DP,

A vast number of Christians throughout the 2,000 years of Christian history have been confident that they have been completely saved by the blood of Jesus’ crucifixion. Yet, in reality, not one individual, home or society has existed free from sin. (15)

For DP, this highlights “a central contradiction between the present reality of Christianity and the belief in complete redemption by the ransom of the cross.” (15) In fact, DP teaches that the Jesus’ crucifixion was not the original will of God or inevitable but a secondary course prompted by failures of those in positions of responsibility to support his mission. (139-63) Unification theology likewise recoils from the “violent history” of the cross, perpetrated by Christians confident of their complete salvation. It views the cross as a barrier between Christianity and other religious traditions as well as a barrier between Christianity and Christ.

### **7. Eschatology, or Last Things**

Neither *The Da Vinci Code* nor DP view the end times as a cataclysmic scenario, characterized by supernaturally-induced natural disasters. Both texts instead view the end time as a period of historical transition. *The Da Vinci Code* utilizes Age of Aquarius language to describe the transition while DP uses biblical imagery. However, they both understand the last days within the context of unfolding historical processes. Both also emphasize the role of new truth as a harbinger of the new age and the ideal of persons “being the truth” as the new age’s primary characteristic.

Brown’s villain, Sir Leigh Teabing, a Grail enthusiast who will stop at nothing to reveal the “truth” of the Holy Grail, tells the novel’s heroine, Sophie Neveu, a putative lineal descendent of Mary Magdalene,

[W]e are currently in an epoch of enormous change. The millennium has recently passed, and with it has ended the two-thousand-year-long astrological Age of Pisces – the fish, which is also the sign of Jesus. As any astrological symbologist will tell you, the Piscean ideal believes that man must be *told* what to do by higher powers because man is incapable of thinking for himself. Hence it has been a time of fervent religion. Now, however, we are entering the Age of Aquarius – the water bearer – whose ideals claim that man will learn the truth and be able to think for himself. The ideological shift is enormous, and it is occurring right now. (268)

It falls to Brown's protagonist, Robert Langdon, to make the connection between astrological and biblical prophecy. He describes the "end of the world" or "Apocalypse" as a "common misconception." Agreeing with Teabing, Langdon contends that "the End of Days... refers not to the end of the world, but rather to the end of our current age—Pisces, which began at the time of Christ's birth, spanned two thousand years, and waned with the passing of the millennium." (268)

Though agreeing in part, Langdon and Teabing part company over the methods they are willing to employ in exposing the "truth." Teabing believes that public exposure of Grail secrets will precipitate the new age. He perceives that the Grail's guardians have suffered a failure of nerve or that the Church has launched a preemptive attack to destroy the Grail documents. Teabing's willingness to employ espionage and murder in pursuit of the Grail and the goodness it will foster is the driving force of Brown's novel. Langdon also is motivated by the promise of a more egalitarian world. He, like Teabing, believes that "the gods of destruction and war" had taken their toll and "The male ego had spent two millennia running unchecked by its feminine counterpart." (125) However, he is of a distinctly less conspiratorial frame of mind and is unwilling to employ the methods of the old age in service of new. In the end, Sophie Neveu's grandmother, a higher-up among the Grail's guardians, terms the "End of Days" a "legend of paranoid minds," stating there is nothing in the guardian's doctrine that "identifies a date in which the Grail should be unveiled." (444)

*Divine Principle* utilizes biblical rather than astrological prophecy to deconstruct literalist interpretations of the end times. Its chapter on the "Consummation of Human History" (99-136) considers but rejects the literalism of a variety of biblical passages which point to such end time phenomena as the heavens being kindled and dissolved (II Peter 3:12); or the sun being darkened, the moon not giving light and the stars falling from heaven (Matt. 24:29); or the dead in Christ rising and those alive being caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. (I Thess. 4:16-17) DP concludes that such Last Days phenomena are "stated in symbolic terms" (100) and that the "last Days... will not be a day of fear in which many natural calamities will take place." (112) Like *The Da Vinci Code*, DP contends that the Last Days to be a transitional age. Unlike *The Da Vinci Code*, DP does not understand this transition to be between Piscean and Aquarian ages but rather from "the sinful world under Satanic dominion" to "the world of good sovereignty." (111)

*Divine Principle* is not a novel and, therefore, does not personalize conflicting perspectives as Brown does with Langdon and Teabing. It does, however, factor in dramatic tension by asserting that the new age must ward off powerful "satanic" imitations which utilize vile means to realize "non-principled" pseudo-forms of the new age. (445) Interestingly, recent Unification theology, like Brown's protagonist Langdon, sees one such usurpation to be that of the male ego. Rev. Moon has touted the necessity of "the age of women" to counterbalance patriarchy and its habitual abuses. Mrs. Moon, in a speech previously cited, stated, "in past history the 'logic of power' had been ruling" but that the new age demanded the "feminine 'logic of love' to solve ... problems and lead history in a proper way."<sup>[12]</sup> DP likewise emphasizes the role of "new truth" in solving problems and inaugurating a new history (9-16), as well as the necessity of

human beings to embody the truth or in its terminology to become “individual truth incarnations.” (36)

### **Affinities to Christian Tradition**

Having pointed out similarities and differences between *The Da Vinci Code* and *Divine Principle*, it remains to assess how the revisionist content of both texts relates to the broader Christian tradition. This section will highlight resonances between the two texts and the broader tradition both in terms of theological method and content in each of the seven areas considered, i.e., the use of allegory and symbol, the sacred feminine, creation, Christ, human sexuality, the Church, and eschatology or last things. The intention in each case is to offer preliminary observations rather than to be definitive. I will conclude by assessing the principal contribution of both texts to contemporary theological discourse.

The use of allegory, symbol and typologies of various hues is by no means unprecedented but has an ancient and ongoing pedigree within Jewish and Christian traditions.

Apocalyptic literature (Daniel, Revelation) is crammed with code language, in part to mislead would-be persecutors of the faith, i.e., Rome depicted as a beast, harlot or seven-headed dragon. The notion that there is a “secret inner meaning” to Scripture which “stands on a quite other level than its obvious surface meaning” has a distinguished heritage extending from the earliest Biblical exegetes to today’s literary critics.[\[13\]](#) However, the most significant warrant for the use of allegory and symbol is Jesus’ use of parables. In noting their effect, one modern scholar writes,

[H]owever we evaluate the parables of Jesus themselves, our main point is their effect in guiding Christian readers to the conclusion that the Bible contains much material that does not mean exactly what it says. The surface expressions are a coded representation of a hidden and more spiritual meaning.[\[14\]](#)

Of course, it is a major leap to move from acknowledging the use of allegory and symbol in Biblical materials (or non-Biblical materials such as Da Vinci’s paintings and Grail legends) to accepting the specific interpretations offered by *The Da Vinci Code* and *Divine Principle*. Both texts offer internal rationales and justifications for their positions as noted. Unification exegetes also have attempted to corroborate DP’s sexual interpretation of the human fall by referencing Genesis language and symbols which would have conveyed obvious sexual meanings to Ancient Near East audiences.[\[15\]](#) However, regardless of their respective interpretations, it is clear that both texts’ use of allegory and symbolism is consistent with methods historically and widely employed within the Christian tradition.

Both *The Da Vinci Code* and *DP* undertake efforts to recover the sacred feminine, which they claim has been suppressed within the Christian tradition. These efforts obviously are consistent with a broad spectrum of feminist/womanist theologians who have insisted that Christianity go *Beyond God the Father*.[\[16\]](#) *The Da Vinci Code* rightly references the Shekinah, or feminine presence of God in Judaism. Within Christianity, the grammatically feminine Hebrew *Ruach haKodesh* (Holy Spirit) was rendered masculine or neuter. The resultant loss of the feminine was compensated for by feminine portrayals of Jesus (“Oh Jerusalem... How often I would have gathered your children as a hen

gathers her brood under her wings,” Matt. 23:34), by ascribing functions to the Holy Spirit commonly associated with women (comfort, consolation, inspiration, warmth, birth),[\[17\]](#) and in some sectors of the Church by elevating the status of Mary “Mother of God” to that of a virtual co-redemptrix. To be sure, efforts to reclaim the divine or sacred feminine are gathered at the margins of Christian faith, in part due to the threat they represent to a predominantly male church. Nevertheless, these efforts are gaining in force and momentum. In this respect, *The Da Vinci Code* and *Divine Principle* resonate with an emergent theme in Christian theology.

*The Da Vinci Code* and DP’s arguments in favor of intelligent design in creation are consistent with what has generally gone under the name of “natural theology” within the Christian tradition. There was a tendency within twentieth century theology, under the impress of two world wars and global depression, to disengage from creation-based theologies in favor of “revealed theology” which was considered to be more attuned to the human propensity for evil. However, new age physics as well as renewed creation-evolution controversies have revived interest in creation-based theologies and spiritualities. There is little in *The Da Vinci Code* or *DP* which is at cross-purposes to traditional natural theologies apart from the manner in which they both utilize creation-based arguments to buttress their positions in favor of the sacred feminine. That is, they both view the *yang* and *yin* in the natural order to be reflective of the Divine nature. *The Da Vinci Code* is more militantly creation-centered than *DP* in that it discounts the human fall. Hence, it exhibits a radical openness to any number of Mother Earth-based spiritualities as have a procession of Christian mystics from Meister Eckhardt to Matthew Fox. *DP* is more moderate in attempting to balance its doctrine of creation with doctrines of the fall and redemption, or what it terms “restoration.” In this way, the texts resonate with a spectrum of natural theologies within the Christian tradition.

*The Da Vinci Code* and DP’s doctrines of Christ, or Christologies, are best understood within the context of the modern quest for the historical Jesus. Both texts, like those produced by several generations of quest proponents, attempt to lay bare the “true history of Jesus Christ.” The distinctiveness of the two texts’ findings is their common association of Jesus with marriage, actual according to *The Da Vinci Code*, intended according to *DP*. The Christian tradition as a whole spiritualized and universalized Jesus’ marital status, utilizing metaphors such as the marriage supper of the Lamb, Jesus as bridegroom, and the Church or human soul as his bride. However, Jesus’ association with a literal marriage in his lifetime presupposes a re-visioning of his saving work.

As noted in the previous section of this article, neither *The Da Vinci Code* nor *DP* evidence belief in “complete redemption by the ransom of the cross.” (*DP*, 15) In fact, both suggest that glorification of the cross furthered violence, thereby increasing rather than lessening sin. There is a small but vocal group of contemporary theologians who are likewise critical of the blood atonement.[\[18\]](#)

Hence, in terms of their respective Christologies, *The Da Vinci Code* and *DP* may be difficult to place within the Christian tradition as they self-consciously deconstruct previous positions. However, it must be acknowledged that deconstruction and reconstruction is an ongoing dynamic within Christian theology and life. In particular, each generation and culture interprets Jesus anew as has been documented.[\[19\]](#) If Jesus can be conceptualized as the world’s greatest salesman, a Marxist guerrilla, a sage, a

hippie, a superstar, an illiterate Mediterranean peasant, a magician, or any number of other personas, there would appear to be no inherent reason why he couldn't also be conceptualized as the world's greatest husband and father.

In their depiction of human sexuality, *The Da Vinci Code* and DP straddle the divide between repressive, anti-sexual tendencies within the Christian tradition and libertinism of the sexual revolution. Affirming a disciplined yet joyful attitude toward sex is fairly commonplace within contemporary Christianity. What is distinctive about *The Da Vinci Code* and Unification theology is their mutual emphasis on sexuality as an expression of and pathway to the divine. Extraordinarily sensuous language describing the union of the soul with Christ is not uncommon in Christian mystical writings or even sermon-cycles such as Bernard of Clairvaux's sermons on *The Song of Solomon*. However, Christianity as a whole has stopped short of embracing sacred sex. Given widespread sexual confusion and misconduct, notably among clergy, it may be that the tradition ought to reconsider its position.

It might be questioned how the profound anti-clericalism of *The Da Vinci Code* interacts with the Christian tradition in any meaningful way. After all, Brown's characters judge the Church to be guilty of virtual genocide in its treatment of "free-thinking women" and claim both it and the Bible to be illegitimate, based upon lies from their beginnings. DP, again, is less radical in attempting to balance criticism with an acceptance of Christianity's legitimacy and ongoing mission. However, DP affirms a doctrine of continuing revelation.

It must be remembered that anti-clericalism, charges of illegitimacy (including distortions of scripture) and sectarian violence have been all too common fixtures in the history of Christianity. Churches have subjected their rivals to the harshest denunciations. Various Protestant sects have regarded Roman Catholic Church and its offices as the invention of power-crazed human beings, or the devil, not God. Roman Catholics have applied similar phases of opprobrium (i.e., "first-born of Satan") to a long line of heretics. In this regard, anti-clericalism, even of the most radical sort, ought not disqualify either text from consideration any more than it has disqualified previous claimants to truth.

DP's doctrine of God's continuing revelation may be problematic, depending upon how it is interpreted. Christianity typically finessed claimed encounters with the supernatural by such personages as Francis of Assisi, Ignatius Loyola or Bernadette of Lourdes by distinguishing between divine inspiration and revelation. However, there has never been a shortage of those who believe that God has "more light to shed from his Holy Word."[\[20\]](#)

Both *The Da Vinci Code* and DP attempt to deconstruct literalist readings of the end times. In so doing, they chart an eschatological course midway between cataclysmic end time scenarios envisioned by Biblical fundamentalists and skepticism as to end time scenarios at all, especially claims as to their imminent occurrence, which characterizes the views of liberally minded Christians. The texts resonate with fundamentalist readings in that they accept (though redefine) the end time, posit decisive change, and perceive signs of its immanent arrival. At the same time, the texts resonate with liberal readings in repudiating outmoded cosmologies and crass supernaturalism but affirming the ideal of persons "being the truth" (though this also has continuities with the Orthodox doctrine of



humankind's divinization). Mediating theologies are typically rejected by contending parties on either side and form third wave alternatives. Perhaps the two texts' ultimate eschatological vision could appeal to Christian liberals. However, it is questionable whether the eschaton's imminent dawning, which both texts uphold (though *The Da Vinci Code* hedges its bets), would garner widespread acceptance.

In the end, *The Da Vinci Code* and *Divine Principle* are compelling because of their audaciousness. This is most evident in their efforts to deconstruct two millennia of interpretation as to the "true history of Jesus Christ." Whether or not one accepts their conclusions, the boldness of their undertaking is striking. Mainstream theology tends to be predictable, if not boring. Theologians face the unenviable task of inspiring interest in questions for which the answers are already known. Stated differently, their job is to think inside the box. From this perspective, *The Da Vinci Code* and *Divine Principle* challenge the mainstream paradigm, calling upon theology to recover its vocation as a high stakes enterprise with meaningful consequences. The two texts, in effect, are saying that theology needs to be breathtaking. It also needs to be imaginative, even fun. To be sure, *The Da Vinci Code* and *Divine Principle* are not the only texts saying this. However, they reinforce the truism that the more interesting and cutting edge theologies emerge from the periphery rather than from the center.

## Notes

- [1] Ron Charles, "Da Vinci Code sets a record, inspires a genre," *Christian Science Monitor*, March 19, 2004.
- [2] See David Neff, "Da Vinci Dissenters: Four Books Try to Break, Crack, or Decode the Deception," *Christianity Today*, June 2004, p. 57.
- [3] *Divine Principle* (New York: HSA-UWC, 1977). There are various translations of the Korean *Wolli Kangron* (1966), the most recent being *Exposition of the Principle* (New York: HSA-UWC, 1996).
- [4] Hak Ja Han Moon. "World Peace and the Role of Women," speech delivered at Opening Convention of the Women's Federation for World Peace. Seoul, Korea, Aug. 24, 1992.
- [5] Sun Myung Moon, "Let Us Become Survivors," *Sermons of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon*, vol. 4 (New York: HSA Publications, 1995), p. 191.
- [6] Text and accompanying discussion provided by Professor Andrew Wilson, Unification Theological Seminary.
- [7] Sun Myung Moon, "God and Humanity Should Live Together," *Sermons of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon*, vol. 5 (New York: HSA Publications, 1995), p. 106.
- [8] Sun Myung Moon, "Jesus is Searching for Us in This Way," *Sermons of the Reverend Sun Myung Moon*, vol. 1 (New York: HSA Publications, 1994), p. 40.
- [9] See Sun Myung Moon, "In Search of the Origin of the Universe," *True Family and World Peace* (New York: FFWPU, 2000), pp. 57f.

- [10] Andrew Wilson, "Sexual Interpretations of the Human Fall," in *Unification Theology in Comparative Perspectives*, ed. by Anthony Guerra (Barrytown, NY: Unification Theological Seminary, 1988), p. 63.
- [11] Sang Hun Lee, *Life in the Spirit World and On Earth* (New York: FFWPU, 1998), p. 34.
- [12] Hak Ja Han Moon, "World Peace and the Role of Women."
- [13] See James Barr, "Allegory and Typology," in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology*, edited by Alan Richardson and John Bowden (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), pp. 11-15.
- [14] Barr, p. 12.
- [15] Wilson, "Sexual Interpretations of the Human Fall," pp. 52-62.
- [16] Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).
- [17] See [www.spiritbride.com](http://www.spiritbride.com).
- [18] See J. Denny Weaver, *The Non-Violent Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).
- [19] Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries* (New Haven: Yale, 1999).
- [20] See Y.O. Kim, *Unification Theology* (New York: HSA-UWC, 1980), pp. 37-42.