

Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci*
Code

(Corgi, 2003)

Chapter 55

Seated on the divan beside Langdon, Sophie drank her tea and ate a scone, feeling the welcome effects of caffeine and food. Sir Leigh Teabing was beaming as he awkwardly paced before the open fire, his leg braces clicking on the stone hearth.

'The Holy Grail,' Teabing said, his voice sermoniac. 'Most people ask me only *where* it is. I fear that is a question I may never answer.' He turned and looked directly at Sophie. 'However . . . the far more relevant question is this: *What* is the Holy Grail?'

Sophie sensed a rising air of academic anticipation now in both of her male companions.

'To fully understand the Grail,' Teabing continued, 'we must first understand the Bible. How well do you know the New Testament?'

Sophie shrugged. 'Not at all, really. I was brought up by a man who worshipped Leonardo da Vinci.'

Teabing looked both startled and pleased. 'An enlightened soul. Superb! Then you must be aware that Leonardo was one of the keepers of the secret of the Holy Grail. And he hid clues in his art.'

'Robert told me as much, yes.'

'And Da Vinci's views on the New Testament?'

'I have no idea.'

Teabing's eyes turned mirthful as he motioned to the bookshelf across the room. 'Robert, would you mind? On the bottom shelf. *La Storia di Leonardo*.'

Langdon went across the room, found a large art book, and brought it back, setting it down on the table

between them. Twisting the book to face Sophie, Teabing flipped open the heavy cover and pointed inside the rear cover to a series of quotations. 'From Da Vinci's notebook on polemics and speculation,' Teabing said, indicating one quote in particular. 'I think you'll find this relevant to our discussion.'

Sophie read the words.

*Many have made a trade of delusions
and false miracles, deceiving the stupid multitude.*

— LEONARDO DA VINCI

'Here's another,' Teabing said, pointing to a different quote.

*Blinding ignorance does mislead us.
O! Wretched mortals, open your eyes!*

— LEONARDO DA VINCI

Sophie felt a little chill. 'Da Vinci is talking about the Bible?'

Teabing nodded. 'Leonardo's feelings about the Bible relate directly to the Holy Grail. In fact, Da Vinci painted the true Grail, which I will show you in a moment, but first we must speak of the Bible.' Teabing smiled. 'And everything you need to know about the Bible can be summed up by the great canon doctor Martyn Percy.' Teabing cleared his throat and declared, 'The Bible did not arrive by fax from heaven.'

'I beg your pardon?'

'The Bible is a product of man, my dear. Not of God. The Bible did not fall magically from the clouds. Man created it as a historical record of tumultuous times, and it has evolved through countless translations,

additions and revisions. History has never had a definitive version of the book.'

'Okay.'

'Jesus Christ was a historical figure of staggering influence, perhaps the most enigmatic and inspirational leader the world has ever seen. As the prophesied Messiah, Jesus toppled kings, inspired millions and founded new philosophies. As a descendant of the lines of King Solomon and King David, Jesus possessed a rightful claim to the throne of the King of the Jews. Understandably, His life was recorded by thousands of followers across the land.' Teabing paused to sip his tea and then placed the cup back on the mantel. 'More than ~~eighty~~ ⁷ ~~gospels were considered for the New Testament, and yet only a relative few were chosen for inclusion -~~ Matthew, Mark, Luke and John among them.' ^{NO.}

'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.'

'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. In Constantine's day, Rome's official religion was sun worship - the cult of *Sol Invictus*, or the Invincible Sun - and Constantine was its head priest. Unfortunately for him, a growing religious turmoil was gripping Rome. Three centuries after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, Christ's followers had multiplied exponentially. Christians and pagans began warring, and the conflict grew to such proportions that it threatened to rend Rome in two. Constantine decided something had to be done. In

(Constantine) hybrid religion

325 AD, he decided to unify Rome under a single religion. Christianity.'

Sophie was surprised. 'Why would a pagan emperor choose *Christianity* as the official religion?'

Teabing chuckled. 'Constantine was a very good businessman. He could see that Christianity was on the rise, and he simply backed the winning horse. Historians still marvel at the brilliance with which Constantine converted the sun-worshipping pagans to Christianity. By fusing pagan symbols, dates and rituals into the growing Christian tradition, he created a kind of hybrid religion that was acceptable to both parties.'

'Transmogrification,' Langdon said. 'The vestiges of pagan religion in Christian symbology are undeniable. Egyptian sun disks became the halos of Catholic saints. Pictograms of Isis nursing her miraculously conceived son Horus became the blueprint for our modern images of the Virgin Mary nursing Baby Jesus. And virtually all the elements of the Catholic ritual – the mitre, the altar, the doxology and communion, the act of "God-eating" – were taken directly from earlier pagan mystery religions.'

Teabing groaned. 'Don't get a symbologist started on Christian icons. Nothing in Christianity is original. The pre-Christian God Mithras – called *the Son of God* and *the Light of the World* – was born on December 25, died, was buried in a rock tomb, and then resurrected in three days. By the way, December 25 is also the birthday of Osiris, Adonis and Dionysus. The newborn Krishna was presented with gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Even Christianity's weekly holy day was stolen from the pagans.'

'What do you mean?'

'Originally,' Langdon said, 'Christianity honoured 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.*

Sophie's head was spinning. And all of this relates to the Grail?

'Indeed,' Teabing said. 'Stay with me. During this fusion of religions, Constantine needed to strengthen the new Christian tradition, and held a famous ecumenical gathering known as the Council of Nicaea.'

Sophie had heard of it only insofar as its being the birthplace of the Nicene Creed.

'At this gathering,' Teabing said, 'many aspects of Christianity were debated and voted upon – the date of Easter, the role of the bishops, the administration of sacraments, and, of course, the *divinity* of Jesus.'

'I don't follow. His divinity?'

'My dear,' Teabing declared, 'until *that* moment in history, Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet... a great and powerful man, but a *man* nonetheless. A mortal.'

'Not the Son of God?'

'Right,' Teabing said. 'Jesus' establishment as "the Son of God" was officially proposed and voted on by the Council of Nicaea.'

'Hold on. You're saying Jesus' divinity was the result of a *vote*?'

'A relatively close vote at that,' Teabing added. 'Nonetheless, establishing Christ's divinity was critical to the further unification of the Roman empire and to the new Vatican power base. By officially endorsing Jesus as the Son of God, Constantine turned Jesus into a deity who existed beyond the scope of the human world, an entity whose power was unchallengeable. This not only precluded further

DOORS - ON CHRISTIANITY
pagan challenges to Christianity, but now the followers of Christ were able to redeem themselves *only* via the established sacred channel - the Roman Catholic Church.'

Sophie glanced at Langdon, and he gave her a soft nod of concurrence.

'It was all about power,' Teabing continued. 'Christ as Messiah was critical to the functioning of Church and state. Many scholars claim that the early Church literally *stole* Jesus from His original followers, hijacking His human message, shrouding it in an impenetrable cloak of divinity, and using it to expand their own power. I've written several books on the topic.'

'And I assume devout Christians send you hate mail on a daily basis?'

'Why would they?' Teabing countered. 'The vast majority of educated Christians know the history of their faith. Jesus was indeed a great and powerful man. Constantine's underhanded political manoeuvres don't diminish the majesty of Christ's life. Nobody is saying Christ was a fraud, or denying that He walked the earth and inspired millions to better lives. All we are saying is that Constantine took advantage of Christ's substantial influence and importance. And in doing so, he shaped the face of Christianity as we know it today.'

Sophie glanced at the art book before her, eager to move on and see the Da Vinci painting of the Holy Grail.

'The twist is this,' Teabing said, talking faster now. 'Because Constantine upgraded Jesus' status almost four centuries *after* Jesus' death, thousands of documents already existed chronicling His life as a *mortal* man. To rewrite the history books, Constantine knew he would need a bold stroke. 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 spoke of Christ's *human* traits and embellished those gospels that made Him godlike. The earlier gospels were outlawed, gathered up, and burned.'

'An interesting note,' Langdon added. 'Anyone who chose the forbidden gospels over Constantine's version was deemed a heretic. The word *heretic* derives from that moment in history. The Latin word *haereticus* means "choice". Those who "chose" the original history of Christ were the world's first *heretics*.'

'Fortunately for historians,' Teabing said, 'some of the gospels that Constantine attempted to eradicate managed to survive. The Dead Sea Scrolls were found in the 1950s hidden in a cave near Qumran in the Judean desert. And, of course, the Coptic Scrolls in 1945 at Nag Hammadi. In addition to telling the true Grail story, these documents speak of Christ's ministry in very human terms. Of course, the Vatican, in keeping with their tradition of misinformation, tried very hard to suppress the release of these scrolls. And why wouldn't they? The scrolls highlight glaring historical discrepancies and fabrications, clearly confirming that the modern 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.'

'And yet,' Langdon countered, 'it's important to remember that the modern Church's desire to suppress these documents comes from a sincere belief in their established view of Christ. The Vatican is made up of deeply pious men who truly believe these contrary documents could only be false testimony.'

Teabing chuckled as he eased himself into a chair opposite Sophie. 'As you can see, our professor has a

far softer heart for Rome than I do. Nonetheless, he is correct about the modern clergy believing these opposing documents are false testimony. That's understandable. Constantine's Bible has been their truth for ages. Nobody is more indoctrinated than the indoctrinator.'

'What he means,' Langdon said, 'is that we worship the gods of our fathers.'

'What I mean,' Teabing countered, 'is that almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false.' As are the stories about the Holy Grail.'

Sophie looked again at the Da Vinci quote before her. *Blinding ignorance does mislead us. O! Wretched mortals, open your eyes!*

Teabing reached for the book and flipped toward the centre. 'And finally, before I show you Da Vinci's paintings of the Holy Grail, I'd like you to take a quick look at this.' He opened the book to a colourful graphic that spanned both full pages. 'I assume you recognize this fresco?'

He's kidding, right? Sophie was staring at the most famous fresco of all time - *The Last Supper* - Da Vinci's legendary painting on the wall of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan. The decaying fresco portrayed Jesus and His disciples at the moment that Jesus announced one of them would betray Him. 'I know the fresco, yes.'

'Then perhaps you would indulge me this little game? Close your eyes if you would.'

Uncertain, Sophie closed her eyes.

'Where is Jesus sitting?' Teabing asked.

'In the centre.'

'Good. And what food are He and His disciples breaking and eating?'

'Bread.' *Obviously.*

'Superb. And what drink?'

'Wine. They drank wine.'

'Great. And one final question. How many wine-glasses are on the table?'

Sophie paused, realizing it was the trick question. *And after dinner, Jesus took the cup of wine, sharing it with His disciples.* 'One cup,' she said. 'The chalice.' *The Cup of Christ. The Holy Grail.* 'Jesus passed a single chalice of wine, just as modern Christians do at communion.'

Teabing sighed. 'Open your eyes.'

She did. Teabing was grinning smugly. Sophie looked down at the painting, seeing to her astonishment that *everyone* at the table had a glass of wine, including Christ. Thirteen cups. Moreover, the cups were tiny, stemless, and made of glass. There was no chalice in the painting. No Holy Grail.

Teabing's eyes twinkled. 'A bit strange, don't you think, considering that both the Bible and our standard Grail legend celebrate this moment as the definitive arrival of the Holy Grail. Oddly, Da Vinci appears to have forgotten to paint the Cup of Christ.'

'Surely art scholars must have noted that.'

'You will be shocked to learn what anomalies Da Vinci included here that most scholars either do not see or simply choose to ignore. This fresco, in fact, is the entire key to the Holy Grail mystery. Da Vinci lays it all out in the open in *The Last Supper*.'

Sophie scanned the work eagerly. 'Does this fresco tell us *what* the Grail really is?'

~~'Not what it is.'~~ Teabing whispered. 'But rather *who* it is. The Holy Grail is not a thing. It is, in fact, ... a person.'