

Behind the Da Vinci Code
REL 3490

Professor Erik Larson
DM 303
Office Hours: By Appointment

Fall 2022
Email: larsone@fiu.edu
(305) 348-3518

Course Description and Objectives: The Da Vinci Code was a runaway bestseller from the moment of its publication. While a work of fiction, it raises questions that many readers have about the real origins and history of Christianity. It even claims that although the story may be fictional, all the documents and historical events mentioned in the book are real. But is this really so? Using the book as our starting point, we will examine many of the issues it raises, such as whether there really is a *secret* history behind what is usually taught. More importantly, you will learn how to evaluate such claims by carefully looking at the original sources and learning how to evaluate both what is said and what is not. In our study we will look at the Da Vinci Code from the aspects of literature, history and art.

1. [Week 1] Introduction and Orientation to Basic Issues.

Read: *The Da Vinci Code*, chaps. 1-52

Be sure to submit Student Bio Activity from Week 1 Discussion Questions.

2. [Week 2] Da Vinci Code as Literature. Conspiracy Theory

Read: *The Da Vinci Code*, chaps. 53-end.

Watch the movie *Conspiracy Theory*.

3. [Week 3] Women in the Life of Jesus. Mary Magdalene.

Read: Matthew 26:1-35; 27:32-28:20; Mark 14:1-31; 15:21-16:8; Luke 7:36-8:3; 22:1-38; 23:26-24:12; John 12:1-11; 19:16-20:31.

Raymond F. Collins, "Mary" *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. N. Freedman, vol. 4. New York: Doubleday, 1992, pp. 579-582 (online course materials).

Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Constructing 'Real' Women from Gospel Literature: The Case of Mary Magdalene," *Women and Christian Origins*, eds. R. S. Kraemer and Mary Rose D'Angelo. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 105-128 (online course materials).

4. [Week 4] Gnosticism: Definition and Issues.

Read: Yuri Stoyanov, *The Other God*, pp. 1-123.

5. [Week 5] Gnostic Sex and View of Women.

Read: Erik Larson, "Gnosticism and Sexuality" forthcoming *Encyclopedia of Human Sexuality* (online course materials)

Gospel of Thomas (online course materials).
Gospel of Philip (online course materials).
Gospel of Mary (online course materials).

Wednesday, September 21: Literary Comparison Due.

6. [Week 6] Constantine.

Read: Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History and Life of Constantine* (library reserve).
W. H. C. Frend, "The Constantinian Revolution" *The Rise of Christianity*.
Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984, pp. 474-498 (online course materials).

7. [Week 7] Constantine continued.

Read: W. H. C. Frend, "The Constantinian Revolution" *The Rise of Christianity*.
Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984, pp. 498-517 (online course materials).

October 5-9: First Examination.

8. [Week 8] The Grail.

Read: Richard Barber, *The Holy Grail*, pp. 1-87.

9. [Week 9] Knights Templar.

Read: Richard Barber, *The Holy Grail*, pp. 91-134, 290-320, 356-370.

10. [Week 10] Life of Leonardo da Vinci.

Read: Alessandro Vezzosi, *Leonardo da Vinci*, pp. 1-80.

Wednesday, October 26: Factoid Paper Due.

11. [Week 11] da Vinci's Art.

Read: Alessandro Vezzosi, *Leonardo da Vinci*, pp. 81-159.

12. [Week 12] Freemasons

Read: Jasper Ridley, *The Freemasons*, pp. 1-58, 90-137.

13. [Week 13] Freemasons

Read: Jasper Ridley, *The Freemasons*, pp. 191-204, 264-296.

Wednesday, November 16: Research Paper Due.

14. [Week 14] Opus Dei.

Read: Michael Walsh, *Opus Dei*, pp. 1-102.

15. [Week 15] Opus Dei.

Read: Michael Walsh, *Opus Dei*, pp. 105-207.

December 5-110: Second Examination.

Assigned Textbooks:

- Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*, New York: Doubleday, 2003. ISBN-13: 978-1400079179.
- Richard Barber, *The Holy Grail: Imagination and Belief*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004. ISBN-13: 978-0674018150.
- Jasper Ridley, *The Freemasons: A History of the World's Most Powerful Secret Society*. New York: Arcade Publishing, 2001. ISBN-13: 978-1559706544.
- Yuri Stoyanov, *The Other God: Dualist Religions from Antiquity to the Cathar Heresy*. Hartford: Yale University Press, 2000. ISBN-13: 978-0300082531.
- Alessandro Vezzosi, *Discoveries: Leonardo da Vinci*. New York: Abrams, 1997. ISBN-13: 978-0810928091.
- Michael Walsh, *Opus Dei: An Investigation into the Powerful Secretive Society within the Catholic Church*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004. ISBN-13: 978-0060750688.

Assigned Video:

Conspiracy Theory. A Richard Donner film starring Mel Gibson and Julia Roberts. 1997. ASIN: 6304708793. You can rent this movie or buy it from Amazon.com or a local store such as Walmart, Best Buy, etc.

Other Useful Books

- Dan Burstein, *Secrets of the Code: The Unauthorized Guide to the Mysteries behind the Da Vinci Code*. CDs Books, 2004. ISBN-13: 978-1593150228
- Michael Haag and Veronica Haag, *The Rough Guide to the Da Vinci Code*. London: The Penguin Group, 2004. ISBN-13: 978-1843537137
- Carl E. Olson and Sandra Miesel, *The Da Vinci Hoax: Exposing the Errors in The Da Vinci Code*. Ignatius Press, 2004. ISBN-13: 978-1586170349

Grading:	Midterm	20%
	Final	20%
	Literary Comparison (3-5 pages)	10%
	Factoid Paper (2-3 pages)	10%
	Research Paper (5-7 pages)	20%
	Discussion Participation	20%

Examinations: The first and second examinations will be based on both the readings and the weekly lessons. The exams will consist of multiple choice questions. Examination 2 is not cumulative—it covers only material from the second half of the semester.

Papers in General: All papers will be submitted via the designated Paper Dropbox on the course menu.

Literary Paper: Write a comparison of the story in *The Da Vinci Code* with the movie *Conspiracy Theory*. Analyze them from the aspect of the nature of the conspiracy, the major characters involved and how their figures are developed in the course of the story's

unfolding, and the overall coherency of the story line. At each stage you should make some determination as to which of the two you find to be more compelling and effective and why. Length should be 3-5 double-spaced pages.

Factoid Paper: Check out one of Brown's explanations (such as the origin of the cornucopia, the number phi, the Fibonacci sequence, the significance of the rose, Baphomet) and research how accurate it is. Length should be 2-3 double-spaced pages. Make sure to use good resources since you can't check someone else's accuracy unless your own information is correct. Include your bibliography.

Research Paper: Write a term paper on some topic relating to the course that particularly interests you. The topic should not coincide with one of the segments of our course (such as Gnosticism), but it may further develop an aspect of one of them (such as a particular Gnostic group that we didn't have time fully to explore, or one of the Gnostic texts that we didn't read). The topic must receive the approval of the instructor before it is handed in. Paper length should be 5-7 double-spaced pages, excluding bibliography. Margins for the pages should be 1 inch on all sides and the style should conform to some standard such as *MLA* or the *Chicago Manual of Style*. In the body of the paper you may use either footnotes or endnotes.

Discussion Participation: Each week there will be discussion questions posted for you to respond to. The responses don't have to be long, but should be well thought out and written in standard American English (that is to say, use correct spelling and proper punctuation and capitalization).

You will participate in 10 topics out of the 15 weeks of the course. This gives you some flexibility during weeks that are especially busy for you. In addition to posting your own answers, you should respond to the postings from your fellow classmates or the instructor. Each week that you participate, you should respond to at least 2 postings of your classmates. At the end of the course, your discussion thread will be graded based on the quantity and the quality of what you have written.

Note: Everyone is required to submit the Student Bio Activity before Thursday, September 8, 2020 by 11:55 pm U.S. Eastern Time. Provide a brief biographical overview on the Student Bio Forum under Discussion Forum on Blackboard. You are encouraged to include following in your bio: Name, status in your current program, educational background to date, the reason you take this course, your expectation of this course, your experience with any aspect of online learning, work experience, career plans, and personal plans. (No longer than 500 words).

In responding to others, it is important to be courteous and respectful. If you disagree with something that has been said, that is fine. But be sure to explain why and where appropriate support your own view with evidence. Also, it is fine to ask questions that are related to our topic to extend the discussion. But please make sure the questions are relevant.

Drop Box: Discussion responses will be placed in the drop boxes that you will be given each week. After one week (you will have from Monday to Monday), the drop boxes will

be locked so that nothing new may be added. You can, however, go back and view what has already been written.

Academic Honesty: Each student is expected to do his or her own work. It is absolutely unacceptable to submit someone else's work as your own. This is plagiarism and will result in a failing grade (F) for the assignment and possible disciplinary action. Thus, when in the course of writing your paper you quote or paraphrase an idea found in one of your sources you must give credit to the original author (usually by means of a footnote).

Syllabus Note on Internet Use in Research: You may cite from the internet in your term papers, but you must be discerning. Anyone can post "information" on the internet, and thus some of what is there is inaccurate, incomplete, and sometimes even blatantly untrue. As in print collections in libraries, only scholarly articles on the internet are acceptable as sources for research papers.

Internet articles should ideally have authors. Some will list individual authors; others will list institutions as sources. The credibility of the information depends on the credibility of the source. Acceptable sources include individual scholars with academic credentials, educational institutions (e.g., Institute of Reformation History, Princeton University), publicly supported national or international institutions (e.g. the World Health Organization or the National Institutes of Health) or other well known institutions with credible reputations (e.g. the World Council of Churches, the Childrens' Defense Fund). Most educational institutions have addresses which end with the letters "edu." You must use your judgment since many reputable institutions may not be well known by most students. Also, sometimes websites may list a university as the place from which the material emanates, but which does not sponsor or in any way support the information on that site (You could set up a website that lists FIU as its origin, and purports that the Pope died last month and was replaced by a ringer!).

There will be some internet sources the reliability of which will be difficult to assess. Sometimes you must judge by the tone and range of an article. If it reads like a magazine or newspaper article and cites none of the sources it used, it is not scholarly. You should ask whether the article demonstrates balance: Does it attempt to tell all sides of the story? Does it ask critical questions of the material it covers? How well does its treatment accord with other treatments of the same material you have found? If you would really like to cite an internet article but have doubts about its acceptability, look up the institution or the author on the internet or in the library. Has the author or institution published other works? Have those been reviewed or cited by other scholars?

When you cite from the internet, you must list the entire address on the web where you found the information and the date you accessed it. When applicable you must also note any search terms needed within the website to find this particular article when these do not appear within the address.

The following are some bibliographic entries:

Musa, Edward, "The Art of the Maya."
<http://www.unescape.org/pop/journal/v1onaal.htm>. 4/27/19.

Zarabozo, Jamaal, "Is Family Planning Allowed in Islam?"

<http://www.albany.edu/~ha4934/famplan.html>. 4/21/19.

Academic Freedom and Integrity: Academic freedom and responsibility are essential to the integrity of the University. The principles of academic freedom are integral to the conception of the University as a community of scholars engaged in the pursuit of truth and the communication of knowledge in an atmosphere of tolerance and freedom. The University serves the common good through teaching, research, scholarship/creative activities, and service. The fulfillment of these functions rests upon the preservation of the intellectual freedoms of teaching, expression, research, and debate. We affirm that academic freedom is a protected right in addition to a faculty member's constitutionally protected freedom of expression and is fundamental to the faculty member's responsibility to seek and to state truth as he or she sees it.

Students are encouraged to employ critical thinking and to rely on data and verifiable sources to interrogate all assigned readings and subject matter in this course as a way of determining whether they agree with their classmates and/or their instructor. No lesson is intended to espouse, promote, advance, inculcate or compel a particular feeling, perception, viewpoint of belief.