

Accuracy of the Bible and the Reliability of Christian History

Richard B. Sorensen, www.unholygrailbook.com

Copyright © 2007, All Rights Reserved

March 19, 2007

The grass withers and the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our God shall stand forever.
~ Isaiah 40:7-8

For a long time it has been fashionable to trash the Bible and treat it as nothing more than a collection of folk tales that have no basis in history or reality. But these criticisms have come from ideological opponents seeking to disparage it, and most of them are completely without merit.

This is especially true of the current spate of attacks from books such as *Holy Blood*, *Holy Grail*, *The DaVinci Code*, *Bloodline of the Holy Grail*, *The Templar Revelations*, *Roslyn—Guardians of the Secrets of the Holy Grail*, and others. Here are some of the items presented as “facts” in the above books, and the real truth:

- **Claim:** The Bible evolved through countless translations, additions, and revisions. History has never had a definitive version of the book.

Reality: The books of the Bible were written over a sixteen-hundred-year period, from around 1500 BC to AD 100. The Old Testament books were collected into what the Jews called the Torah by the time of Ezra (fifth century BC). The New Testament books were written in a much shorter period of time, from AD 40 to 100, and all of them were in use by the early Christian era (AD 100-150). Naturally these books had to be copied by hand, using the technology and writing implements of the times.

Regardless of their age, both the Old and New Testaments are very well supported by copies that were rigorously compared. Jewish copyists of the Torah, had word and letter counts for each text to ensure that the copies were accurate, and the copies were made and kept with great care (a Torah scroll was a priceless object). Prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls, the oldest versions of the Old Testament were from the tenth century. The Dead Sea scrolls were therefore a very significant find, because they were a thousand years older, and contain portions of almost every Old Testament book. While there were minor differences in spelling and word usage, amazingly, there was not even one change that altered the meaning of the text of any OT passage in the entire Dead Sea scrolls. Therefore during a one-thousand year interval there were no significant changes to the text.

The New Testament documents are especially well supported, *more than fifty times better than any other writing from the same period.*¹ There are approximately 5,000 Greek copies alone dating from as early as AD 350, and many more fragments that date back as far as 130. Minor variations have appeared in various versions, but none of these variations has produced any

substantive changes. The ancients were much more careful than ourselves even with the spoken word, because many agreements were oral. Likewise, they were also very careful with writings, of which there were very few. The assertion that large portions of the New Testament documents have been rewritten or replaced by substitute parts is simply wishful thinking.

It is the Gnostic documents which are instead poorly supported. For example, the *Gospel of Mary Magdalene* was a pseudepigraphal work written anonymously around AD 200 and then ascribed to Mary Magdalene. There are only three surviving fragments, and even among these there are significant differences in the text. Furthermore, many Gnostic documents are also poorly written in the first place, and contain meandering philosophical portions. The theology expressed in the *Gospel of Mary Magdalene* is pantheistic—more in line with Taoism and Buddhism, and therefore totally at odds with the Bible. For example, Jesus is quoted as saying, “All natures, all formed things, all creatures exist in and with one another and will again be resolved into their own roots, because the nature of matter is dissolved into the roots of its nature alone.”

As Thomas Cahill points out in his book *Desire of the Everlasting Hills*, the Old and New Testaments are virtually the only ancient documents that are still widely read by the public. A child can read and understand most of the Gospel accounts, which is a testimony to both their simplicity and power.

Some anti-Christian scholars have stated that the New Testament is essentially myth. In his book *Atheism: The Case Against God*, George Smith says, “As one moves from the earlier to the later gospels, some of the miracles become exaggerated.” He cites as evidence Mark 1: “all were brought to Jesus and many were healed”; Matthew 8: “many were brought to Jesus and all were healed”; and Luke 4: “all were brought to Jesus and all were healed.” Historian Archibald Robertson said, “We are witnessing the progressive growth of a legend.”² The problem with this analysis is that the Gospel writers did not use the words “all” and “many” in a clinical sense. Mark 1 states: “All the country of Judea was going out to him (to John the Baptist), and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River...” It is clear that Mark is talking in general terms, and did not mean that every single person in Judea and Jerusalem was baptized by John. It is also clear that even in the Mark account, considered to be the oldest, Jesus healed many people and thus performed hundreds of miracles and perhaps thousands; George Smith’s argument is thus reduced to a quibble. Furthermore, all of the Gospels culminate in the resurrection, the greatest miracle of all. If the resurrection is a lie, then none of the other miracles matter. But if the resurrection is true, then all of the other miracles are believable, because the resurrection demonstrates that what Jesus said about himself was true—that he was the Son of God.

The Apostle Paul, in I Corinthians 15:3-8, recorded a creed of the early church that was based on eyewitness accounts of the resurrection. Various scholars have dated this creed to a few years after the crucifixion of Christ,³ much too quickly for a mythology to have been developed.

Contrast this to the miracles supposedly performed by Muhammad. In the Quran Muhammad is presented as an ordinary man, both by himself and his

contemporaries.⁴ The miraculous acts he was said to have done, such as his ascension to heaven from the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, come from the Muslim Hadiths (“sayings”). These were additional oral traditions, collected and written one to two hundred years later, and thus constitute a hagiography of Muhammad.

The synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) were written during the period of AD 40-75, with the letters of Paul also being composed during the same era. The Gospel of John and Revelation were probably written later (or written earlier and edited and published later), perhaps during the period 80-100. Many of the NT writings including the Gospels were known to early Christian leaders such as Ignatius (?-110), Polycarp (70-155), Valentinus (136-165), and others because they quoted from various NT documents in letters that they wrote. Thus, there is direct evidence of the NT documents being used by various far-flung churches between AD 100-150, around sixty years after they were written.

It is certainly true that the Gospel writers borrowed from each other, used a variety of sources, and that some degree of editing was performed. But this was not done in an atmosphere of conspiracy and power struggles, as some suggest. The early Christian church was constantly persecuted and on the run, first by the Jewish authorities beginning around AD 37, and then by various Roman emperors until the Edict of Milan issued by Constantine in 313 which legalized Christianity and finally halted government-sponsored persecution.

- **Claim:** The Gospel writers disagreed on the ordering of some of the events in Jesus’ life, and also on a number of details such as who was present at certain events, what was said, etc. Also, there is much material that is included in some Gospels but not in others. This invalidates them as authoritative accounts of Jesus’ life and work.

Reality: The Gospel accounts are first-person recollections of the life of Christ by four men who were either apostles or close associates of Jesus, and they represent what each writer gathered from first-person sources or saw at the time and what was significant to him. Furthermore, as is true of all writings, each author had their own unique perspective and intended audience. They did not bind themselves to record every single event or to place all of the events in the actual chronological sequence in which they occurred. This is similar to obtaining accounts from multiple witnesses of a series of events—different eyewitnesses may describe the same events differently and in a different order, and may mention different details, but that does not invalidate their testimony.

- **Claim:** The Council of Nicea in AD 325 voted to make Jesus divine. Previously he was viewed as purely a moral prophet.

Reality: From the very beginning Jesus was viewed by the church as being both human and divine. The main purpose of the Council of Nicea was to consider and decide on the teaching of Arius, who promoted a new belief that Christ was a created being and therefore not fully divine. The Council overwhelmingly rejected the views of Arius by confirming the existing doctrine of Jesus’ dual divine/human nature, and the Council did not invent any new teaching. The Nicene Creed, which was written and voted on overwhelmingly at the conclusion

of the Council, restates in summary form what Christians had believed about the nature of Christ since the beginning. The Creed states in part, “We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only son of God...of one Being with the Father, and through him all things were made.”

The New Testament confirms Jesus’ divinity in many passages, for example, John 1:1, Titus 2:13, Hebrews 1:8-10, and II Peter 1:1; the words of Thomas to Jesus after the resurrection were: “My Lord and my God.” Jesus’ humanity is so event in so many places in the Gospels that it is ludicrous to claim that he was not human. It was only after the end of the first century, long after Jesus resurrection and the death of the apostles, that Gnostics and other groups claimed that Jesus was either purely human or purely spirit.

- **Claim:** The emperor Constantine is the one who forced the church to adopt the current books of the New Testament at the Council of Nicea in AD 325, and he promulgated a new Bible with different or modified gospels.

Reality: The churches had settled on which books they considered to be authoritative and canonical by the end of the first century, and therefore long before Constantine. For example, Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch, in 115 AD had already accepted the current four gospels as we have them today. Constantine who came on the scene two hundred years later had absolutely nothing to do with this process. We have existing portions of the New Testament that predate Constantine, and it would therefore be known if changes had been made by him or others following the Council of Nicea.

It is important to understand Constantine’s motives in enacting the Edict of Milan and attending the Council of Nicea. The Roman Empire of his day was coming apart at the seams, and rightly or wrongly Constantine saw Christianity as a means to reunify and pacify the Empire under his rule. It is alleged that he became a Christian at some point in his life, but his actions to stop persecution and support Christianity were primarily motivated by political concerns.

Constantine was concerned what this religion he had selected as the unifying force of his empire was all about. Thus he presided at the Council of Nicea, and tried to moderate the strong views of the participating bishops (his concern was undoubtedly whether their disagreement would provoke a wider societal split). But he did not vote, and had little or no influence on the theological issues being debated. Thus, the notion that Constantine promulgated a new system of beliefs is completely false.

Many, if not most of the bishops who attended the Council had assumed leadership in the church prior to Constantine’s edicts legalizing Christianity and therefore had done so at the risk of their lives. Christians and especially Christian leaders had routinely died for their faith in Roman arenas for over two hundred years, until around AD 315. Such men would certainly not have caved into any major shift about the core of what they believed for which they had risked their life. Constantine’s only request was to ask the bishop Eusebius to make fifty copies of the books that were considered to be the Scriptures, and these copies included all of the current Old and New Testament books.

Furthermore, the Council of Nicea was not at all concerned with the selection of books that would make up the Bible. The official canon of Scripture for the western church was declared at the Councils of Hippo (AD 393) and Carthage (AD 397), but even these Councils basically recognized the books that had been considered to be canonical by the churches since the end of the first century.

- **Claim:** The Gnostic documents such as those discovered at Nag Hammadi were wrongly suppressed by misogynistic patriarchal church leaders.

Reality: The Gnostic documents were written around AD 150-350 and were therefore composed a hundred years or more after the other books of the New Testament. One of the key criteria used for selecting the books that make of the New Testament was whether a book was authored by an apostle or an apostle's associate, and therefore composed when original sources who could verify the details were still alive. All of the original disciples and apostles were long since dead by the time the Gnostics documents were written. Furthermore, the latter portray a view of Christ and his teaching that was vastly different than that which is presented by the New Testament eyewitness accounts, all of which were written and in the hands of the church by AD 100.

The Gnostic "gospels" have relatively little to say concerning Christ's life, and typically consist of sayings and/or philosophical speculations. Many of them were confusing and poorly written, and thus would not have been considered worthy of serious consideration even if they were doctrinally correct and composed centuries earlier. Therefore these documents were rightly rejected by the church, and this rejection had nothing whatsoever to do with misogyny or patriarchy.

- **Claim:** Constantine and his successors converted the world from matriarchal paganism to patriarchal Christianity by waging a propaganda campaign to demonize the sacred feminine.

Reality: There has never been a time in the history of humanity where any group or society has been a matriarchy, pagan or otherwise, so the notion that Constantine or anyone else converted society from matriarchy to patriarchy is completely false. Anthropology has decisively shown that no matriarchies exist anywhere in the world, nor is there any substantial evidence that any have ever existed in the entire history of humanity. Given the innate biological and psychological differences between males and females, it is highly unlikely that a matriarchal group could ever have begun or survived for any period of time. Discredited works such as the 1861 *Das Mutterrecht* (the Mother-Right) of Johann Jakob Bachofen, who first discussed the Amazons (a purely fictional group), have been the major source text for feminist theologians.

Feminist theology teaches that the first societies in the distant past were utopian socialistic matriarchies based on "cooperation and peace with the environment" and goddess worship. These societies were then supposedly overthrown and destroyed by evil patriarchal groups who denigrated women and invented Christianity as a means of holding them down.

Today, these destructive forces are said to have run amok to the point that they are supposedly in danger of destroying the entire world. The crisis in western civilization is said to be a sign that the male God's reign is coming to an end, and the Goddess is waiting to lead us into a New Age of peace and harmony. We must therefore jettison patriarchy and all of its supporting institutions: male-god religions, monogamous families, and all hierarchies of power. If we fail to do this, we may be facing the end of civilization and life on the earth.

The feminist theological agenda is therefore focused on the marginalization and destruction of Christianity and the replacement of capitalistic economic systems with various forms of socialism and environmentalism.

In order to support these theories, feminist scholars have desperately searched for any archeological scraps of evidence for ancient matriarchies and socialistic, egalitarian societies. Focus has been placed on areas such as the Minoan society of ancient Crete, and Catal Hayuk in Turkey, which were thought to possibly be matriarchal. However, the search has been in vain, because as we look back at societies prior to our own, we see more patriarchy rather than less.

There certainly have been matriarchal elements in many past societies, such as the worship of female gods, e.g., Isis and Ishtar, and occasional powerful queens such as Semiramis, Cleopatra, and Queen Elizabeth. Some societies and groups have matrilineal elements, such as inheritance and property rights being passed through the female side. But a detailed examination of past societies reveals that in general, men ruled and dominated women much more completely than in the western societies of today. Feminist theology is thus pure fantasy and deception with no historical or anthropological foundation whatsoever. Furthermore, the current freedom available to women in western societies has primarily been due to the influence of Christianity and Christian thought, which ironically is the very thing that many feminists are attempting to destroy.

- **Claim:** Leaders of the patriarchal male church were so threatened by the power of women that they considered women to be an enemy, and labeled goddess worship and the sacred feminine as unclean.

Reality: There were many women involved in the early church at multiple levels, and the claim that male leaders in general were threatened by women or considered them to be the enemy is preposterous.

It is true, however, that goddess worship and the sacred feminine were thought of as unclean, but not because men were threatened by women. The real reason is that these religious beliefs were and are simply one more form of false pagan idolatry, and therefore not in accord with the true nature of God. For example, the Bible condemns the worship of Baal, a male god, as well as Astarte, a female goddess.

Actual goddess worship (not merely revering women such as the Virgin Mary, or the veneration of small household idols by ancient women to protect themselves and their children) has been relatively marginal throughout history. Even during times when goddesses were worshipped, such as Isis in Egypt and Ishtar in Babylonia, male gods were also worshipped, and were almost always

more significant and superior in power and authority. Ancient societies in general were thoroughly male dominant.

Wicca dates from the 1950s, and it was not until the women's movement of the 1960s and following when the concepts of feminist theology and the concomitant conspiracy theories mentioned above were invented and promulgated.

Furthermore, the actual source of church policy and practice involving the "loathing of sex," the "unworthiness of the body," and the resulting "fear of women" was largely Gnosticism itself, and the ideas of Plato upon which they were partially based. The Greek philosopher Plato, circa 400 BC, believed that the heavenly form or archetype of all things was the ideal, and that earthly things are only shadows of the heavenly, and therefore inferior. Gnosticism borrowed this concept and taught, among other things, that only the spiritual aspects of a person were good, and the body was evil. This meant that sex, and especially the female body, was from the "dark side." Gnostic theology also espouses "dualism," which is notion that God and the devil are essentially equal in power and constantly battling each other for supremacy. Christians never adopted Gnosticism, because it is simply one more form of false belief, and the dualistic concepts of Gnosticism are contrary and antithetical to the God of the Bible. However, the Roman Church unfortunately allowed some of the Gnostic anti-sexual overtones to creep in through Augustine and the ascetics, with many negative consequences, such as the teachings that sexual pleasure is tinged with evil, sex is for procreation only, birth control is wrong, priests must be celibate, and that women are a temptation that must be avoided if a man would be truly spiritual.

The Cathars, who lived in the Languedoc area of southern France, were perhaps the most historically significant Gnostic group. They were typical Gnostic dualists believing in an equally powerful "god" and "devil." They also believed that sex was sinful and a man who truly desired to serve God could never engage in it. Instead, they accepted sodomy as a replacement for heterosexual union. Catharism was hostile to maternity and family, and pregnant female followers were told that they carried demons in their bellies, making the religion unattractive to women (and men), especially for those who understood what the Cathars actually taught (many did not, and thought of it as essentially another form of Catholicism). The Cathars also practiced flagellation and self-mortification, and did not eat meat on the grounds that it came from animals that required sexual intercourse for the purposes of reproduction. However they did eat fish, not realizing that they also reproduce in a sexual manner.

However, a person could be a nominal Cathar follower and avoid committing themselves to all of the strictures of the faith. The Cathar religion was divided between a small minority of *perfecti* (the "perfect ones") who had pledged themselves to celibacy, to the dietary rigors, and who had passed through a ritual laying on of hands by the Cathar leadership, and the vast majority of *credenti* ("followers"). Only *perfecti* were considered to be members of the Cathar Church, and many *credenti* became *perfecti* only on their death-beds to avoid what they considered to be the unpleasant aspects of Catharism. Thus, despite their undesirable beliefs and practices, the Cathar religion was attractive to many,

especially those who despised the Catholic Church for its worldliness and money-grubbing, as the Cathar preachers were poor itinerants who did not demand tithes and had no church buildings.

It is often alleged that the Cathars were medieval feminists, with men and women sharing power in all areas, and that the Catholic Church attacked them for that reason. Both of those assertions are also untrue and are likewise the product of contemporary feminist myth-making. It is true that the Cathars were more egalitarian, that *perfecti* could be either male or female, and that there were significant number of female *perfecti*. However, the Cathars had an episcopal structure similar to the Catholic Church (i.e., bishops and deacons), and females were not allowed in those positions, nor were they allowed to perform the ritual functions of the church leadership. Furthermore, preaching by female *perfecti* was very rare, and they functioned in more-or-less the same way as nuns did in the Catholic Church except they did not live in cloisters.

The Roman church was concerned with the growth of this heresy and became jealous of the popular appeal of the Cathars, as well as being stung by their accusations of the worldliness of the Catholic leadership. After a number of attempts to convert them to Catholicism, in 1213 Pope Innocent III began the Albigensian Crusade in an effort to stamp the Cathars out; for thirty years they were pursued and eventually hounded to their death.

Even though the Catholic Church was largely successful in eliminating this Gnostic group, the resentments caused by their vicious actions created even more hatred against Catholicism, and the echoes of that hatred have persisted through the centuries. And despite the Christian rejection of Gnosticism, the Roman church was heavily influenced by the Gnostic idea of the evil of the body and other material things.

The church thus created many tensions and problems for itself, but the notion that the major threat was the power of women and goddess worship is not accurate.

- **Claim:** The Gnostic writings indicate that Mary Magdalene was married to Jesus and/or had a sexual relationship with him.
Reality: In no place do the Gnostic writings ever claim that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married, or that they ever had children, or even a sexual relationship. The Gnostic text that is frequently quoted from the purported *Gospel of Mary Magdalene* alleges that “Jesus loved Mary more than other women” and “more than the disciples,” and that “the disciples resented Jesus for expressing affection to Mary.” Consider this: if Jesus and Mary Magdalene had actually been engaged and/or married, why would the disciples express concern or jealousy over his being affectionate with her?
- **Claim:** The Gnostic writings indicate that Jesus gave Mary Magdalene authority over the church, and that Peter resented this.
Reality: No such statements exist—this is pure fabrication. In no place does Jesus give Mary Magdalene authority over the church, and the concern that Peter

actually expresses in the Gnostic writing is that the Gnostic concepts being expressed by Mary are “strange ideas.”

- **Claim:** Jesus supported female power and wanted women to be leaders in the same way and in the sense as men are.

Reality: This is false. Jesus affirmed the worth of women and taught that in the eyes of God that women are of equal value to men. But despite Jesus’ revolutionary teachings on love and the responsibilities of power, he consistently upheld traditional sex roles. He did not condemn female leadership, but did not encourage it either, and allowed for a dynamic where women would lead and use their gifts, but to do so in the context of traditional male/female paradigms. There are many examples of this: the disciples that Jesus chose were all male; when speaking to the woman at the well he asked her to “go and call your husband”; his acceptance of Mary anointing and kissing his feet; and so on.

In their writings, the Apostles upheld the same balance—affirming the value and worth of women and encouraging them to use their talents and gifts, while maintaining that men should be servant leaders.

Furthermore, the paradigm used consistently throughout the Bible is God as the husband, and the people as his bride in the Old Testament, and Christ as the husband, and the church as his bride in the New Testament.

- **Claim:** Jesus must have been married because it is inconceivable that he could have been a Rabbi and remained single.

Reality: Jesus was not a Rabbi in the formal sense. He was called “Rabbi” because of the respect that people accorded him, but was never formally confirmed or appointed as such. Furthermore, although it was expected that a Rabbi would marry, there are a number of examples of celibate Jewish religious leaders, such as John the Baptist and Paul the Apostle. Therefore, the notion that celibacy is inconceivable for a Rabbi is historically incorrect.

- **Claim:** The royal bloodline of Jesus Christ has been chronicled in great detail by many historians.

Reality: The only “historians” who claim this are the writers of the books described above. No bloodline of Christ can be documented because it does not exist.

Here are a few examples of other inaccuracies and distortions from the above mentioned books:

- **Claim:** The Priory of Sion was founded in 1099 by Godfrey of Bouillon, the first crusader king of Jerusalem.

Reality: This makes for a good story, but the organization was actually founded in 1956 by Pierre Plantard, a Frenchman who was obsessed with the idea of becoming an occult master and generating a lineage that extended back to the Merovingian kings of France. He wrote a number of fake documents and

surreptitiously placed them in various libraries to substantiate his claims regarding the Priory of Sion. However, Plantard himself backed off from the assertion of the 1099 date, later stating that the start of the organization dated to the mid-1700s. Then Plantard was implicated in the death of a French official who was supposedly a member of his organization, and during the trial he was subpoenaed to give testimony. On the witness stand he admitted that he made up the entire story. Plantard died penniless in 2000.

Godfrey de Bouillon, the crusader leader and first ruler of Jerusalem in 1099, was continually doing battle to maintain and expand the tenuous foothold that the crusaders had gained in Israel, and he died within one year of their victory. The Knights Templar, which according to the Priory documents, was supposedly a sister organization to the Priory of Sion, was not founded until sometime during the period 1113—1118 during the reign of Baldwin II, Godfrey's nephew.

The related story of the Bérenger Saunière is referred to in several of the above books, and Dan Brown named one of the central characters of *The DaVinci Code* after him. Brown was heavily influenced by the book *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, and the name "Leigh Teabing," another of Brown's central characters, is an anagram of the surnames of Richard Leigh and Michael Baigent, authors of *HBHG*, who ironically sued Brown prior to the release of the *DaVinci Code* movie.

As recounted in *HBHG*, Bérenger Saunière was a priest in the small Languedoc town of Rennes-le-Chateau, from 1885 until his death in 1917. Despite being paid only a small income, Saunière spent large amounts of money rebuilding his church and constructing a tower dedicated to Mary Magdalene. The church has statues of demons and other arcane sculptures, and the tower has many elements of kabbalistic symbolism. The Merovingian rulers were deeply involved in the occult, and Saunière may have secretly abandoned Catholicism and decorated his church in an attempt to identify with them. Saunière may further have believed that the Merovingian dynasty was descended from Mary Magdalene, because one of the coded messages he left in the tower dedicated to her was the following: "TO DAGOBERT II KING AND TO SION BELONGS THIS TREASURE AND HE IS THERE DEAD." Dagobert II, one of the last of the Merovingian heirs, was assassinated by Pepin the Fat, his prime minister, which effectively ended the Merovingian dynasty of French kings.

However, there is controversy about Dagobert II and the Carolingian conspiracy to seize power from the Merovingians. Some allege that the story of Dagobert's assassination was a legend created by the Merovingians in an attempt to discredit the Carolingian usurpers, although this is questionable due to the fact the Merovingians were already in decline. Historians also question the existence of a bloodline descended from Dagobert. He was said to have married a noblewoman named Giselle de Razes, and had a son by her (Sigebert IV), after he returned to France, and that this son was hidden from the Carolingians and raised in the Languedoc in the area of Rennes-le-Chateau, which is the same place where the mystery of the Abbé Bérenger Saunière supposed took place at the end of the

nineteenth century. Plantard claimed to be descended from Sigebert IV. However, others deny the existence of both Giselle and Sigebert.

The source of funds used by Saunière for rebuilding his church is another mystery. Soon after coming to Rennes-le-Chateau, Saunière supposedly found ancient documents and possibly others treasures hidden under the church's altar, and it was said that he sold these for large sums. The documents and/or treasure were supposedly placed there by members of the Knights Templar following the destruction of their order in 1307, or from the Cathars who were wiped out in the Albigensian crusade and fought their final battle on the slopes of the mountain fortress of Montsegur in the Pyrenees near there in 1244.

Another, more prosaic explanation for the construction money, is that Saunière "trafficked in masses" (i.e., he said masses for pay), for which he was later prosecuted by the church. He advertised in religious magazines and journals, and this generated a large income that would perhaps have been sufficient to pay for all of his building efforts.⁵ After he was prosecuted, his income dropped precipitously and he died penniless.

Another little-known fact is that the Saunière stories were embellished and publicized by Noel Corbu who bought property in the area, opened a restaurant, and needed a gimmick to create publicity.

- **Claim:** During 300 years of witch hunts the church hunted down and burned at the stake an astounding five million women. These were supposedly worshippers of the "sacred feminine" and secretly passed their concepts of goddess worship from mother to daughter. Therefore they were persecuted and killed in a war of extermination by the forces of patriarchy.

Reality: This is a stock feminist lie, similar to their assertion that one in every four female college students are raped. Scholars have estimated that from 1400 to 1800 (400 years) a total of 30,000 to 80,000 people were victims of witch hunts, and a significant number of these were men. Furthermore, many of the victims were not sought out as a group to be eliminated, but rather were reported by other women (and men).

There has never been a long-standing coordinated pogrom against goddess worshippers, and never very many goddess worshippers who would be the target of such a pogrom in the first place.

- **Claim:** The Shroud of Turin was painted by Leonardo DaVinci.
Reality: Leonardo maintained detailed notes about all of his works but never once mentioned the Shroud. As indicated previously, the first documented exhibition of the shroud was performed in 1355. During the following years the Shroud was shown publicly in Lirey, France, at the church built by the owner of the Shroud and was shown numerous times afterward. Leonardo was born in 1452.

For more information on these and related topics, please see the books *The Truth Behind the DaVinci Code* by Richard Abanes and *Decoding the DaVinci Code* by Amy Welborn.

¹ F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* Intersity Press, 1972

² Archibald Robertson, *The Origins of Christianity*, International Publishers, 1954

³ Hans Conzelmann, *I Corinthians. A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 251; Fee, *Corinthians*, 723; Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Jesus: History, Experience, Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 35. Reginald H. Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 11.

⁴ See, for example, Sam Shamoun, *Muhammad and Miracles: Analyzing Muslim Arguments for Muhammad's Supernatural Feats*, www.infolink-islam.de/Main/Responses/Azmy/mhd_miracles.htm

⁵ Smith, Paul, *Source of Saunière's Wealth—The Real Truth*, <http://priory-of-sion.com/psp/id62.html>