
The Da Vinci Code Revisited

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by the Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler,
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip**

What fun!

I have been asked again to provide my slides and review of Dan Brown's provocative book, *The Da Vinci Code*. I haven't picked up the book in over a year, and I marvel that it is still listed among the top ten selling books in the country. *The Da Vinci Code* presents a fun read, an easily accessible mystery, a completely exaggerated repetition of an old legend, a shallow and distorted summary of early Christian history, a titillating hint of sexual secrets, and an unexplored, all too casual, view of the "sacred feminine." All these ingredients make the book irresistible to our present culture!

I will never forget the moment I first realized the overwhelming popular significance of the book. In the Fall of 2003, I had spent hours of class time discussing the Episcopal Church and sexuality (more particularly: the Episcopal Church and homosexuality). Many of those discussions continue, and some people have an obsession that this subject must be one that divides the church. Thus, they drive that wedge deeper and deeper into the public arena; I believe that their hammers will soon destroy the wedge.

By January of 2004, I decided to devote my Sunday education class time to something else: to Dan Brown's book which was becoming the talk of kitchen conversations and cocktail circuits. Well, on the first day of that Sunday presentation, over 500 people filled the parish hall to see the slides and to discuss the book. Mind you, we had been seeing only about 200 people interested in "The Episcopal Church and Homosexuality."

I knew that if I had decided to present a slide show and presentation on "The Bible and Early Church History," I would also have had only about 200 people show up. Instead, Dan Brown's book, *The Da Vinci Code*, gave me-and many other Christian ministers-a chance to speak clearly about the Bible and early church history to folks who might not have been otherwise interested.

Thus, I use the book as an avenue into the realm of Christianity and history. When folks ask if I liked the book, I must answer that I do. In fact, I have been a fan of Dan Brown's writing since before *The Da Vinci Code*; *Angels and Demons* is still his best book. I like mysteries. When mysteries also involve God and the Church, I am captivated. I often think of my own vocation as a popular mystery. Every day, I set about the observation of clues and data-from people and illnesses to questions and liturgies-which point us to the grand and glorious mystery of God's truth. If it's been a good day, I discovered something else about the truth of God.

However, don't misunderstand me here! *The Da Vinci Code* is wrong about Jesus' supposed marriage, wrong about how the Bible was written, wrong about the theology of Jesus' humanity, and wrong about elaborate cover-ups and conspiracies in the Christian Church. The book is right about one theological point: there is a sacred feminine at the heart of the mystery of God.

Right or wrong, all that material is worth talking about. So I welcome the opportunity to discuss the book again. Many of you will discuss the book this summer, at book clubs or on summer vacation. I hear tell that a movie version of the book is about to appear; popular culture will flock to it, I am sure.

Be prepared this summer. Enjoy the ebbs and flows of cultural tides, but do not let distorted Christian history or shallow theology point you away from the Church. Enjoy your summer reading! But return to the Bible. Read a genuine history of the Christian Church this summer; I still believe that story, the story of God acting through our corporate community in Jesus Christ, may be the greatest mystery of all.

Sam Candler signature



The Very Rev. Sam Candler