## Historical Inaccuracies

*Main article:* [*Inaccuracies in The Da Vinci Code*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inaccuracies_in_The_Da_Vinci_Code)

The book generated criticism when it was first published for inaccurate description of core aspects of Christianity, the history of the [Catholic Church](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic_Church), and descriptions of [European art](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_art_history), history, and architecture. The book has received mostly negative reviews from Catholic and other Christian communities.

Many critics took issue with the level of research Brown did when writing the story. [*New York Times*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_Times) writer Laura Miller characterized the novel as "based on a notorious hoax", "rank nonsense", and "bogus", saying the book is heavily based on the fabrications of [Pierre Plantard](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_Plantard), who is asserted to have created the Priory of Sion in 1956.

Critics accuse Brown of distorting and fabricating history. For example, Marcia Ford wrote:

Regardless of whether you agree with Brown's conclusions, it's clear that his history is largely fanciful, which means he and his publisher have violated a long-held if unspoken agreement with the reader: Fiction that purports to present historical facts should be researched as carefully as a nonfiction book would be.[[7]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Da_Vinci_Code#cite_note-faithfulreader1-6)

[Richard Abanes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Abanes) wrote:

The most flagrant aspect ... is not that Dan Brown disagrees with Christianity but that he utterly warps it in order to disagree with it ... to the point of completely rewriting a vast number of historical events. And making the matter worse has been Brown's willingness to pass off his distortions as ‘facts' with which innumerable scholars and historians agree.[[7]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Da_Vinci_Code#cite_note-faithfulreader1-6)

The book opens with the claim by Dan Brown that "The Priory of Sion — a European [secret society](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secret_society) founded in 1099 — is a real organization". This assertion is broadly disputed. Some critics claim that the [Priory of Sion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Priory_of_Sion) was a hoax created in 1956 by [Pierre Plantard](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_Plantard). The author also claims that "all descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents ... and secret rituals in this novel are accurate"; but this claim is disputed by numerous academic scholars expert in numerous areas.[[8]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Da_Vinci_Code#cite_note-7)

Dan Brown himself dilutes the suggestion of some of the more controversial aspects being fact on his web site: "The "FACT" page makes no statement whatsoever about any of the ancient theories discussed by [fictional characters](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fictional_character). Interpreting those ideas is left to the reader".[[9]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Da_Vinci_Code#cite_note-8) However, it also says that "these real elements are interpreted and debated by fictional characters", "it is my belief that some of the theories discussed by these characters may have merit." and "the secret behind The Da Vinci Code was too well documented and significant for me to dismiss." Brown's ambiguity on the matter continues to fuel debate over the factual content of the novel.

In 2003, while promoting the novel, Brown was asked in interviews what parts of the history in his novel actually happened. He replied "Absolutely all of it." In a 2003 interview with CNN's [Martin Savidge](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Savidge) he was again asked how much of the historical background was true. He replied, "99% is true ... the background is all true". Asked by [Elizabeth Vargas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_Vargas) in an [ABC News](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ABC_News) special if the book would have been different if he had written it as [non-fiction](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-fiction) he replied, "I don't think it would have."[[10]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Da_Vinci_Code#cite_note-9) More recently Brown has avoided interviews and has been rather more circumspect about the accuracy of his claims in his few public statements. He has also, however, never retracted any of his earlier assertions that the history in the novel is accurate, despite substantial academic criticism of his claims.

In 2005, UK TV personality [Tony Robinson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tony_Robinson) edited and narrated a detailed rebuttal of the main arguments of Dan Brown and those of Baigent, Leigh and Lincoln, *The Real Da Vinci Code*, shown on [British TV](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_television) [Channel 4](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Channel_4). The program featured lengthy interviews with many of the main protagonists cited by Brown as "absolute fact" in *The Da Vinci Code*. Arnaud de Sède, son of [Gérard de Sède](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G%C3%A9rard_de_S%C3%A8de), stated categorically that his father and Plantard had made up the existence of the [Prieuré de Sion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prieur%C3%A9_de_Sion), the cornerstone of the [Jesus bloodline](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus_bloodline) theory - to quote Arnaud de Sede in the program, "frankly, it was piffle". The program also cast severe doubt on the [Rosslyn Chapel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosslyn_Chapel) association with the Grail and on other related stories like the alleged landing of [Mary Magdalene](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Magdalene) in France.

According to *The Da Vinci Code*, the [Roman Emperor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Emperor) [Constantine I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constantine_I) suppressed [Gnosticism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gnosticism) because it portrayed Jesus as purely human. The novel's argument is as follows.[[11]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Da_Vinci_Code#cite_note-10) Constantine wanted Christianity to act as a unifying religion for the [Roman Empire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Empire). He thought Christianity would appeal to [pagans](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paganism) only if it featured a [demigod](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demigod) similar to pagan heroes. According to the [Gnostic Gospels](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gnostic_Gospels), Jesus was merely a human prophet, not a demigod. Therefore, to change Jesus' image, Constantine destroyed the [Gnostic Gospels](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gnostic_Gospels) and promoted the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, which portray Jesus as divine or semidivine.

According to Tim O'Neill, Gnosticism did not portray Jesus as merely human.[[12]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Da_Vinci_Code#cite_note-11) All Gnostic writings depict Christ as purely divine, his [human body](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_anatomy) being a mere illusion (see [Docetism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Docetism)).[[13]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Da_Vinci_Code#cite_note-12) Some Gnostic sects saw Christ this way because they regarded matter as evil, and therefore believed that a divine spirit would never have taken on a material body.[[14]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Da_Vinci_Code#cite_note-13) The Da Vinci Code also portrays the [Council of Nicaea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Council_of_Nicaea)'s decision to recognize the fully human and divine aspects of Christ as being a close vote, but O'Neill says this is not reflected in any of the sources.[[15]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Da_Vinci_Code#cite_note-14)[[16]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Da_Vinci_Code#cite_note-15)