

A four part series:
Why *The Da Vinci Code* is True!
(and today's Christianity is dysfunctional)
Part 3 of 4

The Cover-up of the Divine Feminine: Is it okay to call God, "Goddess"?

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(The words appearing in bold were projected with Power Point onto the front of the sanctuary.)

A special welcome to all of our visitors this morning. I see that our topic, *The Da Vinci Code*, has brought out all the heretics! (laughter) If you want to have your old and new heresies served up fresh, you've come to the right place!

Why has *The Da Vinci Code* attracted so much attention? The *Washington Post* reported a few weeks ago that the scandal over missing documents that rocked the National Archives this spring came to light because an amateur researcher and historian figured out that for at least six years the CIA and the Air Force had been withdrawing thousand of records from the public shelves – and that archives officials had helped cover-up their efforts. Sounds just like what the early church did to all the other gospels they didn't like! In a world of Enron, World/Com cover-up, the scandal of world-wide cover-up of priests sexually abusing women and children in the Catholic church, the deception about why we went to war in Iraq, is it little wonder that *The Da Vinci Code*, a book about cover-ups in Christian history strikes a chord.

I have a little different take on it than most of my fellow pastors. My thesis is this:

Encased in the facts and falsehoods of murder mystery fiction, *The Da Vinci Code*'s vital premise is TRUE - there has been a cover-up in the Christian faith.

Dan Brown's book is all about exposing the hypocrisy and cover-up in traditional organized Christianity. This morning we tackle the cover-up of the Divine feminine in God and humankind.

The Cover-up of the Divine Feminine: Is it okay to call God "Goddess"?

In Brown's murder mystery fiction, the cover-up is about the Holy Grail. According to the book, the Grail is not the cup allegedly used by Christ at the Last Supper. It's the bones of Mary Magdalene along with the documents proving she was the wife of Jesus, and tracing the royal bloodline of Christ by the child they had together! In a key scene, Harvard Professor of symbology Robert Langdon, Detective Sophie, and Teabing, the ultimate villain are standing next to an eight-foot print of Da Vinci's Last Supper. Teabing asks Sophie what the person on Jesus' right looks like. Sophie exclaims, "That's a woman! Who is she?"

“That, my dear, “Teabing replied, “is Mary Magdalene.”

According to the book, Mary along with the secret knowledge that she and Jesus were married and had a child is the woman who “single-handedly could crumble the Church.”

When I read that claim in the book I thought, “That’s silly. Who would think that?” And then I heard the reaction from church groups around the world, and it sounded like that’s just what they did think. If people believe that Jesus was married and had a child, the church would crumble. That would mean women were really important and that Jesus liked sex. He had sex with Mary, and they had a child. We can’t stand the thought of that!

Looking deeper, it seems to me what the Church around the world can’t seem to stand is the sacred feminine – both in God and humankind. That’s exactly what Professor Langdon said a few pages earlier:

“The Grail is literally the ancient symbol for womanhood, and the Holy Grail represents the sacred feminine and the goddess, which of course has now been lost, virtually eliminated by the Church. The power of the female and her ability to produce life was once very sacred, but it posed a threat to the rise of the predominately male Church, and so the sacred feminine was demonized and called unclean. It was man, not God, who created the concept of ‘original sin,’ whereby Eve tasted of the apple and caused the downfall of the human race. Women, once the sacred giver of life, was now the enemy.”

But is the figure next to Jesus really a woman? Looks like it, doesn’t it? Let me point out three things: First, Leonardo, in his own book *Treatise on Painting*, explains that each figure should be painted according to his station and age. He says, “A favored follower, a protégé, or disciple, is always portrayed as very youthful, longhaired, and clean-shaven.” Then we have to understand that Leonardo was quite probably gay himself. Might he have even noticed that the Gospel of John doesn’t hesitate to point out that John was the disciple that Jesus “loved,” not just once but four times. And that Gospel made a big deal of John resting his head on Jesus’ chest during the Last Supper. We might call it looking a little gay today, but there was no such category back in Jesus’ day. Some of us think that John may have been gay as it seems about ten percent of us are down through history. So, given any one of those three ideas, how else do you think John would have looked?

I don’t care if Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married. I don’t even care if Jesus and John were married. But the truth is that there is not a shred of evidence that Jesus was married or that he was not married.

However, what we do know for sure, historically, is this: The feminine has been demonized and called unclean for thousands of years. Or, to quote myself (Hmmm, is it considered bad taste to quote yourself?):

The war on women is the longest running, most destructive, and most pervasive war on earth
Paul Smith, *Is It Okay to Call God Mother?*

In the time it took to say that last sentence, in this civilized, advanced, prosperous country, one more woman was beaten by a man, 300 every hour, and over 1,300 women are murdered every year by their husbands or boyfriends. Sounds like a war to me.

As long as the worst thing you can call a boy or man is “sissy” or “gay”, the war on the feminine is still going on.

The war against women is still going on as long as the Catholic Church can supposedly reason that they should only have male priests because the “original” twelve apostles were all men. Of course, they were all Jewish too, but then what’s a few details.

We call it the battle of the sexes, male supremacy, the divine right of kings and men, the “natural order” of things, and perhaps most often it is called patriarchy – the idea that men are superior to women and should be in charge. All the major religions of today were born at a time when patriarchy ruled the world.

It was a patriarchal Jewish world that Jesus came into. If a man died his property went to his sons, not his wife. A woman was her husband’s property. If you had a mother, but no father, you were legally considered an orphan. Jewish women took no part in public life. Women could not be witnesses in court because they were considered liars socially and minors legally. Women were not to be taught in the Jewish religion, only men. Women were forbidden to teach. The husband was the only one who had the right to divorce. And in case of danger to the lives of both wife and husband, the man was required to be saved first.

In contrast to his culture, women figured prominently in Jesus’ traveling group, and he saved some of his most profound teaching for conversations with women. The first witness to the resurrection was a woman, Mary Magdalene. Women were expected to be nurturing, kind, patient, healing, humble, self-sacrificing, self-giving, relationally oriented, sensitive, and non-violent. But those are the words that also described Jesus, as radical then as it is today. A woman acting like that would be doing what women always did. But a man acting like that shattered the precepts of patriarchy.

Jesus brought a new liberation to women by his message and model.

At Pentecost women as well as men were filled with the Spirit. The first churches forged ahead with the new freedom for women. Women were leaders in the early church. Junia, a woman, is called an apostle in Roman 16. Mary Magdalene was one of Jesus’ main disciples, a close friend, and the first witness to the resurrection. Some groups considered her to be a chief leader in the first 100 years of Christianity.

But the revolution slowed down, came to a stop, and then actually reversed within a 150 years. People always end up dumbing down the teaching and message of revolutionary spiritual leaders. The culturally dominant men began to take over, and the more organized groups were the ones with hierarchies and men in charge, and the male-ruled church at Rome became dominant.

By 200 CE the institutional church had completely stopped the evolution of the Jesus path into the full affirmation of women and the feminine face of God.

By 200 CE the male bishops had banned women from leadership. You can trace in church history when the church began saying that women were no longer allowed to be pastors and priests.

And by the end of the fourth century the Christian movement would have been virtually unrecognizable from the Christians at the beginning of the first century.

One result of the reversal of the liberation of the feminine and the return of patriarchy into the Christian faith 1600 years ago is that today, the most sexist hour in the American week is not Monday morning -

The most sexist hour of the American week is on Sunday morning.

An observer going into most church services this morning would notice that they have only men as priests, pastors and even deacons. When I came here to Broadway four decades ago, the pastors were all men and the twenty deacons were all men, too. No women in the men only leadership club.

In an interview with the somewhat secretive Catholic group Opus Dei on TV, the interviewer asked the male priest, "Doesn't the Church exclude women? After all, the people in charge here are men. You are a male priest with a male bishop under a male Pope. The head priest replied, "But we have women saints." And I thought, "Yes, and they are all dead. And while they were alive you didn't make them priests, bishops or Pope. The only safe woman is a dead woman!"

But I didn't see any of this when I first came to Broadway, just out of my conservative Southern Baptist seminary training. I used to teach that men should be in charge at church and at home. Yes, when I repented and came to my senses, I removed those sermons from the tape library and destroyed them. (I guess one might say that I participated in a traditional cover-up.)

Back in those years I used to quote this, what seemed amusing at the time, letter from *Children's Letters to God*:

**Dear God,
Are boys better than girls?
I know you are one,
But try to be fair.**

Sylvia

I used to think that was cute. Then I repented. I changed my mind and twenty years ago I came to believe it was tragic. I found other Christians who were very concerned about same thing and we traced it all back to our image of God.

As long as God is male, then male is God. Using exclusively masculine words for God to the exclusion of feminine words such as Goddess says something in our gender language day that Jesus never intended; namely that God is more like man than a women

Jesus taught us a profound movement forward in our understanding of God in when he said:

God is spirit John 4:24

This at least means that God both includes and transcends male and female.

I only came to see this slowly. Finally, I was so convicted about the power of how we speak about God in our church services that I wrote a book about it. Published by Hendrickson Press, it is called *Is It Okay to Call God Mother? Considering the feminine face of God*. I recommend my book for anyone who comes from a conservative Bible background and needs convincing from the Bible itself that Jesus never intended for us to think that God was male and masculine in anyway that She wasn't female and feminine, however one defines those terms. It is available at your local bookstore or on Amazon.com.

As long as we refuse to challenge the male only images of God deeply imbedded in our psyche, women will not be seen or treated as equals with men.

God has become a male word. If you don't think God is a male word just use the word "Goddess" and see the reaction. If the word "God" consciously and obviously included both male and female there would not be that reaction.

For us the word God is the male word for God just as surely as Goddess is the female word for God. Why does it sound that way? Because we've been brain washed. The sacred feminine has been demonized and covered up as *The Da Vinci Code* proclaims. So the easy answer to my beginning question today - Is it okay to call God Goddess?, is of course. As long as we, and we must, use personal images of God that are masculine and feminine, then it is wonderful to use both masculine and feminine terms.

I want you to hear that I am not suggesting you must change how you personally talk about God. I have finally gotten used to the fact that when I see people I know out and around in the shopping mall or grocery store, they often will immediately look guilty and say something like, "Oh, I know I haven't been to church but I plan on coming back." In recent years I've started getting another response when I'm in a conversation about spiritual things with someone. They will say something like, "God is blessing me and He . . ." They look apologetically at me and say, "Or She . . ."

You don't need to do that with me! You should use whatever language about Goddess that is meaningful to you! Use Higher Power, Higher Self, Wakan Tonka, or Eternal Light. Use God or Goddess, Father or Mother, He or She, King or . . . Well, maybe in our society there are limitations. Or don't use the word "god" at all, like the Buddhists. Use whatever is meaningful to you.

I want us to enlarge our horizons and increase our awareness. I want all of us to be comfortable with those like myself who use feminine terms for our Higher Power including Goddess. As we do, it will change not only our image of God, but our understanding of the wonderful sacred feminine in both women and men.

I admit that the exclusive maleness of God is only slowly evaporating in me. Since I am a professional God talker, it is especially important for me to use language that expands the work of the Spirit within us. I seldom use clearly masculine words for God. We've had thousands of years of that. I almost always use feminine words for God. After fifteen years of practice, I can, without thinking or flinching, speak of God as she, her, mother, and so on. I still jump when I use "Goddess," but I'm working on it.

Once again the church has been a dysfunctional family. Dysfunctional families always have secrets, things that are covered-up. The early women's freedom movement in the church was stopped and covered-up. Dysfunctional families discount one another. They don't want to share the power. Dysfunctional families have rigid ideas about sex, male and female, gay and straight. Is the church family around the world dysfunctional about sex, women, and gays today? You better believe it.

This is an exciting time for all of us as the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Goddess is calling us to continue with the revolution than began in the early church and was stopped and covered up. It's a great time for women, for gays, for all of us to grow in our understanding of our Creator and Her creation. I close with the words to a children's song one of my friends wrote.

**Our God is a Mother and a Father too.
Our God is the Friend who will always pull us through
Our God is a Sister who loves you and me,
Our God is a Brother who sets of free.
Our God is a She and a He.
But Loving God is much more you see,
For a God who could make both you and me,
Is as great as great can be.**

Children's Song by Jann Aldredge Clanton

Additional teachings by Paul Smith may be found at www.revpaulsmith.com.
CD's may be ordered at www.broadwaychurch-kc.org.