

Don't be ridiculous: No plagiarism or breach of copyright

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Britain's High Court has ruled that author Dan Brown did not plagiarize and breach the copyright of an earlier book in writing his best-selling novel *The Da Vinci Code*, published by Random House.

Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh, two of the three authors of *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*, had claimed that Brown lifted parts of their 1982 book, which theorizes that Jesus Christ and Mary Magdalene were married and had a child, and that the bloodline continues to this day. Baigent and Leigh sued Random House, which also published their book, for copyright infringement.

The Da Vinci Code, which has sold more than 40 million copies, explores a theme similar to that of the 1982 book. The ruling on April 7 also removed a cloud from the scheduled May 19 opening in U.S. theaters of director Ron Howard's film adaptation of the best seller.

Brown conceded in testimony during the five-week trial in London that the earlier book was one of a number of sources that he used in researching his novel published in 2003. However, he insisted that he had not copied the other book's central premise, nor had he even finished reading it.

The 71-page ruling by High Court justice Peter Smith said *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* does not have a central theme in the way its authors suggested. The theme is instead "an artificial creation for the purposes of the litigation working back from *The Da Vinci Code*," he said. "Even if the central themes were copied," Smith said, "they are too general or too low a level of abstraction to be capable of protection by copyright law."

Justice Smith ordered Baigent and Leigh to pay about \$2 million in legal costs, or about 85 percent of Random House's expenses. -*Religion News Service*