

Who Should Be Smiling?

As a novel, *The Da Vinci Code* has sold more than 40 million copies since it was first published in 2003. And it has now been translated into 44 languages. That makes it one of the most widely read novels of all time!

So -- *Brace yourself!* *The Da Vinci Code* is about to be released as a movie, in fact, it will be in London theaters this coming Friday! The enormous world-wide popularity of the novel, and the fact that Tom Hanks is cast as the male lead, pretty well guarantees that the movie will be a big box-office hit.

Why so popular? Here are three reasons.

Firstly, it is a murder mystery. Like a Sherlock Holmes story, it starts with a corpse, and the question of how this poor guy got killed. For some reason, lots of people find that sort of story intriguing --- and *The Da Vinci Code* IS that sort of story, and now THAT sort of movie.

Secondly, it's popular because **it's about a conspiracy theory:** like the theory that NASA actually faked the moon landings and the theory that the man we know as Stephen Harper is actually Brian Mulroney wearing a specially-fitted latex mask. Conspiracy theories are always controversial, which is one of the reasons we find them fascinating. But they also fascinate us because they feed our suspicion that the people in charge are probably trying to deceive us, and they gratify our hopes that we are actually too smart to BE deceived.

A third reason for the popularity of *The Da Vinci Code* is that **it criticizes and insults Christianity:** the Roman Catholic Church in particular but also Christianity in general. The book claims "almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false." Well, the sad fact is, SO MANY people have been SO hurt or offended or annoyed by some church, or by organized religion in general, that the anti-Christianity of the story packs a lot of appeal too.

So! **We should brace ourselves.** **Why is that?**

In the first place, because this hugely popular story is seriously misleading. Although it's labeled a "novel" --- right on the front cover! -- on the page right after the **title page** -- and right before the **Prologue** --- under the heading "**Fact**", we read "All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate."

Um... **Fact?** The fact is: **MANY** of the descriptions of artwork, architecture and documents in this novel AREN'T accurate, at all! Of course, it's hard to comment on the accuracy of the secret rituals, because... well... they're secrets! But we do know that there ARE about 40 million people in the world who would benefit from being clear on the fact that the novel is jam-packed full of inaccuracies, exaggerations, falsehoods and goofs -- in 44 languages!

Goofs? Yes! For example, the famous painter is referred to as "Da Vinci." The truth is, the man's name was Leonardo. Leonardo is not his first name. It's his name: period. "Da Vinci" was his address. He was born and raised in the province of Vinci! It's a little thing, but it should tip us off that our author is NOT a careful historian. What would we make of a writer who thinks that Joan of Arc's last name is "Of Arc"?

Inaccuracies? There are dozens! For example, the book says that the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in the 1950's and are among the earliest of all Christian documents. In fact, the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in the 1940's and they contain NO references whatsoever to Jesus or to Christianity AT ALL.

Exaggerations? How about this? Brown writes, “During three hundred years of witch hunts, the Church burned at the stake a stunning five million women.” You should ask for a second opinion on this one! Historians will tell you that it wasn’t five million people who were put to death as witches between the years 1500 and 1800. It was in fact something less than 50,000. Which makes the number five million a stunning exaggeration! And it wasn’t just women who were executed. And they weren’t all burnt to death. And it wasn’t primarily the work of ANY church. It was much more commonly the state, mostly local governments, that did the killing.

Falsehoods? Here’s a “fer instance.” The book reports that “Jesus was declared divine by a narrow vote at the Council of Nicea.” In fact, that “narrow vote” was 298 in favour, 2 opposed! So it WASN’T narrow! AND it WASN’T exactly about the deity of Christ. The vote was about Jesus being co-eternal with the Father, which is connected to His being divine, but actually a detail assuming it.

So we should brace ourselves because this very widely-read collection of misinformation ---, that many people are thinking is more or less factual --- is about to become a big movie.

And there’s a second reason for us to brace ourselves.

We should brace ourselves to make good use of this opportunity to talk to the people we know and love about the true good news of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul instructs us... Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity.

This IS an opportunity to make the most of, and it certainly DOES require wisdom. Conspiracy theories are notoriously hard to dispute, since every bit of evidence or reasoning brought against the theory can be discounted as being “part of the cover-up.” We really need to know our stuff if we are going to be any help to anyone at all.

It’s my intention to provide YOU with some help along these lines next Sunday morning, May 21st , especially in regard to two huge points of *The Da Vinci Code* controversy:

- 1) The reliability of the New Testament documents, particularly the books we call Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and...
- 2) The divinity or deity of Jesus Christ. The fact is that from the very beginning, the followers of Christ were convinced that this Man to whom they had committed their lives WAS divine, that is, WAS in fact God in human form.

So ... let’s brace ourselves! And let’s smile! There are some great opportunities coming up to talk to people about Jesus, the real Jesus, who is revealed in the real Gospels to be the eternal and only begotten Son of God.

And be watching for help, next weekend, in an Alliance Church near you!

The Da Vinci Code
The Con of Brown
 Making Good Gospel Use of Bad History

A Sunday sermon about a movie? Here are two reasons for such a sermon:

1. There is an opportunity for the gospel that we should be prepared to use.

Colossians 4:5-6 Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, **making the most of the opportunity**. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.

The Passion of the Christ

The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe

"Good guy movies!" Huge box office hits: at best limited good accomplished in lives changed.

The Da Vinci Code A "Bad Guy" movie. A huge box office hit? Perhaps a better opportunity?

2. We have an obligation to defend and contend for "the faith."

1 Peter 3:15 ... sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always **being ready to make a defense** to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.

Jude 1:2,3 May mercy and peace and love be multiplied to you. Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you **contend earnestly for the faith** which was once for all handed down to the saints.

On the thought of defending and "contending," let's be careful about the prospect of doing more harm than good.

Drew Dyck, Faith Today, May/June 2006

"...what could seem like a golden opportunity can feel like a recurring nightmare. The scenario is all too familiar. A neighbour, co-worker or relative reads Dan Brown's bestseller and becomes an instant expert on Jesus. Suddenly we become the ones being evangelized. "Did you know Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene? Are you aware the Church covered up the true history?" The friend is strangely resistant to our patient attempts to refute each outlandish claim. Afire with conspiratorial zeal and buoyed by the thrill of discovery, the *Da Vinci Code* fan is in no mood to listen. We are dismissed as hapless dupes, or worse yet, part of the Church's "ongoing cover-up."

So how **should** we respond? The phenomenon isn't all bad. The story can spark fruitful discussions on faith. But meaningful interactions don't usually happen by accident. Christians who successfully engage others are intentional about their approach, sensitive with their words and knowledgeable about their topic. In other words, they love people and they are willing to do their homework."

Two Big Issues that require "some homework."

I. **THE DEITY OF CHRIST**

II. **THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT DOCUMENTS**

I. THE DEITY OF CHRIST

We need to be clear in dealing with *The Da Vinci Code* that, in fact, it's not the least bit true that The Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. was the event at which the idea of Jesus being God was invented.

In the novel, someone says

"... until that moment in history, Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet.. a great and powerful man, but a man nonetheless. A mortal."

That is not the least bit true! As you can read for yourself, e.g. in the Gospel of John, and in Paul's letter to the Colossians and the letter to the Hebrews [which the vast majority of scholars agree were all written in the first century], the idea that Jesus was both human and divine has been a part of the story from the beginning.

e.g. #1 The Gospel of John

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and **the Word was God.**

John 1:14-18 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. ... No one has seen God at any time; **the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.**

ALSO.... More subtly, but still very plainly:

John 5:18 ... the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself **equal with God.**

John 8:58-59 Jesus said to them, "**Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.**" Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him....

John 20:27-29 Then He said* to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." Thomas answered and said to Him, "**My Lord and my God!**" Jesus said* to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."

e.g. #2 Paul's letter to the Colossians

Colossians 1:15-17 He is **the image of the invisible God**, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things **have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.**

Colossians 2:9-10 For in Him **all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form...and He is the head over all rule and authority...**

#3 The letter to the Hebrews

Hebrews 1:8-10 ...of the Son He says, "**YOUR THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER... And, YOU, LORD, IN THE BEGINNING LAID THE FOUNDATION OF THE EARTH, AND THE HEAVENS ARE THE WORKS OF YOUR HANDS...**

Of course, these three examples, and the dozens of others that can be easily found, all depend upon the first idea of the reliability of the New Testament documents, so now we go on to Point # II...

II. THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT DOCUMENTS

And here, our need to do our homework comes to us courtesy of a character in the book named **Leigh Teabing**

It is he who says, "...almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false."

And he also says, "...The Bible did not arrive by fax from heaven....The Bible is the product of man, my dear. Not of God. The Bible did not fall magically from the clouds. Man created it ..."

Now what Mr Teabing says packs a punch in *The Da Vinci Code*. At least, it's meant to!

Brown says at the beginning of the book:

"All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate."

In the book, it is Mr. Teabing who provides most of these descriptions. And he is a very convincing guy!

- "A former British Royal Historian"
- Knighted by the queen for his extensive history of the House of York ("Sir Leigh Teabing")
- Speaks with a "thick British accent," which always commands attention here in the colonies
- [In the movie] Looks like a lot like Gandalf!

So the reader is encouraged to think, "Wow! If you can't trust a guy like this, who CAN you trust?"

And of course the right answer is, "You CAN trust God"! And you can trust His Word!" Which returns us to our issue...

II. THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT DOCUMENTS

What we need to be clear on is how "the Bible as we know it" came to us. One of the ways the question gets answered is by its "internal evidence," which means what it says about itself.

What DOES the Bible say about itself?

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is *inspired by God* and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness...

Q1. What is meant by "inspired by God"

A1. "Inspired by God" is literally "God-breathed." It's a simple answer but it raises two other questions.

Q2. What is meant by "all Scripture"? The word "scripture" means "writing," and the implication of the word in this context is "holy writing," ["*Holy Scripture*" or "*Sacred Scripture*"] --- in other words, 'writing that is set apart by God.' And who is to say which writings, which written material, has been set apart by God? Who's to say which writings are holy? The Christian answer is "The apostles!"

e.g. **The apostle Peter**

2 Peter 1:16-21 For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased"— and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but **men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.**

ANSWER: "**All Scripture**" means "**all the writings that the apostles and their associates were moved by the Spirit of God to write.**" Here we are introduced to the notion of "canon" (Gk. "rule") And here we must look outside the Bible to what actually happened. **EXTERNAL EVIDENCE.** What actually happened? Well, first you need to discard what Sir Leigh Teabing says about the role of the Roman emperor Constantine. For example, when he says,

"Constantine commissioned and financed a new Bible, which omitted these gospels that spoke of Christ's human traits and embellished those gospels that made Him godlike."

Constantine DID call the Council --- and he hosted it at his summer palace, which was of course very nice of him. But, the Council of Nicea had no part at all in the canonization of the New Testament. By the time the council was

held, there had been something of an “official list” of books in place for two hundred years. Twenty of the twenty-seven books had never been in any doubt. For the two hundred years before “Nicea,” the list included 24 of our 27 New Testament books. AND it was a council held seventy years after “Nicea” that took on the question of “canonizing” the list. So Dan Brown is conning us, actually falsifying the history of the New Testament through the statements of Sir Leigh. Whether he is doing so intentionally, or accidentally, is anyone’s guess, but he is not being “accurate.” Any actual Royal British Historian could have told him that. So how was the list of New Testament books arrived at? That is the third question, which we can ask this way.

Q3. What is meant by “God-breathed”? What actually occurred? “God-breathed” is a figure of speech, right? God is a spirit. He doesn’t actually have breath, or lungs, or a mouth or nostrils, right? So what actually happened when God metaphorically breathed the Scriptures into being?

A3. God “breathed the books” by moving certain people to write certain writings, and by guiding others in the processes by which these writings were recognized as being from God and so collecting and preserving them.

This is often how God does His work! Think of another example. How does God make babies?

Psalms 139:13 ...You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb.

Only God can make a baby, but He generally uses a woman to do so. Generally, His method involves a grown-up man, and a grown-up woman. Right?

- He makes babies through the efforts of a number of adults. Usually the number is two.
- He made the Bible through the efforts of a number of adults. The number was greater than two.

Think of another example. Think of saying “Grace” at a meal, thanking God for the food that you are about to eat. It was shopped for, it was prepared, it was served by people, people probably sitting at the same table, bowing their heads and waiting for you to get on with the prayer!

So we are familiar with the thought that processes that people are involved in can be God’s chosen way of doing what He had decided to do.

So what WAS the process that God used to write the Scriptures?

BASICALLY, THIS IS HOW GOD GAVE US THE BIBLE:

Matthew 16:18 "I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

Matthew 28:18-20 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

1. Christ built His church by gathering, training and authorizing His apostles.
2. The apostles were “moved by the Holy Spirit” to write “the writings” to the churches.

e.g. **II Peter 3:15-16** ...regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

Acts 2:42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Ephesians 2:19-20 ... you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone,

3. The churches accepted these writings as given by God through the apostles and built their faith upon them.

And as for Constantine, or anyone omitting the “gospels that spoke of Christ’s human traits and embellish[ing] those gospels that made Him godlike,” Dan Brown’s idea is exactly opposite to the truth.

The so-called “Gnostic gospels” DENIED Christ’s human traits. In fact, they denied Christ’s humanity altogether. That is one of the essential points of Gnosticism: that flesh is evil and spirit is good and so God would never defile Himself by becoming an actual human being.

And they AREN’T the earlier gospels. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are the earlier gospels: all written in the first century. All four recognized as the writings of actual apostles: Matthew and John, or the work of companions of actual apostles. Mark was an associate of Peter. Luke was an associate of Paul.

The Gospel of Philip and Thomas and Mary Magdalene and the other Gnostic writings all appeared in the second and third centuries. They were the later ones. The New Testament as we know it contains the ones written earlier, by eye-witnesses or the long-time companions of eye-witnesses.

And that’s how God “breathed” into existence the Scriptures of the New Testament.

CONCLUSION... Here’s what we should do!

Be prepared to use this opportunity for the gospel.

Colossians 4:5-6 Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, **making the most of the opportunity.** Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.

Be prepared to defend and contend for “the faith.”

1 Peter 3:15 ... always **being ready to make a defense** to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.

Jude 1:2,3 ...**contend earnestly for the faith** which was once for all handed down to the saints.

This is what we are to do. But let’s be clear: it matters HOW we do so. **“with gentleness and reverence”!**

Nancy Calvert-Koyzis, McMaster University, Hamilton

“Criticizing Christian beliefs has become quite popular in our culture, and some are attracted to the novel simply for that reason. But many people are truly seeking.” She warns us not to use a combative tone. “When you do that you lose people. They just won’t listen.” She recommends a “laid-back, interested manner.”

John Stackhouse, Regent College, Vancouver

“The crucial thing is to find out first why your friend or neighbour is interested. What about the novel (or movie) intrigued them? What moved them? The greatest mistake is leading with the mouth instead of the ears. We too quickly wade into this conversation, attacking errors and misrepresentations without finding out why people are interested in the topic. Rather than starting with arguments, begin with questions. Try to empathize with their concerns. Let them talk. Ask lots of questions. Only after showing a genuine interest will meaningful conversation take place. Until we hear others, they can’t hear us.”

As the saying goes, **“People generally don’t care what we know until they really know we care!”**

And let’s pray for these people we love, and for ourselves as we try to communicate our love for them, and what we have come to know and experience about the love of Christ!