

What you need to know about ***The Da Vinci Code***

Do you know someone who has read *The Da Vinci Code*? If you don't by now, you probably will. Dan Brown's suspense novel has been on the NY Times best-sellers list for over three years and, according to Brown's website, "has become one of the most widely read books of all time."¹ A quick search of a national bookseller's website yielded no less than 15 books written about this novel, and a major motion picture based on the book set to premier May 19, 2006, directed by Ron Howard, and starring Tom Hanks.²

So what does this mean to Christians? The bad news is that the novel is blatantly *anti-Christian*. Using *fiction*, Brown presents half-truths and mis-information as *factual*, endorsing a belief system that seems appealing, but cannot rightly be called Christianity. The good news is that since *The Da Vinci Code* deals extensively with Christian history, the authenticity of the Bible, and the life of Jesus, unbelievers may be interested in discussing these issues, perhaps for the first time. Christians need to take advantage of this opportunity to discuss *why* they believe what they believe, offering direction to those confused by the claims in Brown's book. While a comprehensive critique is beyond the scope of this article,³ the following two points are important to the discussion.

***The Da Vinci Code* misrepresents what happened at Nicea.**

Emperor Constantine called the council of Nicea in the year 325 AD. Official persecution of the church had only recently ended, and some of the approximately 318 bishops who attended the council bore the marks of scourging and other tortures endured because of their loyalty to Christ. These men did not come together to create a new belief system, but to write a creed expressing what the church *already* believed and what they had personally suffered to embrace. The chief doctrine under attack at the meeting was not the deity of Christ (a belief clearly taught by the apostles⁴ and held by the early church fathers). The main point of discussion at Nicea was the teaching that Jesus was co-eternal with the Father. Only two of the representatives present refused to sign the final creed, which stated:

We believe . . . in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, only-begotten, that is, from the substance of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father, through Whom all things were made . . .

As Dr. James White comments, "Nicea was not creating some new doctrine, some new belief, but clearly, explicitly, defining truth against error."⁵ The members of the Council had no illusions that they *created* doctrine; they only *codified* it, believing that Scripture alone was the authority by which all teaching was to be judged.

***The Da Vinci Code* gives undue credence to unbiblical writings.**

The gospels of Thomas and Philip were two of fifty-two ancient texts discovered at Nag Hammadi, Egypt, in 1947. Scholars agree that the texts are dated around 350-400 AD, but they disagree about the dating of the originals from which these may have been copied. Irenaeus, the Bishop of Lyons, writing in about 180 AD, declares that heretics "boast that they possess more gospels than there really are."⁶ So it is conceivable that the original versions of these false gospels may be dated as early as the second century AD. But how did Irenaeus know how many gospels there really were? Are the "secret" gospels of Thomas and Philip authoritative gospels as many modern writers suggest? If they were written early, and known of by Christian leaders like Irenaeus, why were they not viewed as authoritative *then*, and included in the canon of Scripture?

Unlike the questionable dating of the Nag Hammadi texts, all the New Testament books were undoubtedly written during the first century. All were accepted by the church as inspired Scripture because they taught doctrines in harmony with all the other books of the Bible. This cannot be said about the "gospels" of Thomas and Phillip which are filled with inconsistencies. The early church recognized some New Testament books as Scripture even as others were being written.⁷ Others were recognized over time as God directed His church in the truth.⁸ Existing papyrus manuscripts from the early church (before A.D. 325) contain parts of every book of the New Testament, except 1st Timothy, showing that the canon of Scripture was certainly established *before* the Council of Nicea and not *by* it as some have suggested. Simply said, God created the canon through the evolving acceptance of the early church. There is no evidence that the "gospels" of Thomas and Phillip were ever given such acceptance.

Summary

When talking to someone about *The Da Vinci Code*, it might be tempting to get entangled in he-said-she-said arguments over historical and factual errors in the book. Rather than speculating about what Da Vinci may or may not have hidden in his paintings, instead of entertaining the question of Jesus' marital status, encourage those interested in this *fictional* book to read the *true* historical accounts of Christ's life—the four canonical Gospels. Talk to them about the sacrifice of Christ on the cross and explain why it was necessary. Tell them what your life was like before and after you encountered the resurrected Jesus. Make the most of this opportunity!

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¹ Dan Brown, in a statement at <http://www.danbrown.com/index.html>

² This movie is scheduled for release in 2006.

³ For a comprehensive study, we recommend the book *Breaking the Da Vinci Code* by Darrell Bock.

⁴ John 1:1, 14; 20:28-29; Romans 5:15, 18-19; 9:5; 1 Corinthians 15:47-49; Philippians 2:7-8; 1 Timothy 2:5; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8; 2:17

⁵ Dr. James White, in an article for the Christian Research Institute which may be viewed at <http://www.equip.org/free/DN206.pdf>. Much of the information in this section is from that source.

⁶ Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, (Vintage Books, 1979), page 17.

⁷ Peter recognizes Paul's authority in 2 Pet. 3:15-16; Paul quotes Luke 10:7 in 1 Tim. 5:18, and Jude recognizes Peter's apostolic authority, quoting from 2 Pet. 3:3 (cf. Jude 18).

⁸ John 14:26