

THE
Da Vinci
CODE
A COMPANION GUIDE TO THE MOVIE

2006

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DID JESUS REALLY CLAIM TO BE GOD?

WAS JESUS MARRIED TO MARY MAGDALENE?

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INTERVIEW WITH BIBLICAL SCHOLAR JOSH McDOWELL

Viewing the Mona Lisa

CONTROVERSY AND DIALOGUE: A PATH TO UNDERSTANDING

The Ultimate Conspiracy

In *The Da Vinci Code*, Dan Brown has created the ultimate conspiracy novel. In the world of subversive plots the stakes can go no higher—hiding aliens in Roswell or the identity of JFK's assassin are but pranks compared to the idea of a conspiring Church hiding the true identity of Jesus Christ and misleading billions of the faithful. Brown's brilliant mixture of fact and fiction provide plausibility, and we are hooked, compelled to follow the clues wherever they lead, whatever the truth.

On his website, Dan Brown makes the following statement concerning the fascination and debate surrounding *The Da Vinci Code*:

"The debate that is being generated is a positive powerful force. The more vigorously we debate these topics, the better our understanding of our own spirituality. Controversy and dialogue are healthy for religion as a whole. Religion has only one true enemy—apathy—and passionate debate is a superb antidote."

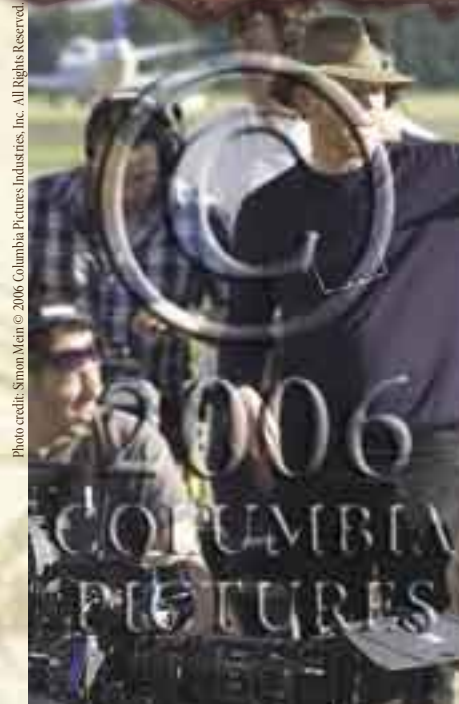


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Director Ron Howard on the set of *The Da Vinci Code*.

And the book has done just that. People who had never given a second thought to such issues have found themselves searching the web for the historic roots of Christianity, and "Constantine," which has not been a popular search word since... well, actually it's never been a popular search word, is now googled daily.

The Da Vinci Code will mark Tom Hanks' third collaboration with Ron Howard, having previously teamed with Howard in the space drama *Apollo 13* and in the comedy *Splash*.

In the world of Hollywood, Hanks and Howard are as likable as they come, which will certainly help PR, for whenever a movie dealing with deeply-held spiritual beliefs hits the theaters, there is inevitable controversy.

Gibson's Gethsemane

Consider, for example, *The Passion of the Christ*, which was more or less a straightforward adaptation of the passion narrative found in the Gospels. Who could have anticipated the maelstrom that would become for Gibson his own personal Gethsemane. But ironically, on the third day, after a weekend at the box office, came a record-breaking \$123 million in ticket sales—Gibson was resurrected.

One could almost feel sorry for Hollywood—almost—as nearly any movie dealing with spiritual issues seems to antagonize some community of faith. But as controversy is equivalent to cash, tears should be shed sparingly. Ultimately Hollywood strives to have their cake and eat it too: promoting the controversy while courting the disenfranchised with special screenings and the promise of "input" on the script. But why shouldn't they? They are, after all, a business, not a charity; Paramount, not PBS.

And while admittedly anchored to a bottom line, they have managed to produce films that have profoundly impacted us both morally and spiritually: *Crash*, *Mystic River*, *Million Dollar Baby*, *The Passion*, *Hotel Rwanda* and *Schindler's List*, to name but a few.

A Healthy Debate

As *The Da Vinci Code* comes to the screen, there will be an increase in the debate, and an increase in the dialogue. People will engage on significant spiritual issues. They will embrace certain beliefs and shed others, and, as Dan Brown points out, "The more vigorously we debate these topics, the better our understanding of our own spirituality."

To that end this booklet is a primer on some of the issues raised by the book and film. It is far from exhaustive; only seeking to sort through the major questions in such a way as to get an unhindered glimpse at the foundation of faith.



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Sophie Neveu (Audrey Tautou) and Robert Langdon (Tom Hanks) seek answers to the Holy Grail.

Box Office Gross Recent Films With Compelling Moral/Spiritual Themes

The Passion \$610 million * Chronicles of Narnia \$544 million * Million Dollar Baby \$216 million * Kingdom of Heaven \$210 million * Mystic River \$156 million * Cinderella Man \$104 million * Hotel Rwanda \$32 million * A History of Violence \$27 million * Lord of War \$24 million

Secret Societies, Secret Missions

KNIGHTS TEMPLAR AND THE PRIORY OF SION

Granted, there has been historical disagreement between Catholics and Protestants, but a great deal of what started the feud would, today, find agreement from both parties, as you'd be hard-pressed to find anyone lobbying for a return to indulgences and the sale of fraudulent church relics. But such was the religious life of the Middle Ages which also included a pilgrimage to the Holy Land for the ultra devout. It was good for the soul, and like a carton of cigarettes in North Carolina, you could get a great discount on a splinter from the cross or a baby rattle from the crib of Jesus.

But these were dangerous days, so in 1118 the Burgundian knight, Yves de Faillon, founded a monastic order to protect pilgrims traveling to the Holy Land, an order comprised entirely of soldiers—warrior monks, Christian samurai. The Order's official name, the "Poor Knights of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon," comes from their place of residence on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, thus the name, Templars.

The Knights Templar became wealthy, as Dan Brown points out, because they invented modern banking (though drive-up windows would still be a millennium in development). But their wealth also came from the sale of religious relics, and in that economy the crown of thorns was as valuable as a Minuteman missile on the black market. The Templars were said to have amassed a treasury of such artifacts including the Holy Grail itself. (Contra Brown, early Christian myth held that the Holy Grail was the cup used by Jesus at the Last Supper. According to legend, Joseph of Arimathea used the Grail to catch Christ's blood while interring him, giving the cup special power.) Whether they possessed the real Grail is unknown, but accompanying such artifacts was power as well as wealth.

But power and wealth always elicit jealousy, and on Friday, October 13, 1307, King Philip the Fair ordered the arrest of the Templars on charges of heresy, which allowed Philip to seize their assets. Of 138 Templars questioned, 105 admitted that they had denied Christ during their secret reception into the Order.

From an historical perspective such confessions were pretty standard under creative means of torture. If they had been anti-Jesus or anti-Rome it would be impossible to deduce from their confession. Most historians suspect the charges were invented as a reason to commandeer their wealth—a pretty standard procedure for maniacal dictators of all ages.



Photo credit: David Henninger © 2005

Rosslyn Chapel, Scotland.

Following this travesty, it appears the knights were folded into other orders, and yet there were rumors that the Order lived on in some clandestine form. While there is little or no evidence for this, Brown masterfully picks up on the thread, and perhaps the Freemasons did too, as claims of being Templar heirs have always surrounded that movement.

“The Da Vinci Code is a novel and therefore a work of fiction. While the book's characters and their actions are obviously not real, the artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals depicted in this novel all exist.”

— Dan Brown

The Priory of Sion

The more one does research the more one comes to value the simplicity of the website Wikipedia.org, which accurately summarized and corroborated hours of independent research.

The Priory of Sion was founded in 1956 by Pierre Plantard and Andre Bonhomme. Plantard began writing a manuscript and produced “parchments” (created by his friend, Philippe de Cherisey) that a local priest had supposedly discovered whilst renovating his church. These forged documents purportedly showed the survival of the Merovingian line of Frankish kings.

Between 1961 and 1984 Plantard contrived a mythical pedigree of the Priory of Sion. This can be easily proved to be historical fiction because the various claims as found in the Priory Documents never existed



Tom Hanks (Langdon) at the Louvre's mysterious pyramid.

Mrs. Jesus?



before the early 1960s in any shape or form, and cannot be substantiated from the known historical records. Furthermore, letters in existence dating from the 1960s written by Pierre Plantard, Philippe de Cherisey and Gerard de Sede to each other confirm that the three were engaging in an out-and-out confidence trick, describing schemes on how to combat criticisms of their various allegations and how they would make-up new allegations to try and keep the whole thing going. Among the allegations found in these forged documents were:

A list of illustrious Grand Masters including such names as Leonardo Da Vinci, Isaac Newton and Victor Hugo. This line of succession was also meant to establish a history for the Order, creating a list of Grand Masters dating back to the Knights Templar.

The Order protects the Merovingian dynasty because they may be the literal descendants of Jesus and his wife Mary Magdalene or, at the very least, of King David.

The Order is sworn to returning the Merovingian dynasty, that ruled the Frankish kingdom from A.D. 447 to 751, to the thrones of Europe and Jerusalem.

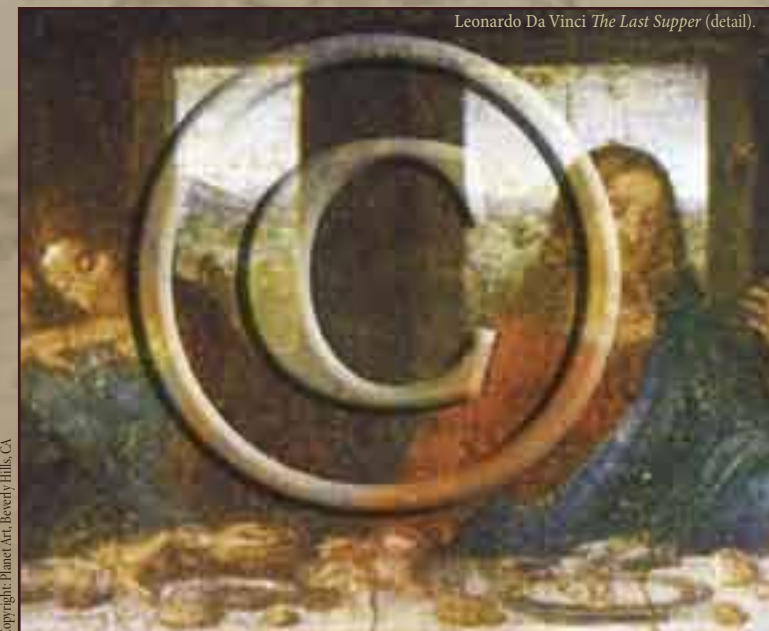
The Catholic Church tried to kill off this dynasty and their guardians, the Templars, in order to maintain power through the apostolic succession of Peter instead of the hereditary succession of Mary Magdalene.

As you read them you can see the potential for a great book, and that book ended up being *Holy Blood*, *Holy Grail*. However, serious historians didn't think it was such a great book as it was, well, filled with fabrications and forgeries—the Priory of Sion's real history only dating back to the “primitive” age of 1956. But what made for lousy non-fiction had unimagined potential for fiction, and it was the genius of Dan Brown to see the potential and turn it in to one of the most intriguing conspiracy plots of all time.



NOT A SINGLE ONE
OF OUR ANCIENT
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THAT JESUS WAS
MARRIED, LET
ALONE MARRIED TO
MARY MAGDALENE

— Dr. Bart D. Ehrman, Department Chair of Religious Studies, University of NC, Chapel Hill



Leonardo Da Vinci *The Last Supper* (detail).

Copyright: Planet Art, Beverly Hills, CA

Did Jesus really claim to be God?

Because historical facts are woven into *The Da Vinci Code*, fact slides undetected into fiction, and the average reader lacks the knowledge to screen every package of thought for spurious content. So perhaps it would dispel some anxiety, to look at a few historical facts.

Did Jesus actually claim to be God? This seems to be

incontrovertible, as almost everything Jesus said and did points in this direction. For example, consider the miracle of Jesus walking on water. Why not fly or turn himself into a pterodactyl? Here is the reason:

He [God] alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea. (Job 9:8)

This verse from the Old Testament would have been common knowledge to Jesus' audience—God alone treads the seas. So when Jesus chooses to walk on water it is not simply a demonstration of power, but of divinity; this is an object lesson, not a carnival show. Conversely, if you were trying to avoid being

given the label of "God," this is about the last thing you'd attempt to do. Neither would you make a statement such as this:

Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered, "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:6-9)

In fact, if there were anything ambiguous about what Jesus was asserting, his enemies certainly didn't think so:

"We are not stoning you for any of these," replied the Jews, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God." (John 10:33)

It is also beyond doubt that the disciples and early Christians from the very beginning held Christ's deity a foundational tenet:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...all things were created by him and for him. (Colossians 1:15-16)

In this passage the apostle Paul describes Jesus as the "image" of God and goes on to identify him as the "Creator." It's important to realize that Paul's

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

— Sir Leigh Teabing,
The Da Vinci Code

letters were written only a few decades after Christ's death, and, if the text doesn't flow like prose, that's because it's not. Quoted within Paul's letters are creeds, like this one, which predate the letter and were formulated within the first few years after Jesus' death. These creeds defined what the earliest Christian community held to be true about Christ, and his deity is central to them.

What about the "other gospels?" The gospels Teabing mentions in the book were written, in most cases, a century or two later, primarily by a group known as the Gnostics. Whether in Waco, Texas, or the ancient Middle East, there have



The Silas Redemption

➤ always been religious sects and cults, peddling their literature door-to-door, and promoting a radical “new” interpretation of Christ. What is interesting to note is a milder form of Gnosticism existed in the days of the apostles, and therefore some of the New Testament was actually written to address it. John unabashedly begins his Gospel:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. (John 1:1,14)

If you study these opening words of John’s Gospel you will notice several ideas emphasized, all of which were major points of contention with the cults of the next two centuries. First, John clearly affirms the deity of Jesus, “the Word [Jesus] was with God and the Word [Jesus] was God.” The apostle could not be any more emphatic than to open his Gospel with this proclamation.

Second, John affirms that Jesus was eternal: “In the beginning was the Word.” *The Da Vinci Code’s* claim that the deity of Christ was debated at the Council of Nicea is very misleading. The debate was whether Christ was coeternal with the Father: if there was ever a time that Jesus “was not” with the Father. No one at the Council believed Jesus was simply a man.

And lastly, John underscores the incarnation of Jesus: he was fully man as well as fully God. This last point is especially important, for the Gnostic beliefs and gospels denied Jesus’ humanity, not his deity. This is something that *The Da Vinci Code* confuses. The Gnostics believed that matter was evil, and therefore it was inconceivable to them that Jesus could have ever been fully human. Teabing’s “other gospels” actually embellish the divinity of Jesus, and marginalize his humanity.

Every now and then something comes along that’s difficult for humans to classify. It’s rather bizarre, for example, that a whale is classified as a mammal. Something that lives its life in the ocean should not wear the label of mammal.

In the world of religious leaders, Jesus is a whale, often lumped into the same phylum with other great religious leaders, including Moses, Muhammad and Buddha. But frankly, he doesn’t fit. On the surface, he looks like fish (a wonderful religious leader who has helped shape the world of faith and morals), but he taught and claimed something that, when analyzed, makes him a different species altogether. He claimed to be God.

The famed Oxford professor C.S. Lewis presented the dilemma of definition:

I am trying here to prevent anyone from saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: “I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.” That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse...But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.



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Monk with a mission: Paul Bettany as Silas.

The story line tracing Silas

(played by Paul Bettany) and Bishop Aringarosa (Alfred Molina) is an insightful, and even sensitive, portrayal of misguided zeal. Through the characters of Silas and Aringarosa, Brown conjectures that if documents damaging to historical Christianity were to exist, a radical faction would undoubtedly arise, invoking “holy war” to protect the reputation of both Church and Savior. While Brown acknowledges church tolerance since the crusading Middle Ages, he infers that the specter of radical zeal may still haunt certain circles of Christendom. He may be right.

It is an issue worthy of self-reflection and one that goes back to the very inception of the church. Peter, on the night of Jesus’ betrayal, picks up a knife in an attempt to defend him, and cuts off the ear of one of the temple guards—a non-fatal wound owing more to bad aim than mercy. Jesus heals the man’s ear and gives Peter, and any would-be follower, this warning: “Those who live by the sword shall die by it,” teaching that the Kingdom of God does not expand through physical force (How can the supreme act of self-surrender be coerced?) nor is it defended through violence. A lesson Silas must have missed in catechism.

Within all fiction, the author is the sovereign dispenser of justice, and Brown chooses to dispense mercy rather than enact revenge on both Silas and Bishop Aringarosa. If the true nature of the Kingdom of God is to be seen within the novel, it is here, with grace triumphing over judgment.



Mona Lisa's Smirk

THE HIDDEN STORY OF RENAISSANCE ART



Photo credit: Réunion des musées nationaux/Art Resource, NY

Leonardo Da Vinci *Mona Lisa*

Renaissance Influences

Sacred art is a source of spiritual inspiration for millions and it's a little shocking to find out that the most worshipful art ever created was nothing more than graffiti sprayed on the Vatican wall. At times *The Da Vinci Code* drops such thought bombs with the subtlety of "Did I ever mention your grandfather was a serial killer?"

A broader perspective of the Renaissance may shed some needed light. Coming out of the Middle Ages there was a flurry of intellectual and cultural activity which we know as the Renaissance. Feeding into the river of cultural change was a rediscovery of ancient Greek and Roman culture. It was like the *Antiques Roadshow*—"Hey, look what we found in the attic." Virgil, Seneca, Homer and Plato were part of a civilization that seemed, to many, grander than the one they lived in.

Out of the same stream, a new Greek Bible translation (the original language of the New Testament) led some to question what the church had been teaching by way of doctrine (in the case of Martin Luther, 95 questions, to be exact). This led to a reform movement within the church, aptly called the Reformation.

As they say, knowledge is power, and with it spreading like a virus, the church feared their storehouse being siphoned off. So as the waters of change rose around the church, they simply raised the drawbridge—*We are not going to have this conversation.*

Artists tend to be rebels with or without a cause and so, without opportunity for dialogue, they protested with their paintbrush, often subtly, preferring to spill their paint rather than blood. It should be noted that just because an artist or scholar had an ax to grind with Rome, or a fascination with classic Greek and Roman culture, it did not mean that their art, science or music was not a reflection of genuine Christian faith. And it almost never meant a belief in paganism.

Surveying the pool of art from this period, we can recognize these separate currents: subjects like Venus and Bacchus in works by Titian and Botticelli; Albrecht Dürer's Christ-like self-portrait reflecting Luther's Protestantism (Christ assuming our sin); Michelangelo's *David* (self-reliant, uncircumcised and looking to the future), a monument to the new humanism; with Raphael seemingly both devout and cozy with Rome.

Leonardo Da Vinci

If the art of the Renaissance was not ambiguous enough, we must add another layer to the subterfuge with the artist, Leonardo Da Vinci (a.k.a

"O, Draconian devil!" or my preferred anagram "Cardinal on video").

Da Vinci is a difficult person to profile. From his own writings we read: "Good Report soars and rises to heaven, for virtuous things find favor with God. Evil Report should be shown inverted, for all her works are contrary to God and tend toward hell."

But hints that Brown was not too far afield on Da Vinci occur in Marco Rosci's biography, *Leonardo*, which states, "We know that Leonardo increasingly advocated an 'un-Christian philosophy' concerning man and nature and indulged in symbolic imagery." Certainly of all of the artists of this period, Da Vinci is the most likely candidate to have parted from orthodox beliefs.

With that in mind, can we detect foul play in the three paintings central to the book: *Madonna of the Rocks*, *Mona Lisa* and *The Last Supper*? The consensus of art historians seems to be "no," at least nothing like the issues mentioned in *The Da Vinci Code*. Here is some of their reasoning:

The original painting request for *Madonna of the Rocks* was for a non-biblical scene where Jesus, as a young child, blesses John the Baptist, conferring to him authority to later baptize him as an adult. Da Vinci's "scandalous" change to the painting was actually to make it more biblically accurate.

Brown describes Da Vinci's *Last Supper* ("Lord, pals on a picture: a dish event," if you're anagramming) as having Jesus and Mary as the



Copyright: Planet Art, Beverly Hills, CA

Leonardo Da Vinci *Madonna of the Rocks*

central theme, but it is Christ alone who is central with the disciples grouped in threes. Sketches for the painting make it pretty clear the person on Jesus' right is John and not Mary Magdalene; the fact that John looks admittedly feminine is explained by Bruce Boucher, of the Art Institute of Chicago: "St. John was invariably represented as a beautiful young man." And, there is the obvious question: with only twelve disciples with Jesus, if one is Mary, where is John? Last, the dagger in Peter's hand seems obviously tied to the Gospel accounts where, following the Last Supper, Peter cuts off the ear of a soldier taking custody of Jesus.

And what about the hidden message in the *Mona Lisa*? Well, we don't want to ruin all of the mystery. Maybe it was Leonardo in drag.

On Easter eve 1519, Leonardo made his will, arranging for masses to be said at three different churches. He died on May 2, having received the Sacraments of the Church with so many of whose teachings he had disagreed. A paradox to the end.



Leonardo Da Vinci *The Last Supper*

Copyright: Planet Art, Beverly Hills, CA

Forty years ago, Josh McDowell, believing Christianity to be a hoax, went on a personal research crusade to discredit the Church and Christianity. Yet somewhere in the process, somewhere in the hundreds of hours of research, doubt turned to faith. His published accounts of that research into the historical roots of Christianity have sold over 10 million copies. The similarity between his quest and the questions raised by *The Da Vinci Code* seemed a mandate for an interview.

In *The Da Vinci Code* it's unclear when the New Testament books were actually written.

McDowell: When it comes to dating the New Testament books, there are differences between conservative and liberal scholars but only in terms of decades, not centuries. For example, the conservative dating for the Gospel of Mark is between A.D. 50-60, with more liberal scholars placing it around A.D. 70. This is remarkable, when you consider that Jesus died somewhere around the year A.D. 30; these are authentic eyewitness accounts. Generally speaking, Paul's letters were written between A.D. 50-66, the Gospels between A.D. 50-70, with John's Gospel being written sometime around A.D. 80-90. If you can believe it, we actually have a fragment of John's Gospel dated about A.D. 125.



Do we have any of the original New Testament documents?

McDowell: If we did, they would be beyond priceless. What we have is early manuscript copies of the originals.

Then how do we know for sure what was in the original documents?

McDowell: To discover the accuracy of copying for the New Testament, you have to look at two factors: one, the number of manuscripts existing today; and two, the time period between the original document and the earliest manuscripts still in existence today. The more manuscripts we have and the closer the manuscripts are to the original, the more we are able to determine accuracy.

For example, the book *Natural History*, written by Pliny Secundus, has 7 manuscript copies with a 750-year gap between the earliest copy and the original text. The number two book in all of history in manuscript authority is *The Iliad*, written by Homer, which has 643 copies with a 400-year gap.

Now this is a little startling: the New Testament has currently 24,970 manuscript copies, completely towering over all other works of antiquity. In addition, we have one fragment of the New Testament with only a 50-year gap from the original, whole books with only a 100-year gap, and the whole New Testament with only a 225-250-year gap. I don't think there is any question from all of these early copies what the original documents said.

Is it true that the New Testament was decided upon at the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325)?

McDowell: It was actually later, at the Synod of Hippo in A.D. 393, quite a few years after the death of Constantine, when the church listed the 27 confirmed books of the New Testament. But, of course, both dates are misleading.

Why are they misleading?

McDowell: Because the church had recognized these books as the definitive New Testament nearly 175 years before Nicea. It was only due to the challenge of missions, fraud, and heresy that the church leadership felt the need to clearly articulate the list.

How early was there a defined New Testament?

McDowell: We know from writings within the first century that many of the books of the New Testament were already regarded as scripture by that point.

In the writings of Irenaeus, A.D. 180, he attests the canonical recognition of the four Gospels and Acts, of Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus, of 1 Peter and 1 John and of the Revelation—that's most of our New Testament decided 150 years before Nicea.

There is considerable evidence such as this that by A.D. 150 at the latest, the church recognized a New Testament pretty close to the one we have today.

Assuming you've read *The Da Vinci Code*, what role did Constantine play in deciding the canon?

McDowell: Ha, yes I have. Well, let's just say you wouldn't want to hand it in as a history or religion paper, but it's a fictional book, so obviously the author took liberties. Constantine had nothing to do with deciding on the books of the New Testament. He convened the Council to provide spiritual unity and a clear Church position on an ongoing debate causing division within the newly-Christianized Roman Empire.

Was the debate over the deity of Christ?

McDowell: Yes and no. It did relate to the deity of Christ but the issue was whether Jesus' status was lesser than the Father—was he coeternal? No one believed or debated if he was merely a man or prophet.

The Da Vinci Code states that it was a pretty close vote.

McDowell: According to recent research done by historian Dr. Paul Maier at Western Michigan University "the vote was 300 to 2." So, no, I wouldn't say it was very close, and again the issue was simply whether Jesus was coeternal with God the Father.

The Da Vinci Code mentions Constantine removed 80 other gospels because they did not portray Christ as deity.

McDowell: There are about 60 other documents, many of them not gospels, the majority of which can be traced to the cult of Gnosticism. These documents were almost all written well into the second century bearing the pseudonyms of the apostles. The earliest of these "alternative gospels" are actually exaggerative in their portrayal of Christ's deity and attempt to deny his humanity. If you go back and read the historic literature from the first and second century you'll see that the Christian community unanimously condemned this cult, their theology, and their literature. And, again, of the 20 rulings made at Nicea, none of them dealt with the contents of the New Testament.

>>> **The story behind your writing is that your research was an attempt to disprove Christianity. Would you like to comment?**

McDowell: By comment, do you mean is it true? Yes, I suspected that at the heart of Christianity was myth not fact. Hundreds of hours into my research I became convinced that the events recorded in the Gospels happened just as they are written, and that Jesus was in fact the Messiah.

All of us struggle with faith. What made you so certain?

McDowell: Biblical prophecy had an enormous role. The Old Testament was written between 1400 B.C. and 400 B.C. As you probably know, a great deal of the Old Testament speaks of a coming messiah. The question, of course, is whether Jesus is that person. Well, the Old Testament contains nearly 300 descriptive, prophetic references to this coming messiah written hundreds of years before Jesus was even born. Let me give you a few of them:

In the book of Micah, written approximately 750 B.C., it states, "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel, whose origins are from of old. From the days of eternity." [Micah 5:2]

In the book of Isaiah, written approximately 600 B.C., it predicts, "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel." (Immanuel means "God with us"). [Isaiah 7:14]

And in Isaiah it also makes this prediction concerning the Messiah's death, "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed." [Isaiah 53:4-6]

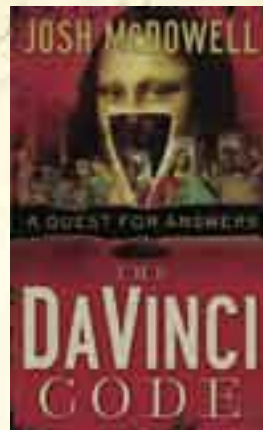
So how many people in human history who could remotely qualify for the title "Messiah" were born in Bethlehem, of a virgin and pierced for our transgressions? Do you see what I mean? The more I researched, the deeper it went.

You've written a new book dealing with issues raised by *The Da Vinci Code*; is this in-depth research like your other works?

McDowell: There are a number of good books out there on the subject right now, but I wrote this for your average person who's probably never heard of the Council of Nicea. I don't think people want to wade through all of my research and references. I wrote it as a dialogue—a discussion between friends—because that's how people think through these issues, not with an encyclopedia of dates and facts. I think it will be accessible for your average reader or moviegoer—that's my hope.

Foundational to plot of *The Da Vinci Code* is the alleged marriage of Jesus and Mary. Is there any historic basis for this?

McDowell: This idea really comes from *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, a popular book from 1980s. I think historians have made it abundantly clear that the ideas contained in the book have no historical grounding. Consider,



for instance, that none of our earliest Christian sources make any mention of this fact. This includes the Gospels, writings of the earliest Christians, and the "other gospels" which Brown alludes to: the Gospel of the Nazarenes, the Gospel of the Egyptians, the Gospel of the Ebionites, the Gospel of Mary, the Gospel of Peter—not a mention in any of them. All you can say is there is no historical basis for the claim.

Doesn't the Gospel of Philip refer to Mary as Jesus' "companion," meaning his wife?

McDowell: In *The Da Vinci Code*—I believe it's Teabing who says it—it states that in Aramaic the word "companion" could mean "spouse." The Gospel of Philip is actually Coptic, not Aramaic, and so the word's meaning in Aramaic is irrelevant. But the word used is neither Aramaic nor Coptic, but is actually a Greek loan word, *koinonos*, which clearly refers to a friend or associate, not spouse. So the one shard of textual evidence that could support the idea, doesn't.

But weren't Jewish men condemned for being celibate or unmarried?

McDowell: No, think of the Essenes who produced the Dead Sea Scrolls: most all of them were single, celibate males. And we know of other single Jewish males from this time period who were unmarried and clearly not "condemned" for it. There are hints of these ideas in much later Jewish writing but not from this time period.

So, no Mrs. Jesus?

McDowell: No, I'm afraid not. I hope you're not going to ask me about the existence of Santa Claus, because I refuse to answer that one.

Any other thoughts for those hashing through the issues raised by *The Da Vinci Code*?

McDowell: The truth is our friend. True historical data holds no skeletons for belief. In my case it led to faith. But you want to look for answers in history not fiction.



A Closing Reflection

REEXAMINING THE ROOTS OF FAITH

The *Da Vinci Code* book and movie provide an opportunity for anyone and everyone to consider afresh the claims of Jesus Christ. In *The World's Great Religions*, Huston Smith observed, "Only two people ever astounded their contemporaries so much that the question they evoked was not 'Who is he?' but 'What is he?' They were Jesus and Buddha. The answers these two gave were exactly the opposite. Buddha said unequivocally that he was a mere man, not a god—almost as if he foresaw later attempts to worship him. Jesus, on the other hand, claimed...to be divine."

In reexamining your own foundation of faith, it might be helpful to summarize the basic message and invitation that is held out in the Gospels and New Testament:

God Loves You and Offers a Purpose and Plan for Your Life

God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

This famous verse from the Gospel of John reflects the New Testament teaching that God loves us deeply, knows us intimately, and created us to have a relationship with him.

Man is Sinful and Separated from God

God has given us an amazing capacity: free will. The reason for giving us this capacity was to entrust us with the power, and freedom, to love him by choice. True love, and a true relationship, requires such freedom but it also has a frightening risk: the person may reject it. And all of us in some way have turned our back on God: we have thought, planned, fantasized, and committed every type

of wrong imaginable, and failed to do the enormous good that was in our power to do. The New Testament generically calls this "sin."

There are several attributes of God that simply do not mix with sin (human evil). The first is his holiness, which means that God, by his nature, cannot be in the presence of sin.

The second attribute is his justice. The moral outrage you feel in the presence of rape or child abuse is the thumbprint of being made in God's image. He is completely and utterly "just"—God cannot turn a blind eye toward evil.

A Dilemma

I hope you are beginning to see the dilemma that precipitates the death of Christ. Because of God's holiness our sin separates us from him, and God is also just, therefore sin—our sin—must be judged or executed. Yet at the same time God loves us compassionately and intensely.

Jesus Christ is God's Only Provision for Sin

Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

The solution God chose was to assume our judgment himself. God's justice is not compromised (sin is judged) but neither is his love, for we are granted a complete pardon. Boston College professor Peter Kreeft puts it this way:

All sin is spiritual garbage, and necessarily meets its end in destruction. God can't let garbage into heaven. Only if the "sinner" won't let go of his garbage does he get burned with it. God offers to take the garbage off his back, to separate the "sinner" from the sin so that the sinner is not separated from God. Jesus is the garbage man.

We Must Individually Receive What Christ Offers

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the privilege to become children of God. (John 1:12)

The Gospels state that becoming a Christian and receiving Jesus Christ is a decision we alone can make. We can either receive it or reject it. We are not born a Christian or become one simply by attending church. Much like a marriage, it is a one-time decision to say "I do," born out of our own volition.

We Receive Christ by Personal Invitation

[Christ speaking] Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him. (Revelation 3:20)

The testimony of the Gospels is that Christ invites us to make a personal decision—to ask him into our lives—which we do through prayer. If in reexamining the roots of your own faith you would like to invite Christ to come into your life, we would invite you to do so. The following is simply a suggested prayer as it is our heart, not words, that matter to God:

Lord Jesus, I want to know you personally. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive you as my Savior. Thank you for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Lead and guide my life. Make me the kind of person you want me to be.

In making this decision the New Testament affirms that Christ comes into our life, forgives our sins and establishes with us an eternal relationship. And it is for such a reason that we derive the term "gospel," which means "good news."

For more on issues of faith go to www.JesusAndDavinci.com

"Many church officials are celebrating *The Da Vinci Code* because it has sparked renewed interest in important topics of faith and Christian history. It is important to remember that a reader does not have to agree with every word in the novel to use the book as a positive catalyst for introspection and exploration of our faith." —Dan Brown

“My hope for *The Da Vinci Code* was, in addition to entertaining people, that it might serve as an open door for readers to begin their own explorations and rekindle their interest in topics of faith.”

— Dan Brown

To order go to www.davinciquest.org

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