



## THE DA VINCI CODE: FACT OR FICTION?

May 22, 2006

(II Timothy 1:7)

**Central Truth: Our goal must first be the Jesus lifestyle rather than a set of facts to refute Dan Brown's fast and loose use of historical and non-historical information.**

Needless to say, this subject can not be dealt with in one article. So today I will give a general overview and next week I will address the truths and errors of the book.

On May 19, 2006, the movie, starring Tom Hanks and directed by Ron Howard, hit the big screen. Dan Brown's faithful readers and many who have never read the book flocked to the theaters. Christians need to realize that the Da Vinci Code's message, is not waning, but growing in social influence and cultural power.

What can the Church do? How do we prepare the next generation? We cannot close our eyes and hang on, knuckles whitening, to some ideal past. Under threat in the past, the Church has responded not with ghettos and retreat, but with confessions, creeds and deep analysis of the nature of error in order to speak with clarity the antithetical nature of the Truth.

The first thing to do is to examine book's claims. Such claims include that (1) Jesus Christ was married to Mary Magdalene, that (2) the four gospels were chosen from among several (namely 80!) that existed in the fourth century because the four gospels presented a divine Jesus versus a human Jesus in the excluded works and that (3) the divinity of Jesus became orthodoxy by a close vote at the council of Nicea in AD 325.

The key to the novel's plot is that many in the church knew that Jesus was married and to protect His late emerging divinity they conspired not to let that become known, even to the point of murder. Now as fiction, this makes an intriguing story, but what about as a historical skeleton that lays claim to being

almost quasi-non-fiction? There are three major problems in the book we shall look at next week.

Christians and churches have many different responses to the release of the movie and to the impact of this incredibly popular book. Some have protested and advocated boycotts of the book and movie. Some have protested publicly or through email and letters. Others have structured classes and curriculum to refute the many different inaccuracies and blatant attacks on the Gospels, the divinity of Jesus and the reliability of the Scriptures.

**"For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." (II Timothy 1:7)**

There is little doubt that the Da Vinci Code has hit a cultural nerve. It has been on the best seller list in the USA for two years. The same is true of many other countries around the world. Sales estimates run at forty-three million, while reader estimates reach as high as one hundred million. The novel's combination of mystery, history, conspiracy and the use of romantic locations and figures have made it a popular piece of fiction. Its plot has intrigued its readers and raised many questions about the history of early Christianity. Polls by George Barna show that 43 to 53 percent of its readers have felt spiritually benefited from reading the book. By any count, that means many people are being influenced by its claims, even though its genre is fiction.

**What to Make of the Novel?**

It is my view that the interest in this novel shows a few things about contemporary culture. There is a keen interest in things related to the origins of Christianity, indeed, there is a spiritual hunger of sorts out there. However, it is not a very discerning kind of quest. This makes it all the more important that those who teach about early Christian history today know the roots of the early history of Christianity and communicate some of that to their students, who in turn can have informed discussions with their inquisitive neighbors.

I have found four types of people responding to the novel. (1) Some treat the novel as fiction and do not believe its claims. **Just have a nice conversation with them.** (2) Others never having been in the church have heard this for the first time and

have no way of knowing whether it is true or not. **Just interact with their sincere questions.** (3) Others in the church are in a similar position never having been taught about this material. **What they need is good information, not an overreaction.** (4) Some are looking for a reason, or, for reasons, not to believe. The novel's information is something they grab onto for support. **Be patient in interacting with them.** In other words, as you talk about the novel and the movie do so with a calm and confidence that the supposed "facts" the novel presents have missed the mark.

One of my concerns is getting accurate information into the hands of Christians but my chief concern is that Christians live up to their own standards.

For those of us who are a bit older, a clean and "logical" presentation of fact matters greatly. However, for the emerging generation, more important than the facts of the argument are the facts demonstrated in the lives of the proponents of these arguments. In other words, there is no truth unless it is lived truth. Put in cornbread English, they want us to walk the walk and not just talk the talk.

Talk is cheap. Those who see themselves on the outside of the church today have already been bombarded with religious talk. They have seen Christians get all stirred up about all sorts of things and make a big commotion about a bunch of different issues. In fact, this younger generation is pretty much turned off by the facts proposed by the religious right, evangelicals, and televangelists and view Christianity — not Jesus, but the organized religious movements they see as Christianity — as irrelevant and out of touch. To them, the code wars are just more yada yada yada language ... the religious noise they can easily tune out and ignore.

I'm not saying facts don't matter. As a teacher the facts matter greatly. I'm not suggesting that truth is determined by the current drift of culture. Truth is truth. We do need to know the truth and the way so many obvious distortions of the truth can be swallowed is a reminder of how much we need to recommit ourselves to the truth.

However, I am saying that all our classes on *The Da Vinci Code* won't matter very much to those outside our Christian circles. The truth of the code wars is irrelevant to most of them. They

want to see if we are serious about the real Jesus — His message, His lifestyle, His compassion, His character, and His involvement in the lives of non-believer who were on the fringes and margins of religious society and power in His day.

Most of us need to get back to the Gospels — Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John — so we can live as Jesus' presence in our time. Our goal must first be the Jesus lifestyle rather than a set of facts to refute Dan Brown's fast and loose use of historical and non-historical information.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus calls us to the truth — authentic, real life as He lived it — in our life before God.

In Matthew, Jesus reminds us again and again that our righteousness has to be displayed in real life, in obedience, and in concern for the "least of these" rather than fighting over words we don't ever get around to obeying.

In Mark, Jesus demonstrates the power of God to redeem lives and care for the broken.

In Luke, Jesus makes clear that the Gospel is for all folks, even the most disenfranchised and forgotten.

The real code breaker, the real power to defeat the cynical and anti-Christian impact of both the book and the movie, is for us as God's people to decide to put into practice the truth we already know. We've got to shift the understanding of our culture about church away from buildings, politics, and powerful church hierarchies. To make a difference, we've got to leave our church buildings and enter our world as caring participants and not as cultural opponents — just like Jesus did.

If we are to have a counter-cultural impact, we've got to live as counter-culture community in the world we're trying to reach. This call to incarnational style of ministry isn't optional, new, or a fad. It is rooted in the very work that God did in Jesus. (John 1: 1-18)

So Dan Brown and *The Da Vinci Code* have given us a wake up call. A call to know the facts of the Gospel better and a call to live the truth more fully in our daily lives in the real world around us. Let's answer that call and break the code and demonstrate the truth.

The fact that this book has put Christianity into the public square is a good thing. Perhaps if people are well equipped to dialogue with the novel's readers in an engaging tone, then more readers may uncover the real code that opens up the way to life. Those readers may also be in a position to better appreciate the history of a faith that lies at the roots of our very existence.

There are a host of problems with the "historical backdrop" of the *Da Vinci Code*. More to come next week when I will discuss the following:

Is Jesus the Son of God?

What about the Lost Books of the Bible?

Was Jesus Married?

#### **Scriptural References:**

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