Special: *The Da Vinci Code*

Responding to The Da Vinci Code

Selected Texts

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Responding to The Da Vinci Code

Scripture

Dan Brown's novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, has sold some 43 million copies, making it the biggest-selling adult novel in history. With the release of the movie adaptation of the book on May 19, interest in this controversial tale has risen substantially.

A new nationwide survey by The Barna Group says that the book has impacted millions of lives—but perhaps not in the way that many Christians have imagined.

According to the Barna research, *The Da Vinci Code* has been read "cover to cover" by roughly 45 million adults in the U.S.A.—that's one out of every five adults (20%)! That makes it the most widely read book with a spiritual theme, other than the Bible, to have been read by American adults.

The audience profile of the book is intriguing. Despite critical comments from the Catholic hierarchy, American Catholics are more likely than Protestants to have read it (24% versus 15%, respectively). Among Protestants, those associated with a mainline church are almost three times more likely than those associated with non-mainline Protestant congregations to have read the book.

Among the adults who have read the entire book, one out of every four (24%) said the book was either "extremely," "very," or "somewhat" helpful in relation to their "personal spiritual growth or understanding." That translates to about 11 million adults who consider *The Da Vinci Code* to have been spiritually helpful.

The Barna study also explored whether or not the book caused people to change some of their religious beliefs. Among the 45 million who have read *The Da Vinci Code*, only 5%—which represents about 2 million adults—said that they changed any of their beliefs or religious views because of the book's content.

"Before reading *The Da Vinci Code* people had a full complement of beliefs already in place, some firmly held and others

loosely held," explains George Barna, the author of numerous books about faith and culture. "Upon reading the book, many people encountered information that confirmed what they already believed. Many readers found information that served to connect some of their beliefs in new ways. But few people changed their pre-existing beliefs because of what they read in the novel. And even fewer people approached the book with a truly open mind regarding the controversial matters in question, and emerged with a new theological perspective. The book generates controversy and discussions, but it has not revolutionized the way that Americans think about Jesus, the Church or the Bible."

"On the other hand," says Barna, "any book that alters one or more theological views among 2 million people is not to be dismissed lightly. That's more people than will change any of their beliefs as a result of exposure to the teaching offered at all of the nation's Christian churches combined during a typical week."

And so it is for this reason that I would like to address the issue in a sermon I am calling "Responding to *The Da Vinci Code*."

This message will not be my normal exposition of a passage of Scripture. Rather, it is a topical message. However, as we begin I do want to begin by reading a passage of Scripture. Please follow along as I read to you from Psalm 25:4-5:

Show me your ways, O Lord,
teach me your paths;
guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my Savior,
and my hope is in you all day long. (Psalm 25:4-5)

Introduction

The Da Vinci Code by Dan Brown is part action, part mystery. Robert Langdon, a professor who is in Paris for a conference, becomes swept up in a murder, religious intrigue, and a hunt for

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¹ http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdateNarrowPreview&BarnaUpdateID=238.

clues revolving around paintings by Leonardo Da Vinci. As he and Sophie Neveu run from the police and follow clues, they meet Sir Leigh Teabing who tells them they're on the trail of one of the most ancient cover-ups ever perpetrated by the Church: the true nature of Jesus and the Holy Grail.

According to Teabing, the Grail secret is that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and had a child by her. Jesus and Mary still have descendants today. And, Teabing says, the Church has been wrong all along about who Jesus really was. According to the earliest, Gnostic Gospel writings, Jesus was a wise man who lived in Palestine, but he never claimed to be God. No one believed Jesus was divine, Teabing says, until another faction of Christians believed in his divinity and rose to leadership in the Catholic Church. The Roman emperor Constantine, in order to bring peace to the Empire, called the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D., where members of the Council voted to make Jesus the divine Son of God. Teabing then says that at the same time, the Church declared that Gnostics were heretics, and refused to allow the other, earlier Gnostic Gospels (numbering around 80), to be included in the New Testament. As the action progresses, Robert, Sophie and Sir Teabing find out just how far the Church will go to hide its secrets.

Has the Church covered up the truth about Jesus? Dan Brown claims that it has. In an interview on NBC's *Today* show in 2003, Brown asserted, "Obviously, Robert Langdon is fictional, but all of the art, architecture, secret rituals, secret societies—all of that is historical fact." The secret societies, of course, hid the truth about Jesus and his bloodline.

But is this what really happened? Did Jesus really marry Mary Magdalene and have children with her? Was he a mere human being, or was he the divine Son of God? Are the Scriptures that we have reliable? Should more books have been added to what we know as the Bible?

The answers to these questions are about more than mere intellectual curiosity. How we answer the question about the Bible and who Jesus is can have a tremendous impact on us and change our lives forever.

Lesson

It turns out that very little of *The Da Vinci Code* is based on history. Today, I would simply like to address two issues:

- 1. The Truth about the Scriptures, and
- 2. The Truth about Jesus' Deity.

I. The Truth about the Scriptures

First, let's look at the truth about the Scriptures.

At one point in *The Da Vinci Code* Sir Leigh Teabing says to Sophie Neveu, "The Bible did not arrive by fax from heaven. . . . The Bible is a product of man, my dear. Not of God. The Bible did not fall magically from the clouds. Man created it as a historical record of tumultuous times, and it has evolved through countless translations, additions, and revisions. History has never had a definitive version of the book."²

How do we respond to that assertion?

The Bible is not just one book. It is in fact composed of 66 separate books. Yet the Bible is not just an anthology, a collection of literary pieces without unity. The Bible is in fact a unique book; it is different from every other book ever written. Consider, for example, the following facts. The Bible is the only book:

- Written over a span of 1,500 years.
- Written by more than 40 authors from every walk of life, including Moses, a political leader, prophet, and judge, trained in the universities of Egypt; David, a king, poet, musician, shepherd, and soldier; Amos, a farmer; Joshua, a military general; Matthew, a tax collector; Luke, a doctor; and Paul, a rabbi.

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² Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2003), 231.

- Written in different places: by Moses in the desert, Jeremiah in a dungeon, David in a palace, Paul inside prison, Luke while traveling, and John while in exile on the Isle of Patmos.
- Written at different times. For example, David wrote in times of war, and Solomon, his son, wrote in times of peace.
- Written during different moods. Some authors wrote at the height of joy, whereas others wrote at the bottom of sorrow and despair.
- Written on three continents: Asia, Africa, and Europe.
- Written in three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.
- Written in a wide variety of different styles, including poetry, historical narrative, song, romance, personal correspondence, biography, law, parable, story, and so on.

In addition to all of the above, the Bible addresses scores of topics, many of them controversial.

And yet, from Genesis to Revelation these authors have written with breathtaking unity. The entire message of the Bible can be summarized in one single unfolding story: God's redemption of human beings. Among all the people described in the Bible, the leading character throughout in the one, true, living God made known through Jesus Christ. From cover to cover, the Bible is Christocentric.

Therefore, although the Bible contains many books by many authors, it shows in its unity that it is also one book. And the only explanation for its unity is that God superintended the authors so that we have one unified book with one unified theme.

The apostle Peter clarifies this point for us in 2 Peter 1:20-21 where he says, "Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." Peter's point is simply that God is the ultimate author of Scripture. To be

sure, he used human authors as his instruments to convey his truth. But, in the final analysis, the Bible is God's word to human beings.

But, Dan Brown's character Teabing argues, "More than *eighty* gospels were considered for the New Testament, and yet only a relative few were chosen for inclusion—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John among them."

According to Harvard Professor Helmut Koester's *Introduction to the New Testament*, there were only sixty extra-biblical documents written, and you need to realize that the majority of those were not gospels.

But we might still ask the question: why were these extrabiblical gospels or writings not included in our Bible? There are at least two reasons why there were not included in our Bible.

First, the extra-biblical writings were not included in our Bible because their subject matter is not consistent with the message of the Bible.

But, second, and more importantly, the extra-biblical writings were not included in our Bible because they were never accepted by the Church as God's Word. The four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—were written within 40 years of Jesus' death. By the end of the first century, these books were accepted by the Church as accurate and authoritative descriptions of Jesus' life and ministry. The extra biblical gospels were written 100 to 250 years after Christ died, and they were never accepted by the Church as accurate and authoritative descriptions of Jesus' life and ministry.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the Church did not create Scripture. It did not determine or select which books would be called Scripture, the inspired Word of God. Instead, the Church recognized, or discovered, which books had been inspired by God from their inception.

One scholar puts it this way, "A book is not the Word of God because it is accepted by the people of God. Rather, it was accepted by the people of God because it is the Word of God. That is,

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³ *Ibid.*, 231.

God gives the book its divine authority, not the people of God. They merely recognize the divine authority which God gives to it."⁴

So, *The Da Vinci Code* is all wrong about the truth about Scripture. The Scriptures are not the fabrication of man but, rather, are nothing less the very Word of the living God.

II. The Truth about Jesus' Deity

Second, let's turn our attention now to the truth about Jesus' deity.

I suppose that it is at this point that I get really irked. One of the reasons that *The Da Vinci Code* has received such a huge following is because people don't know their history. Even Christians are not fully aware of the history of the Church, and so they are liable to fall for the errors regarding the truth about Jesus' deity.

One of Dan Brown's central assertions is that Jesus is not fully God. In an exchange between Teabing and Sophie, Teabing asserts that it was at the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. that the Church voted on the divinity of Jesus.

"My dear," Teabing declared, "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."

"Not the Son of God?" asked Sophie.

"Right," Teabing said. "Jesus' establishment as the 'Son of God' was officially proposed and voted on by the Council of Nicaea."

"Hold on," said Sophie. "You're saying that Jesus' divinity was the result of a *vote*?"

"A relatively close vote at that," Teabing added.⁵ How do we respond to this assertion?

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⁴ Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1968), 210.

⁵ Brown, 233.

During the time of Constantine there were various power struggles taking place throughout his Empire. One source of disunity was the result of a forceful preacher named Arius. Arius had attracted a large following of people who were persuaded that Jesus Christ was something less than eternal God, something like a lesser God, created by the Father and sent to earth to enter humanity through his birth from Mary of Nazareth. Constantine felt both a political and religious desire to end this controversy. So he called together about 300 bishops from all over the Empire to settle the matter.

Something that *The Da Vinci Code* does not mention is that Arius believed that Jesus was sinless, created the universe, and was a unique and special created being. In other words, Arius did not believe that Jesus was a mere man. Arius was simply reluctant to take the next step and classify Jesus as God in the full sense.

It is also important to note that the Council of Nicaea did *not* convene to decide whether or not Jesus was God. The goal of the Council of Nicaea was to define in *which* sense Jesus was God.

So, do you want to know how close the vote was to affirm that Jesus was fully God? Remember, according to Teabing it was a relatively close vote. One would think that the vote might have been something like 151 to 149. However, the actual vote was 298 to 2! Of all the inaccuracies in *The Da Vinci Code*, this is the one that riles me the most.

One of the statements that came out of the Council of Nicaea is the Nicene Creed, which speaks clearly about Jesus' full deity:

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father. . . .

What is important to remember in light of the claim in *The Da Vinci Code* is that the vote at the Council of Nicaea only affirmed what Christians had believed from the beginning.

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For example, on one occasion Jesus asked the disciples pointblank, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:13-16).

One of Jesus' other disciples, Thomas, saw Jesus a week after his resurrection. Even though he had doubted that Jesus was alive, when he saw him, Thomas said to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28).

The apostle John is even clearer as he opened his Gospel with these words, referring to Jesus, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning" (John 1:1-2).

I could carry on with testimonies of the Church Fathers who also affirmed that Jesus fully God. *The Da Vinci Code* is simply wrong in asserting that Jesus was merely a mortal man. In fact, Jesus is nothing less than God in human form, which is what the Christian Church has affirmed from the time of Jesus himself.

Conclusion

I would like to suggest three points of application.

A. Truth Will Ultimately Prevail

First, truth will ultimately prevail.

We can be absolutely certain that truth will ultimately prevail, for God's Word tells us, "Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment" (Proverbs 12:19). In a couple of months most people will have forgotten about *The Da Vinci Code*, and there will probably be some other lie against God and his truth that we will need to address.

B. The Mystery about Jesus Has Already Been Revealed

Second, the mystery about Jesus has already been revealed. Listen to how the apostle Paul puts it in Ephesians 1:9-14:

And he [i.e., God] made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

C. Do Not Believe a False Gospel

And finally, do not believe a false gospel. The apostle Paul clearly stated this in Galatians 1:6-9:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

May God help each one of us to believe the true gospel. Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

To bring people to Jesus Christ and membership in his church family, develop them to Christlike maturity, equip them for their ministry in the church and life mission in the world, in order to magnify God's name.

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

- 1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons
- 2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributor_profile.asp?Contributor_profile.asp?ContributorID=11181
- 3. <u>www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?SpeakerOnly=true&currSection=sermonsspeaker&keyword=Freddy%5EFritz</u>

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PRAYER:

God of all truth, we thank you for the opportunity to consider briefly how we should respond to *The Da Vinci Code*.

We thank you for the Scriptures. We thank you that we have a sure word from heaven, and that we don't have to worry about the authority and authenticity of your Word. Help each one of us to grow in our understanding of and commitment to your Word.

We thank you also for the Lord Jesus Christ. We believe that he is indeed the Second Person of the Trinity. We do believe in the one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father.

God, if there are any here today who do not yet believe in your Word or in Jesus Christ, I ask that you would enable them to believe today. Take away the blindness and grant the gift of truth.

And all of this I ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

As you leave here today, go and share with your friends and family members the truth about God's Word and about Jesus Christ. And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and always. Amen.