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Ideas, Insights & Stories

March/April 2006

OUTREACH



THE DA VINCI CODE

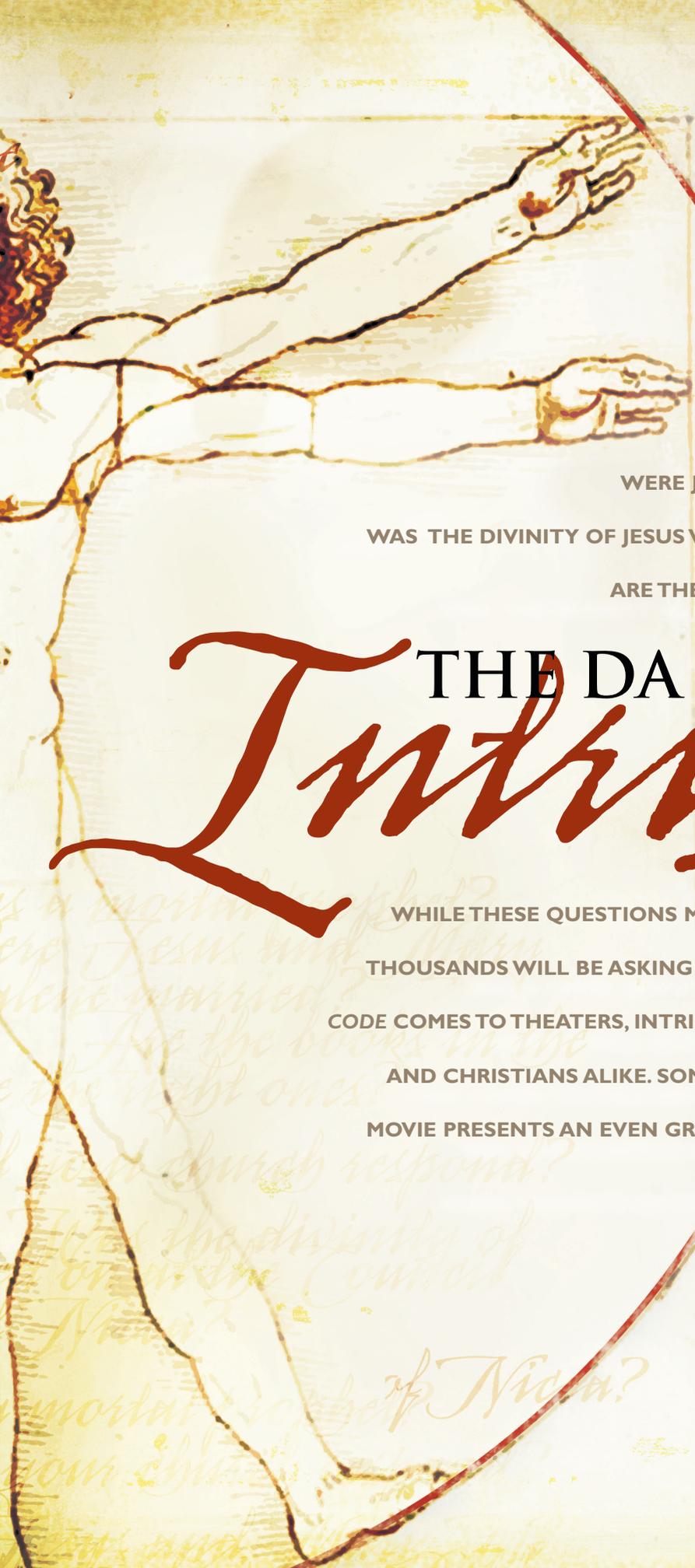
"THE ULTIMATE CINEMATIC
DISCUSSION STARTER" 46

Best-Selling Book
Summer Blockbuster
Bigger Than *The Passion*?

Craig Detweiler,
Author/screenwriter and
professor, Biola University
La Mirada, Calif.

»» THE PARENT
FACTOR 68
9 Ways to Reach
New Families

»» ANNE
GRAHAM LOTZ 114
"We don't know
what we believe."



WAS JESUS JUST A MORTAL PROPHET?

WERE JESUS AND MARY MAGDALENE MARRIED?

WAS THE DIVINITY OF JESUS VOTED ON AT THE COUNCIL OF NICAEA?

ARE THE BOOKS IN THE BIBLE THE RIGHT ONES?

THE DA VINCI CODE

Intrigue

WHILE THESE QUESTIONS MAY SEEM LUDICROUS TO YOU, THOUSANDS WILL BE ASKING THEM AFTER MAY 19 WHEN *THE DA VINCI CODE* COMES TO THEATERS, INTRIGUING THE MINDS OF NON-CHRISTIANS AND CHRISTIANS ALIKE. SOME PASTORS AND FILM EXPERTS SAY THE MOVIE PRESENTS AN EVEN GREATER OUTREACH OPPORTUNITY THAN *NARNIA* OR *THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST*. HOW WILL YOUR CHURCH RESPOND? →

by Lisa Ann Cockrel

As quickly as *The Da Vinci Code*—a fictional page-turner by Dan Brown—topped best-seller lists back in 2003, Pastor Ken Baugh's e-mail inbox filled with questions.

"People were saying, 'Have you heard about this?' 'I've got questions about this book.' 'What about the author?' " says Baugh, who at the time was an associate senior pastor at McLean Bible Church in McLean, Va., teaching the 3,000 young adults in McLean's Frontline ministry. "At first, I thought, *Whatever—this is fiction.*"

Finally, after seeing enough e-mails posing the same questions and concerns, Baugh picked up the mystery thriller while on vacation to see for himself what the controversy was about. After all, within one week of the book's U.S. release, 23,500 copies had sold. Soon, between 80,000 and 90,000 were selling each week.

"After finishing it, I remember thinking, *Oh my gosh, now I know why everyone's freaking out.* I called my staff and said 'Stop the presses! We're not doing the planned summer sermon series. I'm teaching on *The Da Vinci Code.*' "

The seven-week series turned into Baugh's most well-received series ever at McLean Bible.

And now, the book is being turned into what some say will be the biggest film of 2006.

"If the book created this much discussion and interest, the movie is going to do 10 times as much," says Baugh, who is now senior pastor at Coast Hills Community Church in Aliso Viejo, Calif. (coasthillschurch.org).

He preached the exact same series to his new congregation in February to precede the film's U.S. release on May 19.

Like Baugh, other pastors must respond to *The Da Vinci Code* if they want to reach people in today's cultural context, believes Craig Detweiler, associate professor and chair of mass communications at Biola University in La Mirada, Calif. A co-author of *A Matrix of Meanings: Finding God in Pop Culture* (Baker), Detweiler also writes his own screenplays.

"*The Da Vinci Code* movie will be the ultimate cinematic discussion-starter in 2006," he says. "We're discovering that movies are starting conversations for our culture, and *The Da Vinci Code* is asking spiritual and historical questions we, as pastors, theologians and church leaders, were trained to answer."

Will your church stop the presses to answer these questions?

THE THICKENING PLOT

Described by *Christian Science Monitor* as "equal parts thriller, mystery and religious speculation," *The Da Vinci Code* follows Robert Langdon, a Harvard professor of religious symbology, and Sophie Neveu, a cryptologist for the French version of the FBI, as they investigate the mysterious murder of Sophie's grandfather. The duo find themselves in the middle of the ancient quest for the Holy Grail and in league with a secret society known as the Priory of Sion—a group dedicated to the pagan practice of goddess worship.

Langdon and Neveu piece together an alternate version of history—one that says the Church covered up Jesus' marriage to Mary Magdalene and the birth of their daughter. According to the theory, Jesus wanted Mary to lead His church, but the Church and the apostle Peter, being a misogynist, launched a smear campaign and labeled Mary a prostitute, forcing her to flee with her child.

The fast-paced story also asserts that the divinity of Jesus was a political invention of Emperor Constantine and that the Canon of Scripture was merely established by men with dubious personal motives. In a nail-biting adventure, Langdon and Neveu follow clues that painter Leonardo Da Vinci, a former grand master of the Priory of Sion, has crafted into his works, creating the *Da Vinci Code*. As Langdon and Neveu are told, "Behold ... the

greatest cover-up in human history."

The book's assertions could be chalked up to the genre, but Brown and his publisher (Doubleday, a division of Random House) have raised hackles (and book sales) with their attempts to position the story and its detailed accounts of ancient symbols, religious practice and the lives of prominent historical figures as almost more fact than fiction. The introduction to the book states: "All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents and secret rituals in this novel are accurate." Publisher and president of Doubleday, Stephen Rubin, told *The New York Times*, "John Grisham teaches you about torts. Tom Clancy teaches you about military technology. Dan Brown gives you a crash course in art history and the Catholic Church." →

MAN ON THE STREET:
Female, 21
San Diego, Calif.

Yes, I think Dan Brown makes a lot of sense, especially the part about Jesus just being a mortal. I'd always kind of thought that way, but the facts in the book back it up.



CINEMATIC Oracle

Educator and film maven Craig Detweiler finds God in Hollywood and invites churches to meet Him there.

Hornets' Nest, a 1970 flick starring Rock Hudson, left 10-year-old Craig Detweiler in tears. "I think that's when I understood the term 'moving pictures,'" he says. "That they really can move you in a profound way."

Films became not only Detweiler's entertainment, but also his refuge; they also provided him role models. In fact, when Detweiler was introduced to Jesus as a senior in high school, he likened Him to Humphrey Bogart.

"People were always trying to outsmart Bogart," he explains. "Bogart would figure out a way to undo their plans, while carrying out his own. I also thought that Jesus had a sense of style, a certain ability to be cool, just like Bogart."

By age 12, Detweiler was tracking all the movies he watched—awarding them stars and writing mini-reviews.

"In high school, I was probably watching 180 films a year," he explains. "I still have the log."

But entering the film industry didn't cross Detweiler's mind until he began attending Fuller Theological Seminary in Southern California. There, he rubbed elbows with writers, directors and producers and eventually met Coleman Luck, a TV producer.

"As a guest speaker, Luck basically gave an altar call in class, one day. He said, 'If you've got the guts, and you

want to get messy, and you're not afraid of being a missionary in one of the toughest places on the planet, then come to Hollywood and join me!'" relates Detweiler.

He was one of two students in the classroom that "walked the aisle."

Now, nearly 15 years later, Detweiler has written his own screenplays (*Extreme Days* and *The*

Duke for Buena Vista)

and a book, *A Matrix of Meanings: Finding God in Pop Culture* (Baker). He also serves as chair of the mass communications department at Biola University, and executive producer of the City of the Angels Film Festival, an annual festival that is also an ongoing conversation among theologians and filmmakers about theology in films.

Shortly after the Rodney King verdicts, he helped start the festival (CAFF; cityoftheangelsfilmfest.org) in

1994, combining his love for film and Jesus—and hoping to help others do the same.

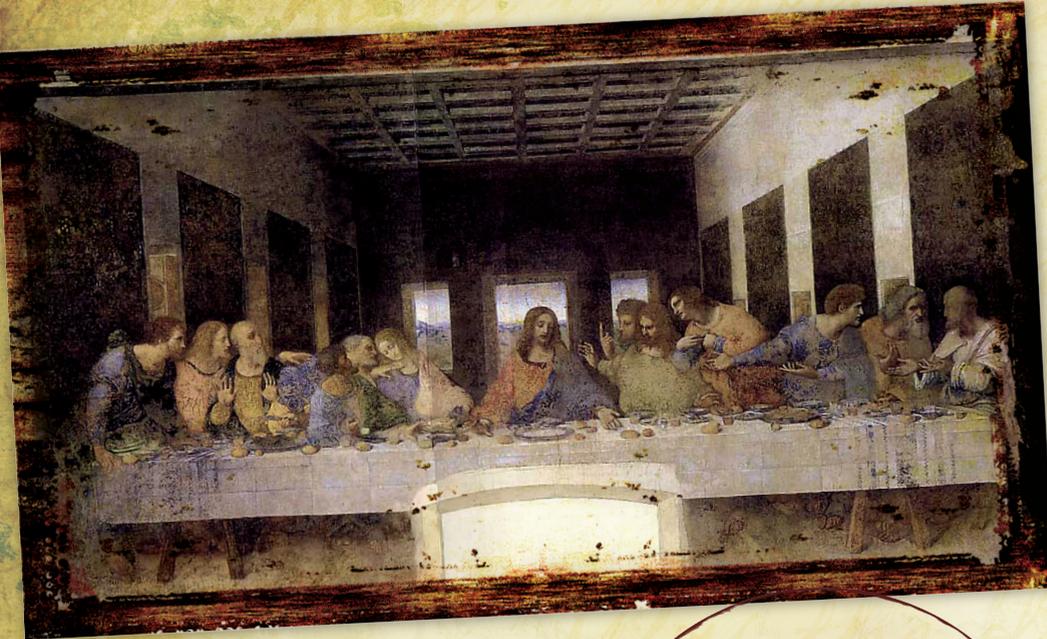
"We said, 'Here is L.A., the capital of film, literally fighting itself. Can we allow movies to be the common ground in bringing people back together?'" explains Detweiler. "We believed in the healing potential of film through dialog. We committed to discuss the best cinema, believing that God is inherently in the most redemptive art."

In Detweiler's world, films are only divided into two categories: good and bad. "If it's bad art, there's a bad message. But good art has the potential to have a powerful, transformative impact," he says.

So what's his favorite "good" film? "Oh, *Casablanca* ... absolutely," he says. "I love the intrigue, the doomed love story, the sacrifice and the honor."

—H.J.

"WE committed
TO DISCUSS THE BEST
CINEMA, believing
THAT GOD IS INHERENTLY
IN THE MOST
redemptive art."



OFF THE SHELVES

It's a crash course millions of people have taken. Since its 2003 publication, *The Da Vinci Code* has been translated into 44 languages and has sold more than 40 million copies worldwide. It's estimated that almost a third of all Americans (100 million) have read the engrossing novel, keeping it on *The New York Times Best Sellers* for 148 weeks straight (at press time).

And *Time* magazine recently named Dan Brown one of the world's 100 most influential people, among the likes of President George W. Bush and the Dalai Lama.

Brown, an English teacher-turned-writer with three previous book titles, including *Angels and Demons* (Simon & Schuster) and *Deception Point* (Simon & Schuster), states on his Web site that he does identify himself as a Christian, as well as "a student of many religions." He goes on to say, "My hope in writing this novel was that the story would serve as a catalyst and a springboard for people to discuss the important topics of faith, religion, and history."

Yet Brown's research has made him a believer in certain aspects of his own tale. In July 2003, he told the *Washington Post*: "I was skeptical, but after a year-and-a-half of research I became a believer. As soon as people understand that the few Gospels included in the Bible are not the only versions of the Christ story, they begin to sense contradictions. Magdalene is most obvious.

"THE *popularity* OF THE DA VINCI CODE IS *telling* US THAT PEOPLE DON'T FIND THE IMAGE OF JESUS THAT'S *portrayed* BY THE DOMINANT CHRISTIAN VOICES *genuine*."
—BRIAN MCLAREN

Her role was deliberately distorted, a smear campaign by the early church fathers."

The book's force as a catalyst for religious dialog is set to increase exponentially this summer. *The Da Vinci Code* is coming to the big screen, with Oscar-winning director Ron Howard (*A Beautiful Mind*, *Cinderella Man*) behind the camera and two-time Oscar winner and box office favorite Tom Hanks in front of the lens as Robert Langdon, at the center of the story's narrative. The \$125 million Sony Pictures production, also starring Audrey Tautou (Sophie Neveu), Ian McKellen (Sir Leigh Teabing), Paul Bettany (Silas) and Alfred Molina (Bishop Aringarosa), was granted the rare privilege of filming in the Louvre—where the story begins—and is one of the most anticipated movies of the summer.

Sony plans to release the movie (not rated as of early February) on screens throughout the United States and abroad.

REALITY CHECK

In the wake of early 2002's pedophilia scandals that rocked the Roman Catholic Church shortly before the book's publication, *The Da Vinci Code* has many readers—Christians and non-Christians alike—questioning what's truth and what's fiction.

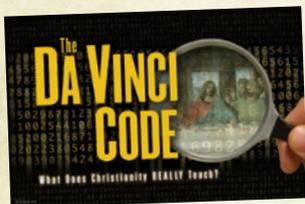
In fact, in Canada, the National Geographic Channel commissioned a survey in 2005 in anticipation of a full day of programming inspired by *The Da Vinci Code*. It found that 32% of Canadians who have read the novel believe that the theories outlined in it are true.

To combat these beliefs, a spate of books have been published debunking many of the false claims and theories put forth in *The Da Vinci Code*—books such as Darrell L. Bock's *Breaking the Da Vinci Code* (Nelson), nominated for the Gold Medallion Award in cultural engagement. Bock, a

article continued on p. 8 →

MAKING THE *Cultural connection*

The *Da Vinci Code* releases in theaters across the country on May 19. How will your church engage? The following are some ideas and resources to help you connect with the curious, questioning and doubting in your church and community this spring.



FROM THE PULPIT

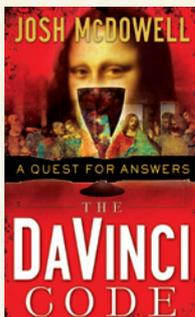
Preach a single sermon or a multi-week series addressing the key doctrines questioned in the book and film.

- See SermonCentral.com for ideas, outlines, manuscripts and PowerPoint slides.

- The CD *The Da Vinci Code: The Truth Behind the Fiction* includes Pastor Ken Baugh's seven-week message series (referenced on page 48) as well as PowerPoint (coasthillschurch.org).

- Promote your Da Vinci related message with outreach tools designed to connect interested doubters and seekers (davincicode.outreach.com).

- Christianbiblestudies.com offers a number of studies, including "The Da Vinci Code and Other Heresies: What's the Allure of Secret Knowledge About God?" and "Debunking *The Da Vinci Code*: Christians Must Know the Truth to Recognize Lies."



GIVE A GIFT

Instead of your regular gift bags or baskets, give away *Da Vinci Code*-related resources to your guests. Suggestions:

- *The Da Vinci Code: A Quest for Answers* by Josh McDowell (Green Key

Books) is a 141-page novel that follows the conversation of four 20-somethings who head to Starbucks after viewing the film.

- *The Da Vinci Code: A Companion Guide to the Movie* (Campus Crusade for Christ) is a 20-page, evangelistic mini-magazine by Josh McDowell.

- *Exploring The Da Vinci Code* paperback by Lee Strobel and Garry Poole (Zondervan) weaves interviews with experts through visits to sites referenced in the story.

TAKE QUESTIONS

Host a Q&A or panel discussion at your church, addressing critical questions raised by the film. Do your research before the event. Helpful resources:

- *Breaking The Da Vinci Code* by Darrell L. Bock (Nelson)
- *Cracking Da Vinci's Code* by James L. Garlow and Peter Jones (Cook)
- *The Da Vinci Codebreaker* by James L. Garlow (Bethany House)
- *The Da Vinci Deception* by Erwin W. Lutzer (Tyndale)
- *The Gospel Code*

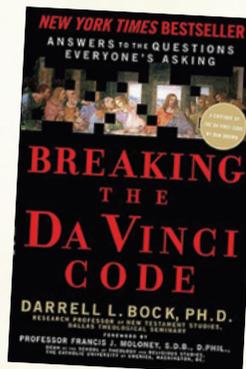
by Ben Witherington III (InterVarsity)

- *The Secret Message of Jesus* by Brian D. McLaren (W)
- *Stolen Identity* by Peter Jones (Cook)
- *The Truth Behind The Da Vinci Code* by Richard Abanes (Harvest House)
- *The Gospel Code* (audiobook, MP3) by Ben Witherington III (Hovel Audio)

GET EDUCATED

- Thedavincicodechallenge.com features essays from dozens of experts, church leaders, authors and educators about the book and the movie's controversial theories, as well as resource links and other information.

- *Exploring The Da Vinci Code* is a 65-minute lecture by Mike Licona. In front of an audience, he uses PowerPoint slides to address Christianity's origins (risenjesus.com).

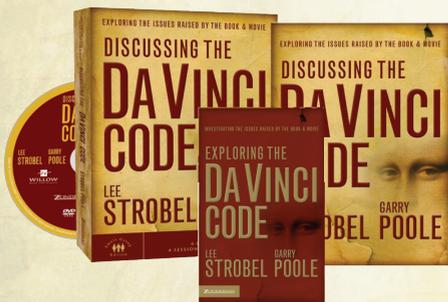


AN EXPERT OPINION

Host a speaker who can examine *The Da Vinci Code's* claims. Possibilities: Erwin Lutzer, Darrell Bock and James Garlow (outreachspeakers.com).

LIVE FROM ...

Host a broadcast to equip your congregation with the knowledge and tools to engage the unchurched. Church Communication Network will air "The Da Vinci Code Evangelism Training Event" with Mark Mittelberg, Lee Strobel, Ken Baugh and Paul Maier on March 28, and "Unlocking The Da Vinci Code" outreach event with Erwin Lutzer, Lee Strobel and Mark Mittelberg on May 21 (ccn.net).



TALK AMONGST YOURSELVES

Offer discussion groups or encourage existing small groups to discuss the issues it raises. Resource ideas:

- *Discussing The Da Vinci Code* by Lee Strobel and Garry Poole (Zondervan) is a four-week, seeker-friendly, DVD-driven small group curriculum, featuring interviews with scholars and investigation of the sites (including the Louvre and Westminster Abbey) referenced in the book.

THE QUESTIONS

They'll be asking

Author of *Breaking The Da Vinci Code* (Nelson), Dr. Darrell Bock, research professor of New Testament studies specializing in historical Jesus and extra biblical gospels at Dallas Theological Seminary, identifies and breaks down four of *The Da Vinci Code's* most troubling theories into fact and fiction.

THEORY	FICTION	FACT
<p>Was Jesus married to Mary Magdalene?</p>	<p>"Therefore, any gospels that described <i>earthly</i> aspects of Jesus' life had to be omitted from the Bible. Unfortunately for the early editors, one particularly troubling earthly theme kept recurring in the gospels. Mary Magdalene. ... More specifically, her marriage to Jesus Christ." (<i>The Da Vinci Code</i>, page 244)</p>	<p>There is no evidence. The vast majority of liberal and conservative Jesus scholars agree on this. No ancient text declares that Jesus was married. The gospels of Philip and Mary simply say Jesus loved Mary more than the other disciples, and scholars do not believe these texts give historical detail about Jesus.</p>
<p>Was Jesus' deity voted on by the Council of Nicaea?</p>	<p>"'At this gathering,' Teabing said, 'many aspects of Christianity were debated and voted upon—the date of Easter, the role of the bishops, the administration of the sacraments, and, of course, the divinity of Jesus. Jesus' establishment as 'the Son of God' was officially proposed and voted on by the Council of Nicaea.'" (page 233)</p>	<p>Jesus' divinity was not voted upon at Nicaea. His deity goes back to the earliest Christian documents we have—as early as A.D. 55 (1 Cor. 8:5–6). Some 216 bishops from around the existing Christian world gathered to discuss not <i>if</i> Jesus was divine, but in what sense He was divine. The accepted view was that Jesus existed eternally as the Son with the Father. The creed adopted precise philosophical and theological language that the majority of the Church believed. All but two bishops signed on to this creed, hardly a close vote.</p>
<p>Were the four gospels not connected to the Canon of Scripture early on?</p>	<p>"Because Constantine upgraded Jesus' status almost four centuries after Jesus' death, thousands of documents already existed chronicling His life as a mortal man. To rewrite the history books, Constantine knew he would need a bold stroke. ... Constantine commissioned and financed a new Bible, which omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ's human traits and embellished those gospels that made Him godlike." (page 234)</p>	<p>Although the Canon was discussed through the fourth century, the four gospels were not a part of the discussion. By the end of the second century, they were established as the key sources for Jesus. Irenaeus, writing in A.D. 180, names these as the "four fold gospel that is the Gospel." The first listing of a Canon, known as the Muratorian Canon (A.D. 180), also lists only the four gospels. Writing some 25 years before Irenaeus, Justin Martyr gives us a clue as to why the gospels were so highly regarded. He calls them the "memoirs of the apostles," noting that their source is rooted in apostolic experience.</p>
<p>Did Leonardo da Vinci paint Mary Magdalene into "The Last Supper"?</p>	<p>"Sophie examined the figure to Jesus' immediate right. ... As she studied the person's face and body, a wave of astonishment rose within her. The individual had flowing red hair, delicate folded hands, and the hint of a bosom. It was, without a doubt ... female. ... 'That, my dear,' Teabing replied, 'is Mary Magdalene.'" (page 243)</p>	<p>Art historians say this is impossible. We have notes about the painting that state the people gathered around Jesus represent the apostles. "The Last Supper" scene was commonly painted during this period, and the "feminine" looking figure next to Jesus simply reflects the tendency at that time to paint young figures in an androgynous manner.</p>



continued from p. 5

research professor of New Testament studies who specializes in historical Jesus and extra-biblical gospels at Dallas Theological Seminary, has written *Da Vinci Code*-related opinion pieces for ABCNews.com and the *Los Angeles Times*, among others, and has been interviewed on “The Today Show,” “Dateline” and “Good Morning America.” He wrote the book in five days, easily disproving Brown’s theories.

“I think the most troubling suggestion in *The Da Vinci Code* is that historical Christianity is a late creation of the third and fourth century, along with the perception that the original Jesus really did

nothing in His life and teaching that warranted being worshipped,” says Bock. “It’s an attempt to change Jesus from being unique to being just another religious figure.”

Although people may not buy into all of Brown’s claims or believe the book’s theories to be absolute truth, chances are they will examine their plausibility, especially in a world of postmodern thought where, for some, one reality is just as good as another.

“So much ink has been spilled about the death of the metanarrative,” explains Detweiler. “Our old assumptions about science technology and epistemology—how we know what we know—have all shifted.”

And unless people have had some training and experience in early church history, they’ll have no way of knowing what’s true, says Bock. →

MAN ON THE STREET:

Male, 35
Cooperstown, Mich.

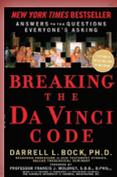
After reading the book, I spent time investigating not only the Christian aspects, but also the historical and geographical theories.

This article is excerpted from the March/April issue of *OUTREACH* magazine.

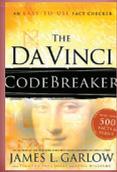
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DA VINCI CODE RESOURCE PACK

(\$54.66 value) Featuring:



Breaking The Da Vinci Code
by Darrell L. Beck, Ph.D.

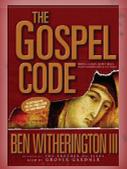
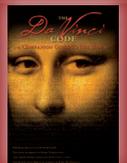
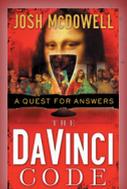


The Da Vinci Code Codebreaker
by James L. Garlow

The Da Vinci Code: A Quest for Answers
by Josh McDowell

Mini-Magazine The Da Vinci Code: A Companion Guide to the Movie
by Campus Crusade for Christ

Audiobook download The Gospel Code
by Ben Witherington III



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“There are certain features that people might respond to and think are credible, and there are some things in the book that *are* historically correct.”

Both the book and the movie are sure to reinforce people’s skepticism, says Josh McDowell, apologist and author of *The Da Vinci Code: A Quest for Answers* (Green Key Books). “If we do not deal with this subject in a positive way, we run the risk of losing a generation of marginal Christians and honest seekers to skepticism,” he explains. “Usually as the body of Christ, we lag behind. But we have an opportunity now to get ahead of this issue and address it in a positive way.”

And that will require knowing what people are thinking. Author and pastor Brian McLaren thinks that people’s questions surrounding *The Da Vinci Code* offer clues to the Jesus people are searching for.

“For all the flaws of Dan Brown’s book, I think in some ways he’s suggesting that the dominant religious institutions have created their own caricature of Jesus. And I think people have a sense that’s true,” says McLaren. “I think the popularity of *The Da Vinci Code* is telling us that a lot of people don’t find the image of Jesus that’s portrayed by the dominant Christian voices genuine, so they’re looking for something that seems more real and authentic.”

Mix this skepticism with Hollywood’s power to create high-quality, believable films, and the movie is likely to pack quite a punch.

“Hollywood is great at shining a spotlight on people, places and issues. Almost no one in America knew or cared about recent African history prior to the film *Hotel Rwanda*,” Detweiler explains. “But after Don Cheadle’s harrowing performance, the real Paul Rusesabagina was able to embark on a nationwide speaking tour. And undoubtedly without the film, the campaign by Saddleback Church’s Rick Warren to bring help and healing to Rwanda would not have happened.”

Audiences are likely to exit the theater after watching *The Da Vinci Code* more suspicious and wary of the Church as an institution, Detweiler continues. “It will likely inspire so many types of water cooler questions and Internet searches. People will be asking, ‘What’s the Priory of Sion?’ ‘Who was the Mona Lisa?’ ‘Was Jesus married?’ ”

FEAR NOT

Fear often sparks defensiveness; and defensiveness usually means there is something to be afraid of. Many churches and Christian leaders have responded to *The Da Vinci Code* in a defensive fashion—vehemently stating that the book isn’t fair and that Brown is lying.

“To the degree we respond defensively, as someone attacked, we will have taken the bait and reinforced the perception of Christianity as a powerful monolith that’s interested in stifling debate rather than encouraging a search,” says Detweiler. “The movie’s tagline is ‘Seek the truth.’ One way to absolutely stop that search (or to encourage people to search elsewhere) is to blatantly say, ‘*The Da Vinci Code* is a lie.’ ”

Churches have nothing to fear. In fact, *The Da Vinci Code*’s power to raise eyebrows and questions presents both an opportunity and a challenge to the Church.

Dan Kimball, pastor of Vintage Faith Church (vintagechurch.org) in Santa Cruz, Calif., and author of *The Emerging Church* (Zondervan) and the upcoming title *They*

Like Jesus But Not the Church (Zondervan), plans to teach a May message series addressing the formation of the Canon and the Church councils, and host a theological think tank night during which people can ask their own questions about the Bible’s origins.

“I personally think *The Da Vinci Code* holds more post-movie evangelistic potential than *The Passion* or *Narnia* movies,” Kimball says. “It shouldn’t scare us, since the truth of Jesus is the truth. It should make us go, ‘Hey, that’s not what really happened! But here is what we believe.’ ”

Mike Licona, director of apologetics for the North American Mission Board (namb.net), created a 65-minute lecture (see sidebar, pg. 51) for initiating discussion on five main issues from *The Da Vinci Code*. Licona was at the forefront of the boycott efforts against *The Last Temptation of Christ* in 1988, but he now thinks the boycott was a mistake.

“It created a perception among unbelievers that Christians were afraid of these ideas, that we were being close-minded to other views,” he says.

In contrast, Licona is encouraging churches to embrace *The Da Vinci Code* movie. “Let’s rent theaters. Let’s invite skeptics to come. Let’s say not only are we *not* afraid of this, we’ll pay your way to go. I think that’s a huge statement. We’re not afraid to face criticism. We’re open to it. We’re looking for truth,” he says. →

MAN ON THE STREET:

Female, 21
Elkhart Lake, Wisc.

I think that the interpretation Dan Brown gave is possible. It’s interesting and refreshing to hear another take on it. I don’t think the Bible is word-for-word accurate in that sense either.



And many churches are. In late January, 68% of churches surveyed by Outreach Inc. said they were “likely” or “very likely” to engage in a *Da Vinci Code*-related outreach. Some 77% said they would do a sermon series on the film, 48% said they’d organize a small group discussion series, and 44% would host an event for their community.

Author Josh McDowell was so moved by the stories of non-Christians, even Christians, walking away from God after reading *The Da Vinci Code* that he wrote his book, *The Da Vinci Code: A Quest for Answers* (Green Key), hoping to get it into the hands of a million people. He, along with Campus Crusade for Christ Int’l (ccci.org), approached **OUTREACH** magazine’s parent company Outreach, Inc. (davincicode.outreach.com) to make these books available at near cost with the hope that churches across the country will get them into the hands of unbelievers and skeptical Christians in their community.

In 2004, Steve Clifford, pastor of WestGate Church in San Jose, Calif. (westgatechurch.org), preached a three-part sermon series on *The Da Vinci Code*, focusing on the three major areas of distortion in the book—the establishment of the Canon, Christ’s divinity and Jesus’ teachings about women, sexuality and the family.

“The fact that this freaked us out at all, that so many books needed to be published to debunk *The Da Vinci Code*, is an indictment against us, not the public,” says Clifford. “But the book is in no way a serious threat to the Christian

faith; this is a story Christians can engage with confidence and patience.”

THEOLOGY 101

The Council of Nicaea, the Canon of Scripture and the origins of Christian symbols aren’t usually common issues discussed from the pulpit. In fact, the basics of Christianity are often held for special weekly or monthly classes—and often for new members or Christians simply wanting a refresher course on the roots of their faith. Rarely is theology a focal point in a church’s ministry, and it’s almost never a part of a church’s outreach ministry.

But *The Da Vinci Code* makes a brief theology lesson easy, interesting and evangelistic, says Coast Hills’s Baugh. Christians and non-Christians alike are apt to approach churches or their Christian co-workers and friends with questions, rather than what typically happens—Christians and the Church giving answers to questions the unchurched aren’t even asking.

“When I preached *The Da Vinci Code* series, I’d tiptoe off the stage thinking, *I can’t believe I just got away with teaching Theology 101*,” Baugh recalls. “*The Da Vinci Code* puts apologetics back in the game. It allows us to teach theology in church. If we had done this before, people would have said, ‘This is so boring. What does this have to do with my life today?’ We can now bring some meat to the table that I don’t think we’ve had the opportunity to do before.”

JOINING IN THE SEARCH

As the Church begins to think about using this film and the questions it raises to reach out to the unchurched, it might do well to take a few lessons from the Sundance Film Festival, where the cultural conversation heats up among filmmakers after they’ve viewed each other’s new films, says Detweiler, who recently returned from the 2006 festival.

“Some filmmakers there are angry at God, some are questioning Him or raging at the Church. But at their core, most are on some form of search or quest. And this is revealed in the questions they’re asking through film,” he explains.

Likewise, after viewing *The Da Vinci Code* film, many people of all different beliefs and faith backgrounds will be seeking answers. It will be the Church’s responsibility to join in the search rather than simply refute the distortions.

Dallas Theological Seminary’s Bock thinks there are two levels—facts and feelings—to joining viewers’ conversations. “For some people, the facts are going to be very important,” he says. “It will be important to be able to respond to those questions, and the information that’s put forth in the varying debunking books can be helpful in doing that.”

But Bock says the church also needs to address the “so what?” factor.

“I think the secret in dealing with provocative questions is not in providing ‘right’ answers, but in reframing the discussion as Jesus so often did when He was being set up,” says Dave Ping, director of Equipping Ministries International (equippingministries.org). He encourages Christians to welcome the interest in Jesus with thought-provoking questions such as: *What do you think about Jesus? How have you come to your conclusions? Why do you think speculation about how Jesus lived stirs so much passion?*

Rather than wasting time debating an impersonal pop-culture theory, Ping hopes Christians will focus on the underlying central questions: Who is Jesus? What does He have to do with me? Where can I go to find the answers?

Bock adds, “For many Christians, this will also require a willingness to step →

back and say, 'Well, I don't really know that much about this either. Let's see what's going on.' Because I suspect that's true for a lot of believers."

And pastors who may not be well versed in the arts should seek help in joining the cultural conversation.

"Converse with the artists in your congregations," Detweiler counsels. "Find your artistic or cinematic members, particularly your younger ones, and figure out how to incorporate them into the life and worship of the church, to use their gifts."

DA VINCI'S POSITIVE LEGACY

Indeed, *The Da Vinci Code's* popularity has already exposed a dearth of knowledge about Church history among regular churchgoers. A positive by-product of the book and upcoming film might be increased attention on the part of pastors to teach their congregations about the formation of the Christian faith. Likewise, people sitting in the pews might be more

interested in hearing about it.

The full impact of *The Da Vinci Code* book and upcoming movie—both positive and negative—on non-Christians is impossible to calculate.

"Salvation certainly won't come from Hollywood," says Detweiler. "But movies give us an easy, non-threatening way to continue a conversation and deepen relationships with pre-believers that we've already started."

And the intrigue of conversations surrounding *The Da Vinci Code* has the potential to last for eternity.

Says Detweiler, "I think this movie is a prime opportunity to discuss the roots of the Christian faith: Who is Jesus? Where did the Church come from? Can we trust the

Bible? These questions will be on the mind of any person who sees the movie, inside or outside the congregation. To pastors, I say: 'Do your homework! Get ready.' ✕



—KEN BAUGH

As an associate editor at Christianity Today Inc., Lisa Ann Cockrel regularly writes film reviews from a Christian perspective. She's excited to review The Da Vinci Code.

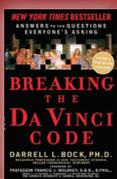
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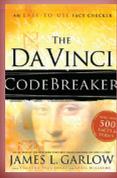
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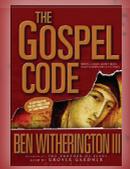
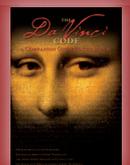
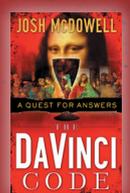


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