

SOLID GROUND

from Stand to Reason

May/June 2006

The Da Vinci Code Cracks

“Everyone loves a conspiracy.” – Robert Langdon, Harvard Religious Symbologist, The Da Vinci Code

Dear Friend,

I never thought it would happen. There I was, at a dead standstill in the middle of the 405 freeway in Los Angeles traffic, and I didn't care. The gridlock could continue all day as far as I was concerned.

I wasn't complaining. I wasn't fidgeting. I wasn't even paying attention. Instead, I was riveted to the words flowing from my in-dash CD player. A talented reader was keeping me spell-bound with a tale of murder, suspense, and intrigue.

The story was called *The Da Vinci Code*.

I'm not alone. To date nearly 50 million copies of Dan Brown's thriller have kept the midnight oil burning around the world. And those were the hardbound edition. The soft cover just came out with an initial release of five million. And then there's the movie.

No question about it, *The Da Vinci Code* is the blockbuster hit who's only rival in publishing success is the Bible. Which is ironic. Dan Brown's tale is frontal assault on the Jesus of Christianity that millions have placed their simple trust in for 2000 years.

Brown dishes up a convoluted conspiracy of corrupted Gospels, doctrinal deception, theological suppression, book burning, the Holy Grail and, climactically, Jesus' secret marriage to Mary Magdalene whose progeny remain to this day. The Vatican lurks in the shadows, of course – maneuvering, manipulating, even murdering – suppressing the real truth for two millennia.

JESUS GETS AN “UPGRADE”

According to Brown, the epicenter of the massive deception foisted on Christians the world over is the Council of Nicea, which met in 325 A.D. at the behest of Constantine. From this meeting “sprang the most profound moment in Christian history.”

Here are the “facts” related to us through Dan Brown's character, the historian Sir Leigh Teabing:

“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...

“[Jesus'] life was recorded by thousands of followers across the land.”
Teabing paused to sip his tea and then placed the cup back on the mantel. “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.



GUARD THE TREASURE

QUICK SUMMARY:

- According to *The Da Vinci Code*, the Bible as we know it today – along with Jesus' divinity – was fabricated at the Council of Nicea for political reasons. The authentic accounts of Jesus were destroyed. However, there is not a shred of evidence for these claims. According to those actually present at Nicea – Eusebius and Athanasius in particular – Christ's deity was the reason for Nicea, not the result of it.
- Writings from the first three centuries are replete with references to Jesus' divinity. Even the heretical Gnostics and the Modalists got this detail right.
- The New Testament Canon was never an issue at Nicea because the legitimacy of the four gospels had been decided centuries before. The Gnostic Gospels that Brown supports – like Thomas, Mary, and Philip – were not.
- None of the canonical Gospels report the most climactic event of the century, the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., strong evidence each was completed before then within decades, not centuries, of the crucifixion.
- No evidence suggests the New Testament evolved over time through countless translations and revisions. Instead, the academic analysis shows it to be the most reliable document from antiquity.

“Who chose which gospels to include?” Sophie asked.

“Aha!” Teabing burst in with enthusiasm. “The fundamental irony of Christianity! The Bible, as we know it today, was collated by the pagan Roman Emperor Constantine the Great.

“Constantine needed to strengthen the new Christian tradition, and held a famous ecumenical gathering known as the Council of Nicaea.”

Sophie had heard of it only insofar as its being the birthplace of the Nicene Creed.

“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 sacraments, and, of course the *divinity* of Christ.”

“I don’t follow. His divinity?”

“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?”

“Right,” Teabing said. “Jesus’ establishment as ‘the son of God’ was officially proposed and voted on by the Council of Nicaea.”

“Hold on. You’re saying Jesus’ divinity was the result of a *vote*?”

“A relatively close vote at that,” Teabing added....

“And I assume devout Christians send you hate mail on a daily basis?”

“Why would they?” Teabing countered. “The vast majority of educated Christians know the history of their faith....”

“The twist is this,” Teabing said, talking faster now. “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. From this sprang the most profound moment in Christian history.” Teabing paused, eyeing Sophie. “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. The earlier gospels were outlawed, gathered up, and burned.”

“Fortunately for historians,” Teabing said,

“some of the gospels that Constantine attempted to eradicate managed to survive. The Dead Sea Scrolls were found in the 1950s in a cave near Qumran in the Judean desert. And, of course, the Coptic Scrolls in 1945 at Nag Hammadi.... The scrolls highlight glaring historical discrepancies and fabrications, clearly confirming that the modern Bible was compiled and edited by men who possessed a political agenda – to promote the divinity of the man Jesus Christ and use His influence to solidify their own power base.” (231-234)

Though this is a work of fiction, Teabing’s testimony has rocked the confidence of many Christians. It’s understandable. There is an implicit trust relationship between writers of historical fiction and their readers. Readers expect an imaginary tale, but they trust the background information to be accurate. They count on the author to do his homework.

Brown invites that trust. An alert placed just before the Prologue under the bolded heading “FACT” reads, “All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate.”

It’s no wonder Christians are shaken. Teabing’s account is so lucid, so compelling, so convincingly told. The more controversial details are offered up as common knowledge to insiders, academics, historians, and intellectuals in general. Only the foolish faithful are still in the dark, unwitting dupes of Constantine and the Vatican.

But Dan Brown has betrayed our trust. For alert readers this is obvious even before second-checking the details.

How is it physically possible, for example – given that Jesus’ life “was recorded by thousands,” with more than eighty gospels being freely circulated for hundreds of years – for Constantine to gather up all of the handwritten copies from every nook and cranny of the Roman empire by the 4th century and destroy the vast majority of them?

With all the conveniences of modern technology at my disposal, I couldn’t do that with yesterday’s *LA Times* circulating in Orange County. How could Constantine’s minions do it by hand on foot over the entire civilized world of that time? Previous Roman rulers – Diocletian in 303 and Maximian in 304i – had tried and failed miserably.

Another question: If the deity of Christ was an idea invented by Constantine and completely foreign to Christ’s followers who viewed Him as a mere mortal, what explains the “relatively close vote” at Nicea? (In actual fact, with only two Egyptian bishops dissenting – Theonas and Secundus – out of 318 bishops,ii the vote wasn’t close at all.)

Again, if the early records of Jesus life are so corrupted and compromised with “countless translations, additions, and revisions,” if “history has never had a definitive version of the book,” from where does Teabing derive his reliable, authentic,



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unimpeachable biographical information about Jesus?

Finally, how does Teabing know that thousands of Jesus' followers wrote accounts of His life if the great bulk of these records were destroyed? This is the classic problem for conspiracy theorists: If all evidence was eradicated, how do they know it was there in the first place?

These problems are obvious on first glance. After a little sleuthing, however, more glaring discrepancies surface.

Brown claims Constantine's book-burning wasn't completely successful, that the famous Dead Sea Scrolls found in caves in Qumran "highlight glaring historical discrepancies and fabrications, clearly confirming that the modern Bible was compiled and edited by men who possessed a political agenda – to promote the divinity of the man Jesus Christ."

Brown might be forgiven for not getting the date right (the first scrolls were discovered in the 1940s, not '50s). He cannot be forgiven, however, for another misstep: *The Dead Sea Scrolls say nothing of Jesus*. There were no gospels in Qumran. Not one shred or shard or bit of pot mention His name. This is a complete fabrication.

THE COUNCIL OF NICEA

A full accounting of the misinformation, falsehoods, inventions, and distortions littering Brown's fiction is not possible here. I am not concerned here with Brown's fanciful conspiracy tales of the Holy Grail, Mary Magdalene's alleged marriage to Jesus, nor with the secret identity of His progeny living now in Paris under cover and out of reach of the Vatican. Another issue is more foundational.

None of those claims can be taken seriously unless

Brown first undermines the historical legitimacy of the canonical Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Only then can his revisionist history go forward.

Sir Teabing is Brown's mouthpiece for this effort. Teabing claims these records were tampered with by Constantine at the Council of Nicea. To advance his own political agenda, the Roman emperor rewrote history, destroying the true records that cast Jesus as a mere mortal and replacing them with documents that advanced the man of Nazareth as the divine Son of God.

Since this is the pivot upon which Brown's entire yarn spins, it's vital to ask, "What really happened at Nicea?"

If you want to know the true details of any event, it's best to consult those who were actually there. Eusebius of Caesarea and Athanasius, archdeacon of Alexandria, both wrote extensively about the controversy. They were also the central figures of the theological debate, along with the presbyter Arius, also of Alexandria.

The basic facts are these.³ Emperor Constantine summoned the Council and presided over it from June 14 to July 25, 325 A.D. 318 bishops attended along with two presbyters each. Three main points were discussed: the Easter question, the Meletian schism, and the divinity of Christ. Since this last issue was the precipitating reason *for* convening the council in the first place, it could hardly have been fabricated *by* the Council, as Teabing asserts.

In fact, *everyone* in attendance at Nicea, including the Arians, regarded Jesus as the "Son of God," however variously they may have understood its meaning. Arius denied the full deity of Christ, true enough, but didn't think Jesus was a mere mortal. Rather, he argued, Jesus was a unique creature,

a human body with no rational human soul. Instead, He was indwelt by a created, pre-incarnate spirit called the Logos. Ironically for Brown, then, the dissenting party led by Arius denied both the deity *and* the true humanity of Christ.

After a pitched debate and failed attempts at compromise offered by Eusebius, the orthodox party prevailed. The vote, as noted before, was a landslide with only two bishops opposing the final accords, affirming what had been taught from the beginning. Jesus was not a mere man; He was the son of God.

Surprisingly, even the early heretics agreed on this score.

THE HERETICS SPEAK

The first great doctrinal challenge to the church was Gnosticism. It existed in seminal form in the 1st century. In the 2nd century, though, it became a full-blown competitor with apostolic Christianity.

Though Gnosticism was a complex mixture of beliefs, at its core was a radical dualism between spirit and matter in which matter was inherently evil and spirit inherently good.

For the “Christian” forms of Gnosticism, then, it was unthinkable Christ could have a real physical body. Instead, some claimed, He only appeared embodied, giving rise to a heresy called Docetism (from the Greek *dokeo*, “to appear” or “seem”).

This raised problems for the incarnation. Note John’s warning in the face of the growing tendency to deny Jesus’ humanity: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God.” What was the test? “By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has *come in the flesh* is from God” (1 John 4:1-2). Early on, belief in a genuine incarnation was a test of orthodoxy. Mere appearances wouldn’t do.

Here’s the important point: Gnosticism *affirmed* that Jesus was divine. It fell afoul of Christianity in its denial of Jesus’ true human mortality, not His divine nature. This proves that Jesus’ divinity was not an invention of Constantine in the 4th century.

Even more damaging for Dan Brown, the vast majority of so-called “lost” gospels (particularly those from Nag Hammadi) were Gnostic in nature. Any unqualified appeal by Brown to Gnostic writings, then, is self-defeating. Many Gnostics would never, even in principle, affirm that Jesus was “a mortal prophet... a man nonetheless.”

Modalism surfaced next. It insisted Jesus was God, but denied any real distinction between the divine persons. Rather, Jesus was one mode of manifestation of God. In the Old Testament God revealed Himself as Father, in the New Testament as Son, and since Pentecost as the Holy Spirit.

The testimony of the heretics is an embarrassment for Brown. Both of these early heresies, in play for more than a 100 years before the reign of Constantine, affirmed the full

divinity of Jesus of Nazareth. This is exactly the *opposite* of what you’d expect if Brown’s assertions were correct.

But there’s more:

- The book of Romans, an uncontested Pauline epistle written c. 55 A.D., shows that the notion of Jesus’ divinity was circulating within 20 years of the crucifixion. Note the opening: “...*declared the Son of God* with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord.” – *Romans 1:4*
- Ignatius (AD 110-130) affirms Jesus as God: “We also have a Physician *the Lord our God, Jesus the Christ, the only-begotten Son and Word before time began*, but who afterwards became also man of Mary the virgin.” – *The Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians*
- Irenaeus (AD 115-190) writes: “...in order that through *Christ Jesus, our Lord, and God, and Savior, and King*, according to the will of the invisible Father, ‘every knee should bow’...” – *Against Heresies X.1*
- Justin Martyr (A.D. 110-165) writes: “In these books, then, of the prophets we found Jesus our Christ foretold as coming, born of a virgin...and being called the Son of God.” – *The First Apology of Justin, XXXI*

The ancient documents – available for anyone to read – speak clearly on this issue. Christ’s establishment as the Son of God was *not* “officially proposed and voted on by the Council of Nicea.” Rather, for three centuries before Constantine, massive numbers of early followers of Christ – both inside of orthodoxy and out – believed Jesus was “the Son of God.”

CONSTANTINE’S GREAT DECEPTION?

Brown is mistaken on still another claim. He asserts, “The Bible, as we know it today, was collated by the pagan Roman Emperor Constantine the Great.” This is a remarkable statement because the canon of Scripture *was never at issue at Nicea*, for good reason. For all practical purposes, the legitimacy of the four standard gospels had been decided centuries before.⁴

Though the Old Testament canon had been fixed before the time of Christ, the formal concept of New Testament canon did not develop until the 2nd century. Early on, the authoritative “rule” (or “canon”) was the teaching of either the Apostles commissioned directly by Christ, or those who were companions of apostles and wrote under their authority and tutelage (e.g., John Mark, companion of Peter and author of the Gospel of Mark, or Luke, the companion of Paul).

When the last apostle died, the emphasis naturally shifted to the written record of their instruction, the Gospels and letters (epistles) they left behind. Therefore, the preeminent question about any work was, Did it have apostolic authority?

Controversy arose only when a Gnostic named Marcion (c. 150 A.D.) flatly rejected, for theological reasons, works that until then had been accepted as authentic for nearly a century.

In the debate that ensued, v the early church identified three categories of text. The “Homologumena” consisted of those books that received unanimous support by all church leadership. This included 20 of the 27 New Testament books, *including all four Gospels*.

The “Antilegomena” were those contested. They received support from some members of church leadership, but not others. Some were ultimately rejected (Shepherd of Hermas, the Didache, Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians, the Second Epistle of Clement). Others were ultimately accepted (Revelation, Jude, James, Hebrews, 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John).

The final group – called variously the Pseudepigrapha, Apocrypha, or simply the “heretical books” – were “set aside as altogether worthless and impious,” according to Eusebius. These included hundreds of documents that received no support from the church and were considered completely spurious by all orthodox fathers. This group included more than 50 (not 80) apocryphal gospels, with the Gospel of Thomas specifically singled out by Eusebius as part of this group.

The most ancient catalog of canonical works is the Muratorian Canon (c. AD 200). This record was discovered by Ludovico Muratori in the Ambrosian Library in Milan, and published by him in 1740. Though the first portion of the fragment is missing, it mentions Luke and John specifically as the third and fourth Gospels – strongly implying Matthew and Mark came before it. In fact, Irenaeus quotes directly from all four canonical Gospels 30 years *before* the Muratorian list.

The inclusion of John is ironic in light of Teabing’s claims. The fourth Gospel is an irritation to liberal critics because of its “high Christology.” It is replete with mentions of Jesus as the Son of God, an idea Teabing says didn’t surface for another 155 years.

If Brown is correct about the Nicean conspiracy, we would *not* expect to see the four canonical Gospels singled out and affirmed early in the historical record. Yet that’s exactly what *do* find.

Works like the Gospel of Phillip or the Gospel of Mary (Magdalene) – which feature so prominently in Brown’s novel – were never taken seriously by the early church. Rather, they were opposed for a very good reason. They, like the other Pseudepigrapha, were late-comers. They lacked any connection with the original apostles and contradicted the records written by those who were eyewitnesses to Jesus’ life.

Why should we trust the Gospel of Phillip, for example, against Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John? Do we have evidence Philip and Mary are early, authentic, and reliable? How do we know they are “unaltered,” as Teabing claims? Brown cannot just say these things; he must *show* these things. Unless, of course, he’s simply writing a work of fiction.

No, the actual historical evidence shows an early consensus on the Gospels. The canonical Gospels had broad acceptance and were in early use by the church. The Gnostic Gospels like Thomas, Mary, and Philip were not. Nor were the “more than eighty gospels considered for the New Testament.” Which is why, in actual fact, they were never even considered.

NO LOST BOOKS

Still, many people are disturbed by the possibility of lost books of the Bible. Have archaeologists uncovered ancient biblical texts that cast doubt on the current canon of Scripture? Is it possible the Bible is incomplete?

These questions can be answered without ever doing any research. No ancient tomes need to be read, no works of antiquity perused. Curiously, the entire issue can be answered by careful consideration of one word: Bible.

The whole question of allegedly lost books of the Bible hinges on what the word Bible means. To a Christian, “Bible” means the inspired Word of God, which includes the notion of God’s authorship and His miraculous preservation.

The second possible definition of “Bible” concedes no supernatural ground. According to this view, the Bible is not God’s inspired and inerrant word. Rather, it is merely a statement of human beliefs adopted as creed by early Christian leaders.

On this view, the Bible represents a collection of books chosen by the early church to represent its own beliefs. A book that didn’t make the cut was rejected for one reason: early Christians didn’t accept its theology. The cause was human and political, not divine and supernatural. This is Dan Brown’s view.

So, the options are these: Either the word “Bible” means those books that are divinely inspired, or it means a mere a human document representing the beliefs of a religious group known as Christians. Given these two definitions, could any books of the Bible be lost?

Whether the supernatural claim is accurate or not, the first definition of “Bible” allows for no lost books because God cannot lose something. The lost books thesis would be reduced to this: “Certain books that almighty God was responsible to preserve got lost.” If the Bible is the Word of God (the first definition), then God’s power guarantees no portion of it could ever be misplaced.

Could there be lost books given the second definition,

that the Bible is of human origin, a collection of works reflecting the beliefs of early church leaders? The lost books thesis would be reduced to this: “Early church leaders rejected certain books as unrepresentative of their beliefs, that actually reflected their beliefs.” The contradiction is obvious. If the Bible is a collection of books that early church leaders decided would represent their point of view, they have the final word on what is included. Any books they rejected were never part of their Bible to begin with. Even by the second definition lost books of the Bible are a misnomer.

“Lost books” advocates often point out that rediscovered texts were missing because the fathers suppressed them. Bible critics think this strengthens their case. Instead it destroys their position by proving the “lost books” were not lost, but discarded. The early church acted fully within its authority when it rejected as non-canonical the Gospel of Thomas, for example. The leaders rightfully decided it did not represent their beliefs.

Has archaeology unearthed previously unknown ancient texts? Certainly. These books may be interesting, noteworthy, and valuable. The rediscovery of manuscripts such as the Gospel of Thomas is significant. Such books might be lost books of antiquity, great finds, even wonderful pieces of literature, but they are not lost books of the Bible.

DATING THE GOSPELS

Even though there can be no lost books of the Bible, this doesn't ensure the existing historical accounts of Jesus' life are accurate. That relies on another argument showing the canonical gospels were written early, boosting their credibility over second century competitors like the Gospels of Philip and Mary.

This argument hinges on two facts virtually uncontested in academic circles. First, the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts were written by the same author. It is irrelevant to my point whether or not the author actually was Luke the “beloved physician” and companion of Paul, as the early church believed. The important thing is that Luke/Acts form a literary unit. Second, the Apostle Paul was executed sometime during the Neronian persecution of the mid-60s. This also is not in dispute.

Here's the argument. First, the narrative in Acts ends abruptly with Paul in jail during his first Roman imprisonment, around 62. Why does it end this way? Most likely because this is when the account was written. Second, Luke's Gospel was written before Acts, placing it in the early '60s to late 50s. Third, even the most liberal critics place Mark and Matthew before Luke, with Mark generally considered the most primitive.

This places the first gospels in the mid to late-50s and possibly much earlier, putting them, on the outside, only 25

years from the crucifixion – powerful evidence for their reliability. The shorter the time, the less likely the distortion, the less chance for accretion of legend and fanciful stories, especially with so many first-hand witnesses still alive including most of the apostolic band.

Eminent New Testament scholar John A. T. Robinson gives another reason to be confident the Gospels were written early:

One of the oddest facts about the New Testament is that what on any showing would appear to be the single most datable and climactic event of the period – the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, and with it the collapse of institutional Judaism based on the temple – is never once mentioned as past fact.⁶

Since Luke recorded Jesus' prophesy of the temple's destruction (Luke 21:6), it is unthinkable he would not have pointed to its fulfillment had Jerusalem already fallen. Is it reasonable to believe not one Gospel writer would mention this to vindicate his message if the Gospels were late and this event had already taken place?

In fact, Robinson argues forcibly that every book of the New testament was completed before 70. By contrast, no one places the Gnostic contenders earlier than the second century.

Teabing is wrong when he says, “There is no definitive account of the life of Jesus.” We have four of them, written early, being actively used by the church centuries before Constantine.

THE BIBLE'S “EVOLUTION”⁷

In *The Da Vinci Code*, Sir Leigh Teabing states the Bible “has evolved through countless translations, additions, and revisions. History has never had a definitive version of the book.” Is he right?

The question of the authenticity of the New Testament is not really a religious question; it's an academic one. “Textual criticism” is the name for the scholarly method used to test all documents of antiquity, not just religious texts. It's not a haphazard effort based on hopes and guesses, but a careful linguistic process allowing an alert critic to determine the extent of possible corruption of any work.

Success depends on two factors. First, how many copies exist? Second, how old are the manuscripts? If the numbers are few and the time gap wide between the original and the oldest copy, the autograph is harder to reconstruct. However, if there are many copies and the oldest are reasonably close in time to the original, the scholar can be more confident she's pinpointed the exact wording of the initial manuscript.

For most documents of antiquity only a handful of manuscripts exist, some facing a time gap of 800-2000 years or more. Yet scholars are confident they can reconstruct the originals with a high degree of accuracy. In fact, virtually all

our knowledge of ancient history depends on documents like these. Even Sir Teabing must rely on this process to form educated opinions about the ancient past.

The manuscript evidence for the New Testament, by comparison, is stunning. The most recent count (1980) shows 5,366 separate Greek manuscripts. These are represented by early fragments, uncial codices (manuscripts in capital Greek letters bound together in book form), and minuscules (small Greek letters in cursive style).⁸

Among the nearly 3,000 minuscule fragments are 34 complete New Testaments dating from the 9th to the 15th Centuries.⁹

Uncial manuscripts providing virtually complete New Testaments date back to the 4th Century and earlier. Codex Sinaiticus is dated c. 340.¹⁰ The nearly complete Codex Vaticanus is the oldest, dated c. 325-350.¹¹ Codex Alexandrinus contains the whole Old Testament and a nearly complete New Testament and dates from the late 4th Century to the early 5th Century.

The most fascinating evidence comes from fragments dated before the time of Constantine. The Chester Beatty Papyri contains most of the New Testament and is dated mid-3rd Century.^{xii} The Bodmer Papyri II collection, whose discovery was announced in 1956, includes the first fourteen chapters of the Gospel of John and much of the last seven chapters. It dates from A.D. 200 or earlier.¹³

The most amazing find of all, however, is a small portion of John 18:31-33, discovered in Egypt. Known as the John Rylands Papyri and barely three inches square, it represents the earliest known copy of any part of the New Testament. The papyri is dated on paleographical grounds at A.D. 117-138 (though it may even be earlier),¹⁴ showing that the Gospel of John was circulated as far away as Egypt within 40-60 years of its composition.

Keep in mind that most of these ancient papyri are fragmentary. Only about 50 manuscripts contain the entire New Testament. Even so, the textual evidence is exceedingly rich, especially when compared to other works of antiquity.

Two other cross-checks on the accuracy of the manuscripts remain: 1) ancient versions and 2) patristic quotations, citations by early church Fathers.

Early in the history of the Church the Scriptures were translated into Latin. By the 3rd and 4th Centuries the New Testament had been translated into Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, and Georgian, among others. These texts helped missionaries reach new cultures in their own language as the Gospel spread and the Church grew.¹⁵ Translations – called “versions” – help modern-day scholars answer questions about the underlying Greek manuscripts.

In addition, there are ancient extra-biblical sources – catechisms, lectionaries, and quotes from the church Fathers – that cite Scripture at great length. Bruce Metzger notes, amazingly, “if all other sources for our knowledge of the text of the New Testament were destroyed, [the patristic quotations] would be sufficient alone for the reconstruction of practically the entire New Testament.”¹⁶

PLAYING SHERLOCK

You don't need to be a scholar to beat Brown at his game. Do your own historical sleuthing. The primary source material is available to virtually anyone, especially if you have access to the internet. Nothing is hidden or suppressed. Many of the ancient documents are available on Amazon.com or can simply be “Googled.”

In the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* you'll find ten full volumes of primary source documentation from before the Council of Nicea (available in hardbound or on the internet) affirming the early belief that Jesus was the Son of God. These include *Against Heresies*, the vigorous refutation of Gnosticism by Irenaeus of Lyon (ca. 125-202), and *Against Praxeas* (c. 208), a polemic by Tertullian against modalism and in defense of the Trinity.

The definitive source for early church history is Philip Schaff's *History of the Christian Church*. In Volume II, 548-556, Schaff chronicles the development of the doctrine of the divinity of Christ through the first three centuries before the Council of Nicea. Find a detailed account of the Council proceedings themselves – drawn principally from the eyewitness accounts of two of the central players, Eusebius and Athanasius – in Volume III, 622-633.

Athanasius wrote two works on the deity of Christ – *Defense of the Nicene Definition* and *On the Incarnation of the Word* – powerful evidence the Nicene decision was theological, not political.

The original Dead Sea Scrolls can be found in the Rockefeller Museum and the Shrine of the Book, both in Jerusalem under the care of Israel, not the Vatican. Microfilm copies of the Scrolls are available in over 80 libraries around the world, including The Huntington Library in Pasadena. Websites devoted to the Dead Sea Scrolls include the Israel Museum site, the Library of Congress site, and The Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Nothing in the scrolls speak of Jesus.

For Gnostic texts use the Nag Hammadi Library Index Search at: <http://www.webcom.com/gnosis/naghamm/nhsearch.html>.

For an exhaustive list (over 150 documents) of other early writings, some in their original languages with translation and commentaries including the Gospel of Phillip and the Gospel of Mary (Magdalene), go to www.earlychristianwritings.com.

Since we have manuscripts from a range of dates, if the Gospels were radically transformed as Teabing says, we would expect to find discrepancies in the earlier manuscripts that have survived. But we do not. The early minuscules are virtually the same as the later uncials.

Dan Brown has not done his homework. He is simply mistaken in his assessment of the New Testament documents. The biblical records actually show more textual integrity than any other of the works of antiquity that historians like Sir Leigh Teabing must rely on to ply their trade. The Bible has not been changed. The claim that it has is nothing more than urban legend.

It ought to be clear by now that Dan Brown, though a

clever author, is no historian. Virtually nothing in *The Da Vinci Code* that touches Christianity or the Bible is sound. Indeed, every time Sir Teabing says dismissively, "It's a matter of historical record," be prepared for a complete fabrication.

Enjoy the book, if you care to read it. But never forget, *The Da Vinci Code* is a work of fiction, nothing more.

Guarding the Treasure,



Gregory Koukl, President



¹ Schaff, Philip, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. II (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1910), 66, 68.

² Schaff, Vol. III, 629.

³ *Ibid.*, 622-633. Schaff drew extensively from the accounts of Eusebius and Athanasius.

⁴ "Nicea did not settle the canon, as one might expect, but the Scriptures were regarded without controversy as the sure and immovable foundation of the orthodox faith." [emphasis added], Schaff, Vol. II, 523.

⁵ See Geisler, Norman L., Nix, William E., *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), ch. 17, and Schaff, Vol. II., 516-524, for a thorough discussion.

⁶ Robinson, John A. T., *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 13.

⁷ This material is taken from a larger treatment of this topic found in the January 2005 issue of Stand to Reason's newsletter, *Solid Ground*.

⁸ Geisler, Norman L., Nix, William E., *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 402.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 392.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 391.

¹² *Ibid.*, 389-390.

¹³ Metzger, Bruce M., *The Text of the New Testament* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 39-40.

¹⁴ Geisler and Nix, 388.

¹⁵ Barnett, Paul, *Is the New Testament History?* (Ann Arbor: Vine Books, 1986), 44.

PUTTING YOUR KNOWLEDGE INTO ACTION

- You might want to consider reading *The Da Vinci Code* for yourself or listening to it on CD, as I did, to get familiar with the story.
- Remind people the book is a work of fiction. Even background details may be inventions. Why believe any of the story is sound?.
- Point out that Brown's claims about Jesus and Nicea are contradicted by the primary source documents themselves.
- Ask which historians have actually endorsed Brown's ideas. According to ancient history scholar Paul Maier, not a single notable one has.
- Inquire how it's physically possible to gather up and destroy the vast majority of biblical manuscripts scattered around the entire 4th century Roman empire.

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- Praise** God for all those faithfully becoming equipped as good ambassadors through STR. **Pray** for expanded opportunities to reach new people with our vision and training materials.
- Pray** for continued and steady provision during normally lean summer months.

NEATO!

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STR SPEAKERS SCHEDULE

Greg Koukl

MAY

- 6 Marin Covenant Church, Marin, CA Topic: [Tactics in Defending the Faith](#) conference
- 20 Christ Community Church, St. Louis, MO 7 p.m. Topic: [The Da Vinci Code Cracks](#) Contact: (314) 843-4600

JUNE

- 4 Faith Evangelical Church, Woodruff, WI 8:30 & 10:15 a.m. Topic: TBD, 6 p.m. Topic: [The Da Vinci Code Cracks](#) Contact: (715) 356-4311
- 11 Calvary Baptist Church, Huntington Beach, CA 6 p.m. Topic: [Truth Is a Strange Sort of Fiction: Understanding the Emergent Movement](#) Contact: (714) 962-6860
- 15 Biola Apologetics Series, La Mirada, CA Topic: [The Bankruptcy of Moral Relativism](#) Contact: (888) 332-4652
- 26-29 Christian Worldview Institute for Students, Garner, NC Topics: TBD Contact: (919) 938-3790

Steve Wagner

MAY

- 20 Justice for All exhibit training, location & time TBD Contact: (316) 683-6426
- 22-26 Justice for All exhibit training, location & time TBD Contact: (316) 683-6426

Brett Kunkle

JUNE

- 18-20 Families First Worldview Camp, Lincoln, NE Contact: JJ Springer (402) 435-3210
- 25-7/2 Utah Missions Trip; Rock Hills Church; Contact (949) 347-1540

Alan Shlemon

JUNE

- 5, 12 North Coast Church, Vista, CA 7:00 p.m (4 week course) Topic: [A Closer Look at Islam](#) Contact: Marie Osborne
- 19, 26 (760) 724-6700, ext. 216

As additional dates are scheduled, they will be posted on our web page at www.str.org

STAY ON TOP OF THE ISSUES

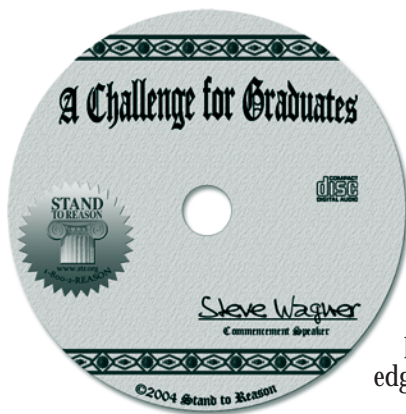
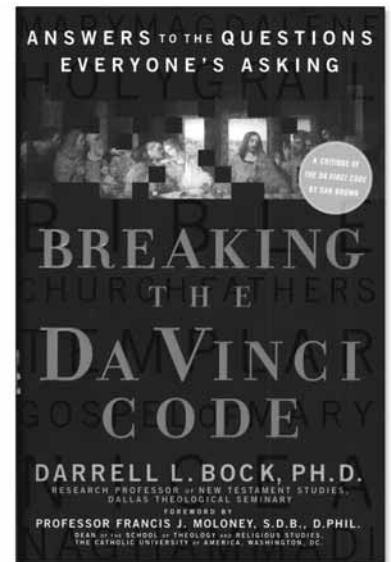
Featured Resources for May-June

Breaking the Da Vinci Code: Answers to the Questions Everyone's Asking

Darrell Bock 224 pages, (BK268) Retail \$19.99, STR price \$12.59

Do you have questions about the seven codes, expressed or implied, in Dan Brown's book? Darrell Bock's research uncovers the origins of these codes by focusing on the 325 years immediately following the birth of Christ.

Bock distinguishes fictitious entertainment from historical elements of the Christian faith for by seeing these differences, one can break the Da Vinci code.



A Challenge for Graduates Steve Wagner CD (CD229) \$5.00

This CD is perfect for the student in your life. Given to a graduating audience, Steve takes them through the challenges they will face as they step out into the world. He prepares them for the ideas that will confront them so they will respond with the knowledge and steadfastness needed to flourish in their faith and be effective for the Kingdom.

Christianity: The First Three Centuries Paul Maier (from the 2006 Masters Series in Christian Thought) 2 CDs (CD246) \$8.95

What happened to Jesus' disciples after the New Testament record ended? Did Nero condemn Paul or set him free? How did the church proceed? When were the Gospels written and who wrote them?

These common questions are rooted in a desire to understand how the New Testament church survived and even thrived, resulting in the faith that has survived the test of 2000 years. Dr. Maier is a historian and the author of several works of fiction about the early church that are informative and fascinating. Explore the roots of Christianity and come away with a brand new appreciation for the heritage on which modern Christianity is built.

