

Deciphering the

Da Vinci Code

A Christian Response by Yio Chu Kang Chapel

Pastor's Message

Standing on the Firm Foundation

Our faith is built on a firm foundation for Jesus Christ is the “chief cornerstone”. He is the One who holds everything together by His power.

But it should come as no surprise that there are forces bent on attacking this foundation. The attacks have continued through history. Satan, God's adversary, is active at work (Mark 4:15). He tries to confuse and cast doubt on God and His word, just as he had done in the Garden of Eden, when he told the woman “Did God really say ...?” (Gen 3:1).

Today, the attack comes in the form of a novel. While *The Da Vinci Code* (DVC) is written as fiction, it cunningly purports to present “facts”. It appears that some people, after reading it, found difficulty separating fact from fiction. Many have asked how we should respond to the DVC, noting that it claims to be a novel and at the same time carries spurious information that attacks the divinity of Christ and the reliability of the Bible.

I would like to suggest a three-pronged response, based on the warnings in Scriptures. **First, we must grow in our spiritual lives** (Eph 4:14-16). God desires everyone who has received new life in Christ to grow. If we remain as spiritual “infants”, we will be easily influenced or even manipulated by various kinds of teachings and philosophies. The picture is given of one tossed about by waves or blown about by strong winds. In the 1970s, Paul E. Little wrote 2 books, entitled *Know What You Believe* and *Know Why You Believe*. These 2 books clearly present the basics of the Christian faith and have helped many young Christians; they remain recommended reading for new believers today. You will remain firm when you are sure what you believe in and why. The Lord has graciously provided the church with gifts so that each one in the body of Christ will grow to maturity (Eph 4:14). We are forewarned of the dangers of remaining as spiritual infants.

Second, we must be on our guard (2 Pet 3:17). When we are on guard, we will be alert to any spurious teachings. At times, statements may be made by “theologians” with high academic standing. Some people may simply accept all that these academics write. We can count on the fact that God is truth. He does not lie. Therefore, God's revealed word to us is always consistent. So, we must not be taken in when various quarters try to pass off “new findings” which they either try to present as authoritative as Scripture, or use to cast doubt on God's word. We must compare Scripture against Scripture, for we can be certain God does not contradict Himself.

Third, we must be prepared to give an answer (1 Pet 3:15). Over the next few months, many who have either read Dan Brown's DVC or seen the movie are likely to bring up the subject of Christ and the Bible with us. Some may be genuinely asking. Others may just repeat the spurious information given by Brown. The DVC actually presents the church with an unique opportunity to share what we believe in. We must be prepared. That therefore means we need to equip ourselves by knowing what is recorded in the Bible about Christ and also have an appreciation of how the Bible came to us in this way.

Our faith is founded on Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who came into this world to reconcile mankind to God. He is the risen Lord. He has already won the victory. We can be certain that God's Word will be fulfilled fully. We can also be certain that the church stands on that firm foundation, and nothing, not even the gates of hell will overcome it. You and I are on the victory side. But as God's Word reminds us, let's strive to grow in our spiritual lives, be on our guard and be prepared to give an answer. May each of us stand firm on the Lord's promises and experience His empowerment as we are presented with opportunities to share about Jesus Christ, our Lord.

"But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have."

- 1 Peter 3:15

"The Da Vinci Code"

Should a Christian Read the Book or See the Movie?

The novel "The Da Vinci Code" is available in bookshops and will soon be screened in our cinemas on 18 May 2006. Some see the themes underlying the book and movie as a grave threat to the gospel message. Still others feel that they present an unprecedented opportunity to reach the unsaved. Should we as Christians read the book or watch the movie? There is no easy or simple answer, but both sides of the argument have a strong case.

PROS OF READING THE BOOK OR SEEING THE MOVIE:

Knowing the enemy. If we haven't read the novel or seen the movie, some may question the authority on which we explain the Christian position on the issues, such as the deity of Christ and the reliability of scriptures. In "The Da Vinci Code", Christians are portrayed as being afraid of the truth and willing to protect a two-millennia old conspiracy. Thus, familiarizing ourselves with the book and movie may show to others that we are willing to face the lies and address the issues. Christian missionaries throughout history also teach us a good model. They study the culture, language, habits, and lifestyles of the people they are attempting to witness. In addition, they pay attention to what the enemy is using to blind the people from the gospel.

The example of Paul in becoming all things to all men (1 Corinthians 9:19-27). In order to reach different people, Paul said, "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some." He exposed himself to what they were exposed to in an attempt to lead them to Christ at all costs. In Acts 17:16-34, Paul addresses Jews, Greeks, Epicureans, and Stoics -- using their philosophies and gods -- to build common ground and point them to Christ. Paul must have read their literature and examined their false claims so that he would be able to proclaim the truth.

CONS OF READING THE BOOK OR SEEING THE MOVIE:

Risk of being led astray (1 Peter 1:15-16). When we expose ourselves to heresies, we risk being led astray. We could become confused about what the truth is. We therefore must be on our guard to monitor what we allow into our hearts and minds, so that we do not stray from Christ. If we are not careful, we can adopt values of the world in very subtle ways. Romans 12:2 says, "...but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will."

Wasting our time. Some may regard the controversy surrounding the book and movie a waste of time. Certainly, there should be priority given to reading and applying the truths of Scripture to our lives. If we neglect the amount of time we spend in God's Word, then we expose ourselves to the risk of allowing ourselves to conform to the patterns of this world. Some may however work hard to build a life centered around just Christians and Christian culture. These individuals are in danger of missing the call of Christ in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20).

Supporting the "The Da Vinci Code" agenda. Some have said that they do not want to support any secular organization or individuals promoting an agenda opposed to the truth of Scripture. This is understandable but can be managed creatively: one could borrow the book from the library or friend, obtain one of the many available Christian books or videos addressing the specific claims of the book or movie.

CONCLUSION

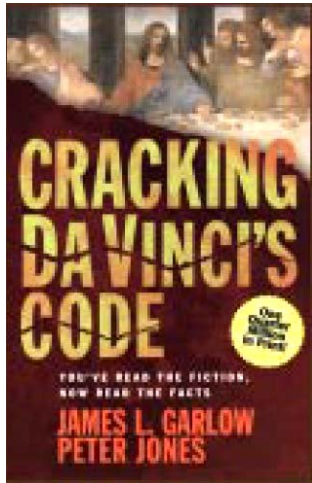
There are good arguments for deciding for or against reading the book or watching the movie. Whether or not Christians feel convicted one way or another, we should commit the issue to the Lord and ask for His guidance on how each one of us can make use of the opportunity for furthering His kingdom.

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"Test all things. Hold fast to what is good."

- 1 Thessalonians 5:21

Book Review 1



Cracking Da Vinci's Code, James L. Garlow and P. Jones, Cook Communications, 2004

There are currently many Christian books dealing with the claims in the Da Vinci Code (DVC). *Cracking Da Vinci's Code*, however, was written soon after DVC came out. What also sets this book apart is its easy writing style, which is sprinkled with humour and aimed at the average reader. But the two authors – Garlow and Jones – are no academic lightweights. They are scholars holding degrees in theology and history from Harvard Divinity School, Princeton Theological Seminary, and several other seminaries. Between the two of them, they have authored more than a dozen books.

The book does engage the DVC seriously and tackles head on the issues of who Jesus is, the Gnostic gospels, revisionist Christian history, the value of women in the bible, and the rise of modern-day paganism. Each chapter in *Cracking Da Vinci's Code* opens with a running story about a young woman struggling with the issues in DVC. I thought these were a slight distraction, but did like the sidebars scattered throughout the book which provide insightful information about history, art and da Vinci himself. At the end of the book is a useful personal study guide.

All in all, this is good book through which to understand the Christian response to the claims in the DVC. It was the first such book I read and I would recommend it readily. It is available from local Christian bookstores, and from the National Library and its branches.

- reviewed by David Loh

Book Review 2

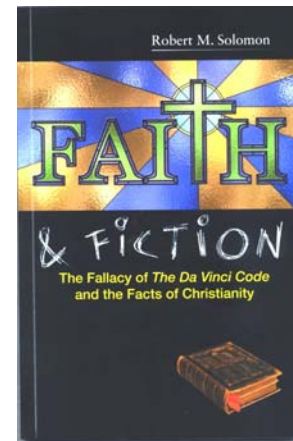
Faith & Fiction: The Fallacy of the Da Vinci Code and the Facts of Christianity

By Robert M. Solomon, Genesis Books (2006)

“God [has] an interest in preserving the truth, for the truth [has] to do with His self-revelation in Jesus, and our salvation... the real facts of orthodox Christianity stand up to scrutiny.”

– Bishop Robert M. Solomon, from the closing chapter of “Faith & Fiction”

A friend of mine told me a lady in his church recently informed her priest that she no longer wished to be baptised, despite having requested and undergone a pre-baptism course. A young believer, she said that her faith had been badly shaken after reading Dan Brown's fictional thriller “The Da Vinci Code” (the DVC).



I am not sure how many people have found themselves in the same situation as the lady I mentioned above. But, more than three years after the DVC first climbed the best-sellers' lists, it continues to be in the limelight. It has been recently made into a movie starring Tom Hanks and Audrey Tautou, and has generated the kind of media hype we have recently seen with Mel Gibson's “The Passion of the Christ”. More importantly, it has provided a continuing opportunity for us to have conversations with pre-believing friends, family members and colleagues about Jesus Christ and Christianity.

Dr. Robert Solomon, Bishop of the Methodist Church in Singapore, has responded to the DVC phenomenon by writing an elegant and concise book. In his preface, he emphasises that Dan Brown's book revives old lies and makes unsubstantiated claims based on unreliable sources. He goes on to warn that since many ordinary Christians know little about church history, there is a real risk that they will be confused or readily believe the falsehood that is presented in the DVC as fact: "the early heresies, Church Councils, Church Fathers and creeds are largely unknown areas of knowledge... ask a Christian how the New Testament was formed and chances are he does not know". This is the context for Dr. Solomon's writing this book and publicly speaking on the DVC on many occasions.

Dr. Solomon starts off by succinctly setting out the dozen or so key claims made by Brown in the DVC—claims that purport to strike at the very foundation of Christianity and allege a vast and historical "conspiracy" on the part of the Catholic Church. These allegations are helpfully categorised into two main issues—the reliability of the Bible, and the divinity of Christ. The other claims relating to the 'Holy Grail', the secret society called the "Priory of Sion", the secret codes supposedly embedded in Leonardo da Vinci's artworks, and even the supposed marriage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene, are all addressed in relation to these two issues.

Dr. Solomon also examines Brown's resources and, like many other reviewers, he comes away disappointed with Brown's weak scholarship and unscrupulous disregard for the truth. Many of the books which Brown has relied upon in his 'research' are identified as seriously inadequate and unreliable.

In fact, it is shown that many of the claims in the DVC merely regurgitate conspiracy theories recently revived by neo-Gnostic writers like Elaine Pagels and the preposterous trinity of Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln (joint authors of 'Holy Blood, Holy Grail'). More importantly, Dr. Solomon points out that these books-- and the documents they are based on-- are unable to withstand the same kind of academic and historical scrutiny that the New Testament books have undergone in the past 1,800 years.

In the next part of his book Dr. Solomon examines the claim that the New Testament is unreliable and the result of a deliberate attempt by the Roman Emperor Constantine and a group of bishops to shape Christianity for political gain. There is a concise explanation of how the Old Testament came to comprise a recognised body of authoritative books by the time Jesus taught in the synagogues. Dr. Solomon goes on to explicate the process by which the New Testament books were inspired, written, circulated and recognised as authoritative even before 325 A.D. (when the bishops gathered in Nicaea for the first ecumenical council). History clearly shows that the New Testament books were written before the so-called 'gnostic' or secret texts that Brown erroneously cites as evidence of an alternative version of Christ's life and teachings. Hence, bible scholars agree that the Nicaea Council did not arbitrarily and deliberately select some books for the canon and omit others (as Brown claims), but rather that the conviction and widespread practice of the church in regarding certain books as divinely inspired, was officially confirmed in the fourth century. Dr. Solomon quotes the renowned New Testament scholar Bruce Metzger as saying that "the New Testament canon is not an authoritative list of books, but a list of authoritative books". This is illuminating to a Christian who has not previously thought of the New Testament canon in this way.

Dr. Solomon rounds off this part of his book by summarising some of the main unorthodox teachings such as Marcionism and Montanism that emerged in the early days of the church—useful information for the seeker who wishes to know the origins of some of the heresies that persist in various forms to this day.

The next part of Solomon's book addresses the second key issue raised by the DVC—that the early Christians regarded Jesus Christ as merely human, and that the doctrine of Christ's divinity was due to the powerful manipulations of certain people in the church. Dr. Solomon takes us through an overview of the evidence that Christ's divinity was an integral part of the church's teachings from the very beginning-- starting with the recorded statements Jesus made about Himself, in conjunction with the many miracles He performed, and even in the face of violent opposition from people who accused Him of equating Himself with God. The divinity of Christ is therefore a teaching introduced and claimed by Jesus Himself, not a subsequent invention of the church. In the New Testament, Jesus is called God (*theos*) seven times, including the account of doubting Thomas confessing Christ as Lord in John 20:27-29.

Dr. Solomon goes on to discuss the Council of Nicaea, which was convened to address the heresy of Arianism, a teaching that called into question the divinity of Jesus. The Council drafted and adopted the Nicene Creed, which formalised the key tenets of Christian belief and made clear that there was no place for the Arian heresy. Interestingly, it is pointed out that the vast majority of the bishops present at the Council bore marks of persecution—a testimony to the fact that they were unlikely to be men who took the politically expedient path as claimed in the DVC.

Dr. Solomon concludes by saying that in fact, the entire scripture (including the Old Testament) teaches the divinity of Christ, and that the disciples, being eyewitnesses to Christ's work, death and resurrection, consistently taught this doctrine from the beginning. Hence, while Dan Brown is entitled to his personal belief that Christ is not God, his assertion that Jesus' disciples and the early church shared this belief simply cannot be supported. Indeed, the well-established historical record points to the opposite view.

What I find especially commendable in *Faith & Fiction* is that it does not shy away from admitting that the paradox of Christ's identity as both God and man is not easy to understand. However Dr. Solomon shows that this doctrine was revealed in scripture and taught by Christ's apostles. Crucially, this doctrine has been faithfully passed down over many years, during which time it has been investigated by minds more exacting than Dan Brown's and stood up to scrutiny.

Before reading this book, I had heard Bishop Solomon speak on various subjects and I knew him as a gifted communicator with the ability to elucidate difficult issues. Written in clear and accessible prose, *Faith & Fiction* exposes the problems with the ideas, both the glaring and the subtle, contained in the DVC. Dr. Solomon's book responds to the DVC phenomenon with assurance and challenges us, as followers of the one true God, to know what we believe and why.

The theologian Albert Mohler quoted GK Chesterton in reminding us that orthodoxy is not only true; it is infinitely more interesting than heresy. It is alive and compelling and life-changing. Heresies come and go by fashion, but the truth is unchanged and unchangeable.

The Christian lady I mentioned at the start of this article agreed to be counselled further on the issues raised by the DVC. It is my hope that she, as well as other Christians who are confused by the spurious messages in the DVC, will come to see that our faith is based on the sure foundation of Jesus Christ. Dr. Solomon's timely book can be a valuable signpost to point them and all of us, to the past and present Jesus that we know, believe and confess as our Lord.

- reviewed by Aaron Lee

People may die for lies that they believe to be truths. But why would someone die for the sake of something he knows to be a lie?

Study Guide

(Suggestion: do this with a family member or friend.)

1. Read and reflect on the following verses from Scripture

<p>1 Corinthians 15</p> <p>¹²But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. ¹⁵More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.</p>	<p>Hebrews 10</p> <p>¹⁹Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ²³Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.</p>
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2. Read and reflect on the Nicene Creed

Nicene Creed

(contemporary version from the Consultation on Common Texts)

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in Being with the Father.

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary and became truly human.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered, died and was buried.

On the third day he rose again in fulfillment of the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father (and the Son)

Who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.

Who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.*

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

(* universal)

3. Then, read and reflect on the first 3 of our church's Statements of Faith.

1. **Concerning THE BIBLE:** The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are inspired by God and thus infallible, completely reliable, and the supreme authority in all matters of faith and practice.
2. **Concerning GOD:** There is one true God, eternally existent in three Persons -- Father, Son, the Holy Spirit -- and entirely sovereign over creation, history, revelation, salvation, and final judgement.
3. **Concerning our LORD JESUS CHRIST:** He is God incarnate, was born of the virgin Mary, lived a sinless human life and performed divine miracles; He died as a vicarious, atoning sacrifice by shedding His blood for our sins and to destroy the works of Satan; He was raised bodily from the dead, ascended to heaven, continues His mediatory work, and will personally return in power and glory.

4. Reflect on the following questions and share your thoughts with your family member or friend.

- a) Why is it so hard for some people to acknowledge that the Truth exists?
- b) Our conviction that the Bible is the Word of God is based on faith and years of carefully study. Do you believe that the Bible is trustworthy? Why or why not?
- c) If Jesus Christ is not God, what implications would it have on your faith?
- d) If Jesus Christ is the Truth, the Way and the Life, what implications does this have for your faith?
- e) What are some things that prevent you from seeing the Truth and experiencing it in your life?
- f) How firm is your knowledge of who Jesus Christ is? If your faith was challenged, could you defend it?

5 Suggested closing prayer:

"God of Wisdom, You know and understand all things. Apart from You we are nothing. Please guide us in our thoughts and actions, and guard us with Your glory, that our lives may be a holy and acceptable sacrifice to You. Help us to be always ready give a wise and gentle answer to those who ask us why we put our faith in You. Most of all, let our very lives testify to the truth of Jesus Christ. In His Name we pray, Amen."

Resources for Further Study

Christianity Today's Special Da Vinci Code section
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/special/davincicode.html>

Covenant Evangelical Church's Da Vinci Code Project
<http://www.davincicode.org.sg/index.php>

Da Vinci Decoded by Cross Communications
<http://www.davinci-decoded.com/content/index.asp>

The Da Vinci Code Hoax from About Bible Prophecy
<http://www.aboutbibleprophecy.com/davinci.htm>

The Da Vinci Code Dialogue
<http://www.thedavincialogue.com/index.cfm>

Leadership U's resource page
<http://www.leaderu.com/focus/davincicode.html>

The Da Vinci Code- Fiction Based on Fiction
<http://www.contenderministries.org/discrepancies/davincicode.php>

Overview of the False Teachings in the Da Vinci Code
<http://www.probe.org/content/view/127/169/>

An easy way to remember why the Bible is completely reliable
<http://www.equip.org/free/DB011.htm>

Article from Answers in Genesis
<http://www.answersingenesis.org/docs2004/0413davinci.asp>