



## **Debunking *The Da Vinci Code***

*The Da Vinci Code* by novelist Dan Brown has been on the NY Times hardcover **fiction** best-seller list since this past summer.

The definition of **fiction** according to the *American Heritage Dictionary*:

1. An imaginative pretense.
2. A lie.
3. A literary work, such as a novel, whose content is produced by the imagination and is not necessarily based on fact.

*The Da Vinci Code* is a murder mystery shrouded in a conspiracy theory, a novelistic thriller, an airplane book, the kind of book you read when you want to waste time, an easy read that combines a fast narrative pace with short chapters.

The confusion about this book begins on the opening page where the author, prior to actually beginning his story, states that: “All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents and secret rituals in this novel are accurate.” Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, there is so much that is historically false in this book that it’s hard to know where to begin.

One of the main characters in the book is an Englishman named Sir Leigh Teabing who is actually the bad guy, the mysterious “Teacher” responsible for ordering the murder of the curator of the Louvre with which the book opens. But Mr. Brown never lets the fast paced action of the book stand in the way of a good lecture and beginning with chapter 55, that’s exactly what the Teabing character delivers.

This morning I want to begin by looking at some of the things that are said there about the Bible and the 1<sup>st</sup> Ecumenical Council.

**The Lord Jesus, the Bible and the 1<sup>st</sup> Ecumenical Council**  
**according to *The Da Vinci Code***

“The Bible did not arrive by fax from heaven” declares Teabing. “The Bible is a product of man, my dear. Not of God. The Bible did not magically fall from the clouds. The Bible, as we know it today, was collated by the pagan Roman emperor Constantine the Great. In 325 AD, he decided to unify Rome under a single religion: Christianity. Constantine needed to strengthen the new Christian tradition and held a famous gathering known as the Council of Nicea. 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. Jesus’ establishment as the Son of God was officially proposed and voted on by the Council of Nicea. A relatively close vote at that. Nonetheless, establishing Christ’s divinity was critical to the further unification of the Roman Empire and to the new Vatican power base. 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.”

Let’s look at several of these assertions.

**First:** “The Bible as we know it today was collated by...Constantine the Great [who] commissioned and financed a new Bible.” This leaves the impression that Constantine determined which books would constitute the New Testament. This is totally and completely false. As a matter of historical fact, although there was a great deal of consensus among the Churches as to what constituted the New Testament well before the Council of Nicea, the first person to list the 27 books that all Christians today accept as the New Testament was not Constantine the Great but Athanasius the Great, the bishop and patriarch of Alexandria in Egypt, in a circular letter to all the Churches in Egypt written in 367AD, 42 years after the 1<sup>st</sup> Ecumenical Council. It was not Constantine who determined the canon of the New Testament as part of a political power play but the Church, in the persons of its bishops and teachers.

**Second:** We would agree that the New Testament “did not arrive by fax from heaven.” The books of the New Testament were written by the apostles in order to get the story about Jesus straight. This is made clear, for example, in the opening verses of the Gospel of Luke 1: 1-4, where Luke, a friend and disciple of the apostle Paul, states that he wrote his gospel as “an orderly account” of the life, ministry, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus after having “carefully studied” and consulting “eyewitnesses.” Virtually all scholars agree that Luke’s gospel was written sometime between 80 and 90 AD *at the latest*. Some scholars theorize that his gospel was written even earlier. Mark’s gospel was certainly written earlier, no later than 65AD, probably in Rome, within only a few years of the execution of Peter and Paul during the persecution of Christians under Nero.

All of the Gospels proclaim that Jesus was *not* “a mortal prophet” and the disciples understood that Jesus was far more than just a man. When the disciples are asked by Jesus, “Who do you say that I am?” the apostle Peter responds: “You are the Christ, the

Son of the living God!” (Matthew 16:16). Nathaniel, another one of the 12 apostles, declares to Jesus, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” (John 1:49). After Jesus calms a storm and walks on water, the Gospel of Matthew records that the disciples “exclaimed: Truly you are the Son of God!” (Matthew 14:33). In fact, Jesus is called “the Son of God” more than fifty times in the books of the New Testament! It would certainly be a surprise to the apostles (including Paul) to learn that they did not proclaim Jesus to be the Son of God and that this had to wait until the 1<sup>st</sup> Ecumenical Council. It is therefore utterly false to assert that “Jesus was viewed by his followers as a mortal prophet...a great and powerful man, but a man nonetheless” prior to the Council of Nicea. Just the opposite is true: the 1<sup>st</sup> Ecumenical Council was held in Nicea to uphold the New Testament teaching that Jesus is the Word and Son of God against the false teaching of an Egyptian man named Arius, a priest who taught that Jesus was more than a man but less than God – a kind of super angel. Athanasius, the future patriarch of Alexandria, attended the 1<sup>st</sup> Ecumenical Council as a young deacon. And, by the way, the vote was not “relatively close” at all. Of the 318 bishops who attended, all but 2 sided with the New Testament and the apostles and not Arius.

***Third, and finally for this morning:*** In the 4<sup>th</sup> century, during the reign of Constantine, there was no such thing as “the new Vatican power base.” This is little more than an anti-Roman Catholic slur, one of many contained throughout the book. In fact, there was no such thing as the Vatican as we understand it today. For Mr. Brown, the author of *The Da Vinci Code*, the only Church is the Roman Catholic Church and he reads back into the 4<sup>th</sup> century the medieval rise and development of the papacy in the West. This is anachronistic. The Vatican, as we understand it today, is the result of the fall of the Roman Empire in western Europe in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries, the increasing civil responsibilities of the papacy during the early Middle Ages, the emergence of the papal states and a number of other historical processes stretching over many centuries, long after Constantine’s death. And finally, the modern Vatican state is a creation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the rise of Italian nationalism.

We’ll continue looking at the errors contained in *The Da Vinci Code* in next week’s sermon!

