

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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WHO IS JESUS?

Depending on your viewpoint, Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* is either a great literary yarn, a publishing world cottage industry, an act of great Biblical heresy, or a marketing masterpiece that has yielded franchise after franchise in virtually every modern medium (or all of the above!). Since its publication March 18, 2003, the book has sold more than 46 million copies in 44 different languages, logging more than 150 weeks on the *New York Times* bestseller list, including 54 of them at number one. The book is expected to reach the 100 million mark before the end of the year. It has become a golden goose for entrepreneurs in every arena, spawning television documentaries, bus tours, and more than a dozen books (including apologies, responses, rebuttals, spoofs, and tie-ins alike). Last March, Anchor Books shipped 100,000 copies of a paperback edition of *The Da Vinci Code: Special Illustrated Edition*. On May 19, Doubleday will release *The Da Vinci Code Illustrated Screenplay: Behind the Scenes of the Major Motion Picture*, synchronizing with the theatrical release of a \$125 million blockbuster film adaptation, directed by Academy Award winning Ron (Opie) Howard (*A Beautiful Mind*, *Apollo 13*) penned by Oscar winner Akiva Goldsman (*A Beautiful Mind*, *Apollo 13*), and starring two-time Oscar winner Tom Hanks in the role of the Harvard professor of religious symbology, Robert Langdon, as well as Audrey Tautou (Amelie) as Sophie Neveu, Jean Reno (*The Professional*) as detective Bezu Fache, Sir Ian McKellen (*Lord of the Rings*) as Sir Leigh Teabing, the world-renowned historian, and Paul Bettany (*Firewall*) as the self-flagellating Silas.¹

When asked if he was a Christian, Dan Brown answered, "Yes. Interestingly, if you ask three people what it means to be Christian, you will get three different answers. Some feel being baptized is sufficient. Others feel you must accept the Bible as absolute historical fact. Still others require a belief that all those who do not accept Christ as their personal savior are doomed to hell. Faith is a continuum, and we each fall on that line where we may. By attempting to rigidly classify ethereal concepts like faith, we end up debating semantics to the point where we entirely miss the obvious – that is, that we are all trying to decipher life's big mysteries, and we're each following our own paths of enlightenment. I consider myself a student of many religions. The more I learn, the more questions I have. For me, the spiritual quest will be a lifelong work in progress."² This is, as Andrew Kostenberger recently pointed out, very revealing indeed. Brown identifies himself as a "non-traditional Christian," a spiritual seeker following his "own path of enlightenment." He is "a student of many religions." This seems to imply that he does not believe Jesus is God or the only way to God as the Bible claims (John 14:6), because, if so, it would be illegitimate for everyone to follow their own path of enlightenment. It also means that Brown does not hold a very high view of the Bible, because he substitutes his own personal religious philosophy for the teaching of Scripture itself. If anything, for Brown's own religious views to be validated, it would be helpful to find some other sources outside the Bible that relativize Jesus' and the Bible's exclusive claims, and this is exactly what Brown does throughout the novel.³

Edmund Clowney provides us with this important warning, "There is danger that you will begin to worship an imaginary Christ, not the Christ who says the things that are written, but a Christ of your

own imagination, a harsh Christ who has not the meekness of Jesus, or a permissive Christ who is not the Holy One of God. It is so easy for us to invent another Christ and fail to be in subjection to the true Lord.”⁴ The late John Gerstner persuasively argued that unless you come to a biblical understanding of Jesus (specifically that He was fully God and fully man), you are *not* a Christian -- period.⁵ But who is (or was) Jesus? There is the traditional view, of course, but hardly anyone (even among professing Christians) seems interested in the Christ who has come down to us in terms of orthodox theology.

- I. **SUPERNATURAL RECOGNITION (Luke 4:34).** *I know who you are.* The demon recognized Jesus as “the Holy One of God,” recalling Luke 1:35 (cf. Acts 3:14; John 6:69). That Luke took this to be essentially a synonym for *Christ, Lord, Son, and Son of Man* is evident from Luke 4:41, where the demons were able to say this because they knew that Jesus was the Christ. In 1:35, it is a synonym for “Son of God.” We are not told how the demon knew Jesus’ identity, but the assumption is that they possessed supernatural knowledge and thus recognized Him. Thus they provided a reliable witness to Jesus’ identity as Luke pointed out in 4:41.⁶ We learn from James 2:19 that demons do have a knowledge about God, but this confession of Jesus as the Holy One of God is strictly a true acknowledgement and not a saving confession as in Romans 10:9. In the word of Geldenhuys, “This is not an exclamation of surprise but of terror and dismay. In the presence of the Holy One the demon is convicted by the knowledge that for him and his kind only destruction is waiting. He knows and recognizes Christ as the Holy One of God, and therefore cries out, shuddering with terror.”⁷ “It is a pity,” moaned Scroggie, “that men deny the deity of Christ when demons acknowledge it.”⁸
- II. **APOSTOLIC CONFESSIO (John 6:69).** The context of Peter’s confession as the Sent One of God is dramatic and reflects the deep tension of the situation. The negative force of Jesus’ question conveys a certain pathos, which should be retained: “You (plural) also do *not* wish to go away, do you?” Peter’s reply on behalf of the Twelve yields three separate assertions: (1) There’s no one else to go to! They who have (truly) seen and (truly) heard Jesus know that there is none beside Him (cf. Isa. 46:9; Acts 4:12). (2) Jesus speaks words that give to those who receive them the life of the world to come. (3) The expression of faith and hope has grown to fuller faith and knowledge (observe the perfect tense in v. 69 *pepisteukamen*, lit. “We have come to a place of faith and continue there,”⁹ and *egnōkamen*, lit. “We have recognized the truth and hold it”¹⁰), they now really believe and have come to know that Jesus is “the Holy One of God.”¹¹ The title is no ordinary messianic designation. That is “holy” which belongs to God; hence, Jesus stands over against the world simply as the One who comes from the other world and belongs to God. Standing in that unique relation to God, He embodies the holiness of God, whom Israel confessed as “the Holy One of Israel.” To confess Jesus as the Holy One of God, accordingly, is to give faith’s response to the utterance of Jesus in v. 21: “I am.” In the context of the Gospel as a whole, the Holy One of God, who has been consecrated by the Father and sent into the world (10:36), brings His mission to its God-ordained culmination in consecrating Himself as a sacrifice for the world (17:19). He is the holy Redeemer.¹² Peter’s answer is a genuine confession not only because in it he adopts Jesus’ word as his own (cf. v. 63b) but also because the faith that comes to expression in it reveals the awareness that Peter is confronting a radical choice: when life is at stake there is no other way to go than that of following Jesus (“to whom else . . .?” cf. 14:6). Verse 69 brings out the most basic component in the answer. It is not merely a spontaneous reaction of fidelity and attachment to Jesus’ challenging question; it reveals a deepened insight on the part of the disciples into the identity of the person in whom they have believed: “We have believed and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God.” The certainty of faith consists and rests in what it has grown to understand as its object: “The believer does not speak of himself but of Him on Whom He believes.”¹³

Summation: In light of the several indications in the Gospels of Peter's growing appreciation of the Deity of Christ, though it is true that his term of address here ("Lord") "could mean much or little" in itself, in this context Morris writes, "there can be no doubt that the word has the maximum, not the minimum meaning of the ascription of Deity to Jesus."¹⁴ However, this is not how Dan Brown sees the matter. In *The Da Vinci Code* we read "My dear," declared acclaimed historian Teabing, "until that moment in history (the Council of Nicea), Jesus was viewed by His followers as a moral prophet . . . a great and powerful man, but a man nevertheless. 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 Nicea." "Hold on. You're saying Jesus' divinity was the result of a vote?" "Yes, and a relatively very close one at that." (p. 233.) Contrary to Dan Brown's ridiculous claims in *The Da Vinci Code*, the Council of Nicea did *not* elevate Jesus to the status of Deity. The Deity of Christ is explicitly taught in the New Testament and affirmed by every significant Church Father *prior* to Nicea. Regarding our text, note the following observations. *First* as for Peter's statement "You are the Holy One of God," while it is certainly a messianic title, several things can also be said in favor of viewing it as including the further affirmation, by implication, of Jesus' divine origin and character. The first factor is Peter's growing appreciation for who Jesus was. We noted earlier his confession of Jesus as his "Lord" (and that in the divine sense) on the occasion of his call to become "a fisher of men" in Luke 5, when, awed by Jesus' supernatural knowledge and power over nature, he acknowledged his own sinfulness over against the majestic and ethical holiness of Jesus. We noted that his title of address there and here ("Lord") suggest Deity, and once a man has begun to apprehend that Jesus is divine, no title (with the exception of those that clearly mark him out as true man) he ever employs in referring to him can be totally void of intending the ascription of Deity. *Second*, while this title ("the Holy One of God") is applied to Jesus on only one other occasion, leaving little room for the extensive comparative study of the title, that one other occasion does cast some light on its meaning here. The title occurs in the mouth of the demoniac in the synagogue at Capernaum, clearly revealing the demon's awareness of who Jesus was (Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34). The demon was obviously fearful of Jesus and implied that he had the power to cast it into hell, suggesting thereby that Jesus possessed divine authority and power as "the Holy One of God." *Third*, the stress on holiness in the title is significant. It reminds us of the frequently-occurring title for God, "the Holy One of Israel," in the Old Testament.¹⁵ In this connection, Morris writes: "There can be not the slightest doubt that the title is meant to assign Jesus the highest possible place. It stressed His consecration and His purity. It sets Him with God and not man."¹⁶

CONCLUSION: Reuters News Service (May 16, 2006) reported the results of a poll of British readers of Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, which showed that over 60% of those who read the book believed that it was fact and not fiction! Phil Ryken's comments are to the point. "What makes *The Da Vinci Code* especially deceptive is not simply the errors it makes, but also its claim -- on the very first page! -- that 'all descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate.' To be blunt, this claim is outrageously false. The book is riddled with errors -- not just biblical and theological ones, although there are plenty of those -- but also artistic and historical ones. Dan Brown's claim of facticity also seems out of place for a work of historical fiction. If the work is intended to be fictional, then why does the author continue to claim that it is factual? We can only conclude that his book's deceptions are deliberate. Sadly, these deceptions will be widely-believed. With the creative energy of director Ron Howard, the unassuming credibility of actor Tom Hanks, and a budget of more than a hundred million dollars, people undoubtedly will find the movie as believable as the book. What they will believe, unless they are well-informed, about the history and authority of the Bible and the person and work of Jesus Christ is that the Bible is a hoax, Christians have suppressed the truth, and Jesus Christ was just another man. Some Christians are saying that *The Da Vinci Code* -- both the book and the movie -- will give Christians a fresh opportunity to share their faith. That may be true in some cases and we should be ready, as always, to give a reason for the hope that we have in Jesus. But the main effect of the Da Vinci deception will be to spread the kind of spiritual misinformation that destroys people's souls. My fear is that for years to come, many people will have false ideas about Christianity that come from the falsehoods they have read in Dan Brown's book and seen in the movie based on it. The real hoax is *The Da Vinci Code* itself. The real conspiracy is the devil's old plot

against Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior of the world. And the really good story is the one Dan Brown is trying to suppress: the page-turner the Bible tells about the one and only divine Son of God becoming a man, dying on a cross, and rising again with life for the world. You don't have to be a code-breaker to figure it out, either. You just have to believe the facts that God has put right in his Word for everyone to see."¹⁷ The difference between the demon's confession and that of Peter's is important. Doubtless Peter and the other members of the Twelve entertained at that time a significantly muddier conception of what the expression meant than they did after Jesus' resurrection and exaltation. It was enough that their first messianic hope (1:41; 45) was being confirmed, that they saw in Jesus one who was greater than a prophet, greater than Moses, none less than, "the Holy One of God."¹⁸ The late James Boice summed it up this way, "Peter's great confession of faith is interesting because of several other words by which Peter indicates how he came to know this truth about Jesus. They are 'believing' and 'art sure.' The most important thing about them is their order – first, belief; then, certainty. It is the divine order for true understanding in spiritual things. Let us admit at the onset that this runs counter to our natural instincts and to our natural way of doing things. From a human point of view, who ever heard of believing in something in order to be sure of it? We want to make sure of something before we believe in it. We want to test out a person before we trust him. God reversed the order. Take these examples. David declared, 'I had fainted, unless I had *believed to see* the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living' (Ps. 27:13). Jesus said to Martha, 'Said I not unto thee that, if thou wouldst *believe*, thou shouldst *see* the glory of God?' (John 11:40). In Hebrews we are told, 'Through faith we understand' (Heb. 11:3). There is a reason for this, of course. Quite simply it is because divine truth is beyond us. God's ways are not our ways. So we will begin to know and understand God's ways only as we begin to know and (in part) understand God. And we can begin to know God only through trusting in him. Assurance, insight, knowledge – these are the fruit of believing. Certainty that Jesus is the Son of God comes, therefore, not by listening to the arguments of professors, or by reading the latest theological books or articles, but by believing what God has said about His Son in the Scriptures."¹⁹

ENDNOTES

¹ Information taken from "The Creation of Mania: The biggest book of the decade becomes a blockbuster summer movie," *Pages: The Magazine for People Who Love Books* (May/June 2006), p. 38, 39.

² Posted at www.danbrown.com.

³ A. J. Kostenberger, "The Da Vinci Code: A Myth of Christian Origins" in *Reformation 21 Online* (4/16/2006).

⁴ E. P. Clowney, "The Unchanging Christ" in *Our Savior God: Studies on Man, Christ, and the Atonement* ed. J. M. Boice (Baker, 1980), p. 77.

⁵ J. H. Gerstner, *Primitive Theology: The Collected Primers of John H. Gerstner* (Soli Deo Gloria, 1996), pp. 115-160.

⁶ cf. R. H. Stein, *Luke: The New American Commentary* (Broadman, 1992), p. 163.

⁷ N. Geldenhuys, *The Gospel of Luke* (Eerdmans, 1977), p. 173.

⁸ *Dr. W. Graham Scroggie on Luke & John* (rpt. Ark Publishing, 1981), p. 21.

⁹ L. Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Eerdmans, 1977), p. 390.

¹⁰ C. K. Barret, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (SPCK, 1979), p. 207.

¹¹ Warfield made this important observation, "First of all, then, we notice that there seems to be an element of boastfulness in this confession. This suggests itself by the obtrusion of the personal pronoun. We might read our English version and think of the emphasis falling on the believing and knowing which is asserted. We cannot so read the Greek. The emphasis falls rather on the 'we.' 'And as for us,' says Peter, 'we at least' have believed. Peter is contrasting himself and his fellow apostles with others and priding Himself on the contrast." B. B. Warfield, *Faith and Life* (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1990), p. 106.

¹² cf. G. Beasley-Murray, *John: Word Biblical Commentary* (Word, 1987), p. 97.

¹³ cf. H. Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Eerdmans, 1997), p. 249.

¹⁴ L. Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Eerdmans, 1977), p. 389.

¹⁵ This summarization is taken from R. L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nelson, 1998), pp. 280-281.

¹⁶ Morris, p. 390.

¹⁷ Phil Ryken, "Window on The World" (5/14/06).

¹⁸ cf. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (IVP, 1991), p. 303.

¹⁹ J. M. Boice, *The Gospel of John II* (Zondervan, 1976), p. 238.