

The Da Vinci Code

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The Da Vinci Code is a recent popular novel. Although its author admits that it is fictional, he also claims that the plot is based on historical facts. These "facts" in turn refer to a conspiracy in which the Church has hidden information concerning Jesus Christ that if uncovered would prove damaging to what has come to be orthodox Christian beliefs. As the author admits, these alleged "facts" are in fact nothing new, nor is this the first time that they have been written about. They are in reality based on a number of documents, theories, and legends that scholars and informed believers have been familiar with since...well, forever. And they have also been refuted since forever.

However, now that these theories have been interwoven into a thriller that many consider to be entertaining, they are suddenly brought to the attention of the general public. And of course, most readers have no way of discerning between fact from fiction. A story can often disarm people's critical faculty, and transmit the theories and beliefs that stand behind it into people's thinking, as if by osmosis. Whether a story is true or false, the average person is easily influenced by story because most people are irrational and undiscerning. So whether it is transmitting truth or falsehood, a theory gains influence when it is placed in the form of a narrative. This does not mean that the method of storytelling is in itself deceptive or otherwise problematic, but I am saying that a theory can gain access to an irrational person's mind more easily when it is transmitted as part of a story than if it is presented in nonfiction form.

I appreciate the work that a number of people have done in formulating specific answers to *Da Vinci*, as long as the contents of their materials are accurate and effective. These answers, of course, are not based on new research and reflection, but on what scholars and informed believers have known and affirmed all along, only that the information is now applied to the novel.

Nevertheless, there are two major problems that I find with most of the Christian responses to *Da Vinci*.

One problem that I have against these materials is not the answers that they give, for on the whole they would be correct, but the philosophy behind their arguments. For example, they might respond to a historical claim in *Da Vinci* with arguments formulated from a purely empirical epistemology. Although their arguments might still be sound relative to the established (agreed upon) methods of investigation, they might reflect too much reliance on and confidence in empiricism in establishing their conclusions, in arguing for the Christian faith, or responding to attacks. Because of this faulty foundation, their entire presentation will necessarily mix in some of the uncertainties and

logical problems that are *inherent* in this approach. To use another topic as an illustration, Christians can use scientific arguments to argue against the theory of evolution. That is, they could use the scientific method to formulate scientific arguments against scientific objections. But if in their presentation they show an epistemological reliance on science, and if science is itself uncertain, irrational, and even false (as I have argued elsewhere), then their approach would make it *appear* that Christianity is itself uncertain, even if Christianity appears *more likely* to be correct. So, this would be the first reservation that I have toward Christian answers to *Da Vinci*.

Another problem that I find in the Christian responses to *Da Vinci* is the suggestion that there is no harm for a person to read the book if he would remember that it is just a novel. A number of writers admit that they find the book rather enjoyable, only that they have a problem with the claim that the plot is based on historical facts. However, the book is not only inaccurate about history, but what it is inaccurate *about* -- what it speaks against -- has to do with the truth of Scripture, the identity and work of Jesus Christ, and even the very nature of God. Therefore, the work is not just "inaccurate" -- it is blasphemous. Since this is the case, it is sinful for a Christian to say to others, "As long as you know the facts, go ahead and read it! It's rather entertaining, really. Just remember that it is a novel and don't take it too seriously." *Even if* there are legitimate reasons to read it, *this* is certainly not one of them. Instead, I would insist that a Christian sins greatly if he reads the novel for this reason, and a Christian leader sins still more severely if he suggests that it would be fine to read it for this reason.

We should never tell people that it is fine to read or watch blasphemy just because it is *entertaining* blasphemy, just because it does not pose a real threat to our faith, or just as long as we do not take it seriously. I would insist that it is a *great* sin against the Lord to read or watch, or tell people to read or watch, for this reason. One reason that many people do not think this way is because they have a man-centered morality. We would not allow people to watch pornography just so that they could be entertained or informed, but from a God-centered perspective, blasphemy is much worse than pornography. How dare we be entertained by it? How dare we? What kind of monster would I be if I were to be entertained by a novel that insults my wife or a movie that mocks my parents? But it is fine to enjoy a novel or a movie that blasphemes our Lord, just as long as we do not take it seriously? At least from this standpoint, those who think this way are just as guilty as the author of *Da Vinci*. You better have a much better reason for reading the book or watching the movie than mere curiosity, or a lust for entertainment or controversy.

Now that *Da Vinci* is being made into a movie, it is that much more likely that some of you will encounter people who mention either the book or the movie to you. Do not be distracted by the current intensity of the hype. Your main response should still be to discuss foundational issues such as epistemology, metaphysics, to arrange a comprehensive clash between the believing and unbelieving worldviews, and so on. To do these things, you should review my *Ultimate Questions*, *Presuppositional Confrontations*, and *Apologetics in Conversation*. Any time that you spend on the details in *Da Vinci* should eventually lead the discussion back to the foundational worldview issues and the contents of the gospel.

This is not very different from when someone challenges you with the theory of evolution. Yes, you can use scientific arguments to defeat him on this issue, but then what? Even after proving that evolution is false with scientific arguments, you still have not proven that other arguments against Christianity are false, or that Christianity is right. So eventually you must still investigate the first principles of the opposing systems of philosophy. So although it is never *necessary*, it might be useful to know several scientific arguments against evolution, if for no other reason than to use them as *ad hominem* arguments to show that you are not afraid to deal with science, or to show that your opponent is wrong *even if* you employ his irrational methods.

In the same way, it might also be useful for you to have access to information against the historical claims in *Da Vinci*. Therefore, at the end of this article, I am listing several online resources on the subject. There are many others, but the ones that I have listed here are enough to answer the challenges against Christianity that people might have from reading the book or watching the movie. There are also a number of printed books written to answer *Da Vinci*, but again, these web sites should be enough, and they are especially convenient when dealing with other people, since you can send them the links in an email.

In any case, remember that people refuse to believe in Christianity *never* because they have some solid argument or evidence against it, but because, as the Bible says, their deeds are evil, so that they love the darkness and hate the light. The false information in *Da Vinci* just gives them the excuse to claim that they are making a *rational* rejection of Christianity, although there is nothing rational about it. So unless the Holy Spirit works in their hearts to produce repentance and faith, even if the claims in *Da Vinci* are shown to be completely inaccurate, they would still refuse to believe, but they would just find another excuse to hide behind.

Therefore, letting the unbeliever force you to devote too much time to any one type of objections -- whether it is *Da Vinci*, or evolution, etc. -- is to fall into a trap. He can always make up something to say, no matter how ridiculous, just so you must take the time to refute it. You see, whether he is consciously doing it or not, he is just trying to keep on making objections so that he does not have to be confronted with the true condition of his soul and the truth about Jesus Christ. In fact, at the right time in a conversation, you should point this out, and say, "I have pointed you to the answers against the claims made in *Da Vinci*. Now you must either refute these answers, or acknowledge that *Da Vinci* does not really pose a problem for the Christian faith. Or are you still hiding behind *Da Vinci*, not because it really gives you any rational objection against Christianity, but because you are trying to find an excuse to reject the truth?"

The unbeliever wants to stop you from talking about *him* -- that is, about the unbeliever himself. He will say anything. He will throw anything in your face just so he can delay a real confrontation with God for another moment. If it is not something from *Da Vinci*, it will be something else. So, yes, answer his objections, but always bring the conversation back to *him* -- the wretched condition of his soul, his sins against God, and his only hope

for salvation in Jesus Christ. Make him defend *his* beliefs. Make him justify *his* behavior and lifestyle.

It is true that *Da Vinci* mentions issues that are good for believers to know about, only that the novel makes false claims about these issues. For example, it makes a claim about the relationship between Christianity and Constantine, emperor of Rome. But I think that the best setting to first learn about this and other topics is a general course in church history -- a positive and organized presentation on the subject -- and not in the context of a refutation of a piece of popular fiction that makes false claims about church history. And of course, a general knowledge of church history would automatically refute what is claimed in the novel, since it would include information on what really happened at the time of Constantine, and so on.¹

¹ This article has been adapted from an "internal" message originally sent to our private mailing list.