

Christians called on to counter Da Vinci Code claims

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By Michael Foust

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)—*The Da Vinci Code* hits theater screens nationwide May 19, and evangelical author Lee Strobel believes churches must be ready to answer pointed questions about the Christian faith.

The movie, based on a popular Dan Brown novel that has sold more than 40 million copies, casts doubt on a number of key tenets of Christianity, including the deity of Christ and the reliability of the Bible.

The movie's claims are refuted easily, Strobel says, but Christians first must be equipped.

"This is more than a book and a movie. It's a cultural phenomenon. It's a cultural tsunami," Strobel said.

"If you read the book, the assertions made about Christian history are made in such a way that they certainly come off as being true. People are believing this stuff."

Strobel and Willow Creek Community Church's Garry Poole are the coauthors of a book, *Exploring the Da Vinci Code* and creators of a DVD-driven curriculum, *Discussing the Da Vinci Code*.

Strobel re-lates the example of one pastor who had a man tell him after reading Brown's book, "I'll never step foot in a church again, because now I know the truth."

Strobel has met people "who have been short-circuited in their faith" because of the book, he said.

But knowledge of the Bible is not sufficient to answer some of the questions the book raises, he said. For instance, *The Da Vinci Code* casts doubt on how the New Testament itself was compiled and implies other documents were just as worthy of inclusion into the Bible. The book also argues the deity of Christ essentially was invented in the fourth century.

"People think, 'Well, if you know your Bible, then this book won't affect you.' That's not true, because a lot of the allegations deal with church history," Strobel said.

"They deal with classic history and ancient history. Consequently, a person can know their Bible but still be confused by the allegations in the book."

The book is a murder mystery set in modern-day Europe. While searching for the murderer, the story's two central characters also uncover what is said to be long-held secret—mainly, Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and many of the claims of Christianity are false. Tom Hanks plays the movie's lead character.

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According to a story synopsis on the movie's website, the clues from the murder "point to a covert religious organization that will stop at nothing to protect a secret that threatens to overturn 2,000 years of accepted dogma."

"Dan Brown claims that it's more than fiction," Strobel said. "He told Elizabeth Vargas of ABC ... that he started out as a skeptic, but after his research he became a believer in the central claim that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married and had a child."

But a basic knowledge of church history shows the book's claims are false:

- There is no evidence—inside or outside the New Testament—that Jesus was married. In fact, the Apostle Paul writes at length about marriage and doesn't mention Christ, which presumably would have been a good argument for being married if Jesus were married. *The Da Vinci Code* asserts the person presumed to be the Apostle John in Leonardo Da Vinci's painting "The Last Supper" actually was Mary Magdalene. But the artist's own notes and sketches identify the person as John.
- The 27 books of the New Testament were affirmed as Scripture based primarily on their ties to an apostle, as well as their impact on the church

and their internal qualities.

The four Gospels were written within 50 years of Christ's resurrection and accepted by the church as divinely inspired. But the texts *The Da Vinci Code* promotes in fact are not Christian documents and were rejected by early Christians as heretical.

- *The Da Vinci Code* asserts the church did not embrace Christ's deity until A.D. 325 at the Council of Nicea.

But the New Testament—all written more than 200 years before Nicea—claims Jesus was God. In addition, the early church fathers, including Ignatius in 105 and Clement in 150, said Jesus was God.

Confusion among Christians over *The Da Vinci Code*, Strobel said, points to the need of churches to “ground their own people in what they believe and why they believe it.”

“As churches do that, what pastors are finding is that people are fascinated by this stuff,” said Strobel, whose website, www.LeeStrobel.com, includes more than 30 free video clips refuting the book's major claims.

“I talked to one pastor who said: ‘I feel like I'm getting away with murder. I walk off the platform, and I've just taught about church history, and people love it.’ ... I think people are hungry for the truth and hungry to know about their history.”

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