

Jesus & DaVinci

Discover the real Jesus

Interview with Dr. Darrell Bock

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In your opinion, what is the single most important error in the *Da Vinci Code*?

Probably the attempt to suggest that the divinity of Jesus Christ emerged late in the history of the early Church. It's an error because Jesus' divinity was right there from the very beginning and there's very good evidence it goes back to Jesus himself. What took time to work out was how to articulate the relationship between Jesus and the Father.

Why is the divinity of Jesus so important?

The divinity of Jesus is crucial because that's part of what makes Christianity unique. The claim is not that Jesus is divine in the sense in which *humans* can share in the divine. The claim is that Jesus is uniquely divine in a way that allows him to provide for humanity. So the result of distorting Jesus' divinity is to rob Christianity of its very uniqueness. This is why it's called "Christianity" and not "Jesus-anity." In the sense of "Christ" being the Messiah and the one who sits at the right hand of the Father.

Did the Council of Nicea vote to make Jesus divine?

There was no vote taken on the divinity of Jesus at Nicea. What took place was the writing of a creed that covered many teachings. The bishops who attended signed on at the end. Of the 216 or 316 who attended (the number in sources varies), only two did not sign on to the creed.

Why should we not believe that Gnosticism represents original Christian belief?

It's likely that Gnosticism as a full blown philosophy emerged in the Second

century, although there are elements that it teaches that may well be older. So it is very unlikely that the original Christianity was Gnostic. On the other hand, the materials that we have in the Bible go back to the earliest decades of the movement.

Let's talk about the Canon of Scripture. Was choosing the books for the New Testament a political process?

There probably was an element of it that was political. Because it was an effort to distinguish the true from the false, and to include and exclude. But it was more of a process of *recognition* than selection. What I mean by that is, is that the books that were included were books whose roots went back to the Apostles and their followers. They were the books that gave evidence of impacting churches of a wide geographic range and time period.

Were they already recognized as canonical, then?

Well, they were in the *process* of being recognized. Now, they didn't function as a *Bible* really until the last part of the second century. What you had was individual books circulating for a time, and you didn't have the conscious effort to draw them into a collection until the end of the second century. So there's a very important 150-year period in there in which traditional Christianity is being communicated through little theological summaries that are embedded in these materials [the New Testament books] and hymns that are also present in these materials. As well as sayings that were associated with the practice of the sacraments, the practice of baptism, etc.

Are the Gospels based on Pagan mythology?

Absolutely not. All one has to do is read the pagan mythology and compare it to the way the Gospels express related but distinct ideas to see the difference. For example, when Alexander [the Great] is said to be born through the work of the gods, a snake is pictured as being responsible for impregnating his mother. In the Gospels, God speaks a word, and that's it.

What can you tell us about the Priory of Scion?

The only thing I'll say about the Priory of Scion is that there's evidence that it likely is a complete fabrication. Not by Dan Brown. But by a group of Frenchman from the 1950's.

Is the Gospel of Mary Magdalene a first-century document?

No, it's not. It's probably a late second-century text. It reflects the other extra-biblical Gospels of this period. And it's very unlikely that it tells us very much of anything that is historical.

Was Jesus married?

There is absolutely no evidence that Jesus was married, but even if he had been that would not be a reason for a cover-up. What marriage would have shown was that Jesus was completely human, and that's what the church has always confessed. The church has always confessed that Jesus was

completely human and completely divine. But it did take several years of the disciples being with Jesus to work that out. It wasn't something they inherently understood. In fact, it probably was the Resurrection that solidified that thought in their minds, and Jesus' ascension to the right hand of the Father.

What would you say to critics who claim Christianity is patriarchal? Does it trample on the rights of women?

There is a sense in which Christianity was patriarchal. I don't think there is that much doubt about that. But it also affirmed the involvement and inclusion of women to a degree that was rather unprecedented for the first century. It might not match 21st century expectations, but it certainly came way down the road compared to the role of women in the ancient world. The very idea that women could sit at Jesus' feet and learn from him was debated in Judaism—whether that would be a task that women could or should perform. The idea that women in the ancient world weren't worthy as witnesses, yet the Resurrection appearances began with women, is another example.

What can you tell us about the Gospel of Judas?

The Gospel of Judas is a 4th century manuscript of a second century text that Irenaeus summarized for us in A.D. 180. So it is not new. Nor was it a secret. It does help us to see how one Gnostic Christian group saw things in the second century. And that's a matter of history that is helpful to us. But it tells us nothing about the real Jesus or the real Judas. Because it is full of Gnostic cosmology, which itself shows that the gospel comes from the second century, not from the first.

What would you like people to know about the real Jesus?

Jesus Christ came to earth to represent God's complete commitment to restoring the human relationship with him. And that is done through embracing the offer of forgiveness and the Spirit of God that Jesus provides through his death. The point is not to escape a certain fate in the end. The point is to reconnect with God in the context of a healthy and restored relationship of fellowship, accountability and worship. That's why Jesus said, "I came to give life, and give life abundantly."

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