



VERITAS

Equipping Christians to live by truth—*veritas*—from God.

**Darrell
Bock, Ph.D.**



Dr. Darrell Bock, is research professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary. Dr. Bock has earned international recognition as a Humboldt Scholar (Tübingen University in Germany) and for his groundbreaking work in Luke and Acts and in Jesus' examination before the Jews. He was president of the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) for 2000–2001 and serves as corresponding editor for *Christianity Today*. His articles appear in leading journals and periodicals, including the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Dallas Morning News*. Dr. Bock has written several books, including *Jesus According to Scripture: Restoring the Portrait from the Gospels* and *Breaking the Da Vinci Code* to be published in May 2004.

**Jeffrey
Bingham, Ph.D.**



Jeffrey Bingham, Ph.D., is department chair and professor of Theological Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary. Dr. Bingham is a member of several professional academic societies and specializes in the study of Irenaeus and the theology of early Christianity. He has written extensively on the early Christian church, and his articles and essays have appeared in leading literary journals. Before joining the faculty of Dallas Seminary, he pastored a church in West Texas and taught at several Christian colleges.

Replacing *The Da Vinci Code* Hysteria with Life-Changing Facts

**Darrell Bock, Ph.D.
Jeffrey Bingham, Ph.D.**

The bestselling book *The Da Vinci Code* has stirred controversy and debate about foundational issues of our faith, such as the deity of Christ, the authenticity of the New Testament, whether Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene, whether He even rose from the grave, and many others.

This article was adapted from a videotaped question-and-answer session in which Seminary president Dr. Mark Bailey interviewed two experts from our faculty, Drs. Darrell Bock and Jeffrey Bingham. It was designed to inform and instruct students and others on the challenges and opportunities raised by the success of this book.

(continued on page 2)

DR. MARK BAILEY:

What is *The Da Vinci Code* about, and why has it spurred such interest?

DR. DARRELL BOCK:

The basic theory of the book, which is actually a pretty entertaining murder mystery, is that Mary Magdalene was married to Jesus and that she and their children went to the south of France where there was produced a royal line culminating in the Merovingians. Known to only a select few, this information was buried in documents contained in the sarcophagus of Mary Magdalene. Part of the quest was to find the location of these documents, which the Catholic Church worked to suppress because they exposed the idea that Christianity was not what it was generally understood to be.

The book makes certain claims about Christianity and the history of early Christianity that, on the surface, give the appearance of being true, when that is not the case. The book leaves the impression with readers that it is, in fact, history. It isn't.

BAILEY:

How does the title of the book relate to Leonardo da Vinci, da Vinci's *The Last Supper*, and Mary Magdalene?

BOCK:

The claim here is that Leonardo da Vinci was a member of a secret guild that understood the "real" history between Jesus and Mary Magdalene—that they were married and had children. So da Vinci would put little indications and codes in some of his works. One of those works was *The Last Supper*, where you see the letter "V" in the painting off to Jesus' right, where supposedly the

beloved disciple, John, is seated. This is a rather longhaired, almost feminine-looking figure. And so da Vinci has secretly painted into this spot Mary Magdalene because the "V" is the sign of

the feminine.

What the author doesn't tell you is that on the other side of the painting is another "V," not quite as prominent but still there and visible. It has to do with the shaping of the painting. Yet no one is suggesting that there is a second woman on the other side, nor is the author telling you how you know that it is a woman on one side of the "V" and not on the other.

The book leaves the impression with readers that it is, in fact, history. It isn't.

BAILEY:

How is the book driven by modern cultural thought?

DR. JEFFREY BINGHAM:

The Da Vinci Code plays off a huge skepticism about the past. "Don't trust the past," it screams. "Don't trust tradition; don't trust what has been passed down to you because it is not reliable." The novel says, "I'm going to show you a more trustworthy, more accurate way because you can't depend on the authority of the past."

BAILEY:

How does the book attack the authority and integrity of the Gospel records by suggesting that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were husband and wife?

BOCK:

The idea that Mary Magdalene was married to Jesus is not attested anywhere in the Gospels. Eleven passages in the New Testament address who Mary Magdalene was, and that is a very limited description. She was a beneficiary of exorcism. She was present at Jesus' crucifixion, and she was there when Jesus was laid in the tomb. She was present when it was discovered that the tomb was empty. And she was also the beneficiary of one of the first

The Da Vinci Code is important to discuss because it is being portrayed as top-drawer scholarship.

appearances of the Lord to anybody. *That is all we know about her.*

Her name, Mary of Magdala, is unusual in that most names of women in the Bible are tied to males to whom they are related. She is not connected to anyone. If she had been married, it would have been easy to say "Mary, wife of," or "Mary, wife of Jesus," or to connect her to some other male. But that is never done. She is only connected to the place where she lived: Magdala. So out of this vacuum of information is spun a theory about her being married to Jesus.

The Scripture assumes that Jesus was unmarried because there was no reason to think otherwise. *The Da Vinci Code* is exploiting that element of the biblical record.

BAILEY:

How does *The Da Vinci Code* implicitly question the factors of canonicity?

BOCK:

The book is an entertaining novel, but historically it is a sieve in terms of the way it handles information. Let me give you one example.

The author says that there were 80 Gospels from which the church chose. In fact, we have probably no more than a dozen that are actually called Gospels. Even more misleading is the author's idea that one day a group of men walked into a council, laid out these 80 Gospels on a table, chose the ones they liked, and ended up with four Gospels. In fact, that is not what happened at all. By the end of the second century, the collection of Paul's letters and the fourfold Gospel were well established.

BAILEY:
How should a pastor prepare people to engage in this cultural issue?

BINGHAM:
The first calling of every pastor is to be the church's theologian. And so pastors need to make their church an environment in which Christian doctrine is taught. Pastors, please teach us what we believe; train us in the faith. If people are taught Christian doctrine, they will immediately recognize *The Da Vinci Code* not as a challenge to their faith, but as a mystery novel without historical or doctrinal discrimination.

The Christian message is not *only* that Jesus is a great prophet of God but that He is much, much more.

BAILEY:
How does *The Da Vinci Code* provide opportunity for the Christian faith to engage culture?

BOCK:
The Da Vinci Code is important to discuss because it is being portrayed as top-drawer scholarship, and culture tends to draw its attitudes from what it perceives to be top-drawer scholarship. Unfortunately, the book is not the best in quality and scholarship.

We cannot address the culture about the *real* Jesus unless we understand the backdrop of how

Jesus is being portrayed and why He is being portrayed that way. Our culture has a tendency to make Jesus a great religious teacher. And that is what some of *The Da*

Vinci Code attempts to reflect.

The problem is that the Christian message is not *only* that Jesus is a great prophet of God—He is a prophet and functions as a prophet—but that He is much, much more. Jesus is unique, and unless the church learns how to talk about Jesus' uniqueness in a culture that wants to make Him a prophet, then it's not going to do

a very good job of presenting Jesus' uniqueness to the culture.

We must teach our culture that Jesus is unique with regard to what He did for sin, that there is a reason that He hung on the cross. And that's because Jesus was a real representative on our behalf, doing what we were incapable of doing for ourselves. Through Jesus, God was making a statement about how much He loved humanity. He loved humanity enough to die to achieve *its* deliverance.

We must always come back to the idea that Jesus is unique. As good as a prophet is, the title "prophet" is not good enough for Jesus. We must take this opportunity to talk about who the *real* Jesus is. He is both prophet *and* Son of God.

BAILEY:
Why should Christians be interested, concerned, and aware?

BINGHAM:
There is a growing group of books being published that are putting forward the idea that the church of history tried to hide something from you and that you were cheated. The church didn't tell you about all the Gospels; it didn't tell you the true story on all the options that are in Christianity.

These books are trying to set forth the idea that Christianity is really much bigger than the traditional church and that there are many more options you can choose from out there.

The Da Vinci Code is being read by Christians who are unschooled in the ability to discern truth from error. And what makes it so "exciting" is that it is a "secret" that they are going to tell you that you didn't know before. And in that process it adds an aura to the whole thing.

BAILEY:
What resources are available to help us interact with others about *The Da Vinci Code*?

BOCK:
A nice place to start is with the book *Hidden Gospels:*

How the Search for Jesus Lost Its Way. The author, Philip Jenkins, teaches history at Penn State University. Bruce Metzger's *The Canon of the New Testament* deals with canonical issues and is a very fine summary of ancient evidence. And there is a collection of writings called *The Nag Hammadi Library*, edited by James Robinson.

The Da Vinci Code is being read by Christians who are unschooled in the ability to discern truth from error.

(continued from page 5)

BINGHAM:

For the pastor who wants to educate and bring people into the theology of Christian orthodoxy, popular handbooks that come forward from our own school are still good, such as Charles Ryrie's *A Survey of Bible Doctrine* and *Basic Theology*. The average Christian can get his hands around these. For the person who wants to go a bit further, Millard Erickson's *Christian Theology* is an extremely helpful volume. But in addition to getting a handle on basic theology issues, basic historical issues of the church are important as well. Our colleague John Hannah has written a fantastic book, *Our Legacy: The History of Christian Doctrine*.

Other books that introduce the history of the church are Bruce Shelley's *Church History in Plain Language* and Mark Noll's *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*. And there is a little book published by InterVarsity Press that I wrote called *Pocket History of the Church*. It is important to know the issues both historically and theologically.

Concluding Thoughts

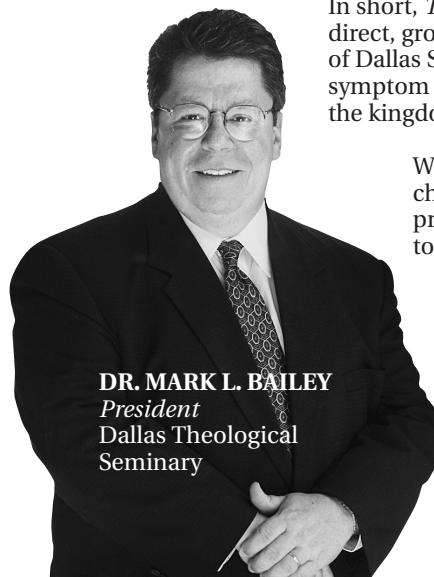
BAILEY:

I think it was Dwight L. Moody who said, "If you want to know how crooked a stick is, put a straight stick down next to it." What we have in Scripture is a straight stick.

Keep reading Scripture and working through the passages of Scripture. Ask the questions: Who is God? What is the Bible? Who is Christ? What is salvation? What is the Christian life? What is the church? What does the Bible teach?

To stay rooted in the Scriptures, God has given gifted people to the church "for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ" (Eph. 4:12-15). And so we must help our people become rooted and grounded in the Scriptures and the spiritual life, active in ministry, engaging our culture—and not being afraid to engage.

Peter wrote to his first-century audience, "But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence" (1 Pet. 3:15).



DR. MARK L. BAILEY
President
Dallas Theological
Seminary

Why this is a big deal.

I realize some Christians might ask, "So what's the big deal about *The Da Vinci Code*?" I hope that after reading the comments of professors Bock and Bingham in this edition of *Veritas*, you will be able to better answer that question.

But let me add a word.

The Da Vinci Code phenomenon is merely a symptom. There are underlying reasons why this anti-Christian book was number one on amazon.com, number one in the *New York Times*, selling at Wal Mart, Barnes & Noble, and seemingly every store in between, and is now headed for Hollywood.

First, we need to realize it is a symptom of unbelief on the part of the world. Jesus Himself said, "Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19).

The Jesus of the Bible is not the Jesus people naturally want, because He exposes our sins even as He offers us the cure for them. So Christianity has always been shadowed by heresies seeking to water down the true Jesus and impugn the inspired Scriptures that tell us about Him. And Christians are called to counter those heresies.

Second, we need to confess that it is a symptom of a problem within the church: a shallow understanding of what we believe and why we believe it.

Yes, I'm grieved to see the world ingesting such spiritual arsenic. But I'm embarrassed and alarmed to see Christians either not responding or being confused and misled by it. When large masses of Christians are only casually familiar with the doctrinal foundation of their faith and the basis for trusting their Bible, they will be neither salt nor light.

In short, *The Da Vinci Code* is a big deal because it represents a direct, growing, and effective attack on Jesus Christ, the mission of Dallas Seminary, and every Bible-believing church. It is a symptom of a religious trend that hinders people from entering the kingdom of God.

With your help, Dallas Seminary is meeting such challenges by informing and exhorting Christians and by providing church and ministry leaders expertly trained to build vibrant lives with deep spiritual roots.

And that makes your gifts to the Seminary a "big deal." It also deepens my gratitude for your sacrificial support—indeed, truth and souls are at stake.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Bailey".

Confidence. Peace. Assurance. Boldness.

You can multiply all these benefits in your life by knowing *why* you can trust your Bible . . . and why attacks on the Bible fail to shake your foundation.

That's why Dallas Theological Seminary is offering you two outstanding resources to debunk the popular book (and soon-to-be motion picture) *The Da Vinci Code*.

- *The Da Vinci Code Decoded* is a booklet by Dr. Darrell Bock (excerpted from a longer upcoming book) that gives you the true biblical and historical facts that expose the errors filling *The Da Vinci Code*.
- And *The Da Vinci Code: A Scholar's Evaluation* is the full-length, 90-minute video of the panel discussion from which this *Veritas* was taken. On either DVD or VHS. Great to show to friends, home groups, Bible studies, and more!

To receive these resources as our thank-you for your support of Dallas Seminary, use the enclosed reply card (for subscribers) or call 800-992-0998. Thank you.

BOOKLET



DALLAS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

DR. MARK L. BAILEY, PRESIDENT

3909 SWISS AVENUE • DALLAS, TX 75204 • 214-824-3094