

# The Da Vinci Opportunity

Talking to the curious about the claims of Christ by Craig Smith

Almost two years after its release, Dan Brown's book, *The Da Vinci Code*, continues to make waves. As the release of Ron Howard's film version approaches, Christians need to be prepared for a new surge of interest.

*The Da Vinci Code* follows its characters as they race to unravel a mysterious murder. Along the way, they discover an ancient conspiracy to cover up the true origins of Christianity. The "truth" is that Jesus never claimed to be divine and had a son with Mary Magdalene. Furthermore, the New Testament was essentially invented by the Council of Nicea in the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

These claims are purported by the book's author to be well-established, though long-neglected, historical fact.

Unfortunately, these claims are not found only in works of fiction. "These ideas are now commonly taught in our universities and are being disseminated in numerous recent books," explains Dr. Darrell Bock, a highly respected New Testament scholar. "These ideas reflect an effort to remake our religious and cultural history, an attempt to make over Christianity and rob it of its unique claims."

For this reason, the Church cannot afford to write *The Da Vinci Code* off as simple fiction. A lot of Christians are seriously confused



by this view of Jesus and the Bible's origins. Even worse, I recently met a youth worker who told me that she had been teaching *The Da Vinci Code* to her youth group. That's scary. This is not just something going on "out

there." It's having an impact inside the church as well.

At the same time, there are positive aspects of the book's popularity. For example, everywhere I go, people are reading it and are fascinated by its claims. More importantly, they're interested in discussing those claims in light of the historical evidence.

I expected to spend a lot of time refuting the *Code's* revisionist history, but I'm actually spending more time answering people's genuine curiosity about the reliability of Scripture and the claims of Christ.

Late this spring, Shepherd Project Ministries is planning a set of national training conferences designed to prepare Christians for the upcoming movie release. These conferences will include presentations by world-renowned biblical scholars on such subjects as early Christology, New Testament

## » EFCA Today Reader Survey Results

Last summer, *EFCA Today* surveyed readers for input as to whether the magazine is fulfilling its purpose: to unify you, our movement's leaders, around the overall mission of the EFCA by bringing its stories and vision to life, and to strengthen you by generating conversations over topics pertinent to faith and life in this 21st century.

Thank you for your responses! Below is a sampling of what we learned and will implement in future issues. Thank you for living out the ministry and heart of the EFCA and providing so very many stories to tell.

**82%** of you give concentrated time to each issue of *EFCA Today*; **57%** locate and read items of special interest; **25%** read it thoroughly, page by page.

Concerning the regular sections in each issue, **67%** of you ranked *Breakthrough* as offering greatest value. *Breakthrough* highlights innovative outreaches and practices across the EFCA.

When considering regular, short columns within those sections, **75%** chose "From the Trenches" as most valuable. "From the Trenches" features conversation-starters for your church staff on challenging topics.

When asked what you would enjoy as a new column, **73%** said "expository look at a tough or controversial passage." Please send suggestions and articles!

We asked what you would prefer **more of** in future issues, **45%** of you said, "outside-the-box-thinking." When asked what you would prefer **less of**, **62%** said "long articles." So we'll shorten whenever possible.

Finally, **77%** of you, our readers, agreed or strongly agreed that *EFCA Today* is a valuable resource, bringing to light trends in ministry and culture while equipping you for your specific area of leadership.

formation and the Gnostic Gospels.

In California, the conference will be hosted by First EFC of Fullerton. "As the person of Jesus, the canon of Scripture and church history are called into question, we must be ready to respond," says Jason Whalen, pastor to young adults at First EFC.

"The opportunity this film provides is precisely what Peter had in mind when he challenged the church to be ready to give an answer for the hope that lies within." ■

Visit the Web ([www.shepherdproject.com](http://www.shepherdproject.com)) for more information on the national conferences, to inquire about scheduling a training seminar for your church or to find practical training resources.

Craig Smith is pastor of worship/outreach at Heritage EFC in Castle Rock, Colo., and president of Shepherd Project Ministries.



## » EFCA Statement of Faith

### Draft revision

The Midwinter Ministerial conference focusing on the draft revision of our Statement of Faith is now behind us, with its emphasis on "God's Gospel." This discussion among EFCA people is an important part of the process.\*

More than 400 pastors from 280 churches attended the conference, held January 18-20 at South Suburban EFC, in Apple Valley, Minn.

"It's important that we have this theological discussion," said EFCA President Bill Hamel, "because we are not the same denomination that wrote the 1950 statement. Are we willing to dialog openly, with our finger on the text, about the essentials of the faith?"

Revision discussions began in summer 2004 and will continue during district conferences this spring. The input that the Spiritual Heritage Committee receives in each of these settings is invaluable to the ongoing revisions. "It's a work in process," affirms Greg Strand, EFCA director of biblical theology and credentialing.

Plan to attend the National Leadership Conference in Denver, June 28-30, where further opportunity for discussion and input will be provided. If the board of directors recommends a revision at that 2006 conference, formal action would take place no sooner than the 2007 leadership conference.

If you have questions, comments or suggestions regarding the Statement of Faith, please send them via e-mail to [president@efca.org](mailto:president@efca.org). ■

\*Taped portions of the Midwinter discussion are available through NextStep Resources ([www.nsresources.com](http://www.nsresources.com) under "EFCA resources"), or check out the Web dialog on the topic ([blogs.efca.org/sof](http://blogs.efca.org/sof)). To view the current Statement of Faith and most recent draft revision, please visit the Web ([www.efca.org/about/doctrine](http://www.efca.org/about/doctrine)).



## [ LETTERS ]

Home run on the summer 2005 *EFCA Today*! As a pastor "between ministries," I have been "out of the loop" for the past year and a half. While I don't recommend such an extended break in pastoral ministry for everyone, it has been good for my family and me. I am so glad to be part of the EFCA family of God. For a brief season when my hiatus began, I was not using my gifts. What a miserable existence I had!

The article by Dr. Hamel ("The 'Black Hole' of the Church") is a powerful reminder that we are gifted because God wants us to use our gifts. As a pastor waiting for the Lord to lead me back to a church, I enjoy using my gifts as a "lay" person.

I also applaud Scott Yorkavich's article ("Vision Guided"). He gives a very practical paradigm for carrying out Jesus' passion for His Church. I could go on and on about the articles in this edition. Suffice it to say: Thanks again for a job well done!

— Paul W. Rathke, Faith EFC, Sparta, Wis.

What a tremendous help the last EFCA magazine was to me (Fall 2005, "Entering the Greenhouse: Growing a heart for missions")! It was encouraging not only personally, but professionally. I sent a copy on to a friend who is not affiliated with our denomination but who would no doubt benefit from the helpful articles. I saved a copy for myself for future reference too. Tremendous job!

— Molly Deuberry, Liberty Bible Church (EFCA), Chesterton, Ind.

**Editor's note:** Starting with this issue, we are including EFCA Today's purpose statement on page 5 of each issue. We trust that we are accomplishing our goal of serving as a sharpening tool for you in your ongoing ministries within the EFCA. And as always, we welcome both your comments on particular issues and your ideas for future issues. Thank you for the privilege of telling your stories.

Please send comments to: EFCA Today Letters, 901 E. 78th Street, Minneapolis, MN 55420; fax (952-853-8488) or e-mail ([DianeMc@JourneyGroup.com](mailto:DianeMc@JourneyGroup.com)). Letters may be edited for clarity and space.