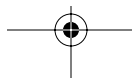


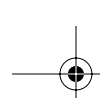
PREFACE

Western culture is a Jesus-haunted culture, and yet one that is largely biblically illiterate. Almost anything can pass for knowledge of Jesus and early Christianity in such a culture. I was doing a radio show last year when a lady called from her car. She was stuck in traffic on the Santa Monica freeway and was listening to the show. She said, “I am sitting here in traffic holding on to my crystals and feeling really close to Jesus, and I am wondering, what is the connection between these crystals and Jesus?” My instant and instinctive response was to say, “Nothing, except that he made those crystals.”

Today, those who promise to reveal secrets about Jesus—secrets long suppressed by the church and other religious institutions, secrets that may be scandalous or at least that debunk traditional views of Jesus and early Christianity—have an instant audience. Throw in a conspiracy theory and take an anti-establishment approach, and the audience is hooked. In a culture where the latest is the greatest and the old is suspect, it is no wonder that *The Da Vinci Code* has been atop the *New York Times* bestseller list for over forty weeks. Even a serious religious book like Elaine Pagels’s *Beyond Belief*, which offers up scholarly support for some things the novel suggests, has cracked the top 100.

While many traditional Christians might be tempted to scoff at and dismiss such books as either mere fiction or the opinions of a few fringe scholars, this would be a serious mistake. We are facing a serious revolution regarding some of the long-held truths about Jesus, early Christianity and the Bible.





It is no accident that in the 1990s we were regaled time and again by the revelations of the Jesus Seminar. This group of scholars dismembered Jesus' teachings and then divided them into genuine and inauthentic parts. It is no accident that we have well-known figures like Bishop Spong or Marcus Borg proclaiming a new Christianity for a new age. They are John the Baptists heralding the coming of the new syncretism of New Age religion — part pagan, part gnostic and part Christian. It is no accident that a mainline denomination has now ordained a gay bishop, and gay marriage is already being legalized in various places. It is no accident that a judge in the Bible Belt was censured for putting up a monument to the Ten Commandments in a public place, commandments that were part of the basis of every Western law code, including America's. Our culture is experiencing a sea change, and the old Judeo-Christian ways of thinking about things are being challenged at their very foundations.



Now novels such as *The Da Vinci Code* are disseminating this new syncretism to the masses. A follow-up movie, directed by Ron Howard and with a world-class cast, is soon to follow, while the wonderful *Gospel of John* movie is largely ignored by the general public and Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* is mired in controversy and objections. As I write this, I am being asked to go to one church after another to explain and decipher Dan Brown's novel. It appears that we are in an age where a New Testament prophecy has come true — "For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths" (2 Timothy 4:3-4). These seem to be such times, when people will indeed believe things that are "beyond belief." This book is intended as a wake-up call to those who have not been noticing the signs of the times.



To avoid cluttering the text with note numbers, I have identified my sources and given additional information in a set of notes at the back of this book. See page 185 for a further explanation of how to use them.

