

Title:

The Michelangelo Code; Or How To Let The Da Vinci Code Pass On By

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Summary:

While the usual expectation is that we are simple-minded enough to be caught up in the mass-media Tsunami created by The Da Vinci Code, now a movie starring Tom Hanks, so that we might all the better assist Hollywood in carting off its share of megabucks from this transient tempest for historical tots, let us explore how we might, instead, observe the refitted ancient frigate pass by on time's wide and eternal river, as we lounge on the bank in supine placidity, or, as a generous gesture, consent to turn our eyes toward the flick just for the faux tension of it all.

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Article Body:

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Since we believe our readers wish us to address every issue that troubles us via the news without flinching, so that we may all find ease in seeing the sanely funny side of it, we assume you'll allow this attempt to see the book cum movie as, in W. S. Gilbert's bouncy phrase, "a source of innocent merriment."

First, let's consider the tooting of the ship's horn in the light of history as it has actually come to be agreed on, to the extent that events 1,700 years or so ago can be rigorously sifted. As a soothing antidote in advance for our faithful readers, we advise that, as the council under consideration occurred in 325 AD, Christ had long since escaped to the realm where modification of his life, as the Gospels present it or as a paragraph in Roman history reputedly

refers to it, was beyond the debates of ever-contentious humankind.

When our tidy history is over, we'll also offer a few suggestions on which we may all pillow our world-thumped heads.

To provide historical solidity as a basis for our determinedly placid outlook, as much as a considerate paragraph or so can, let's recount the facts as they have been bruited about now for some centuries.

When Constantine, later, The Great, became Emperor, the Roman Empire was, we are told, in disarray. The old faith, Paganism, had begun to lose its hold as a credible unifying force. The new Emperor noticed that a widespread heresy called Christianity was gaining more and more enthusiasts, who were by previous emperors, particularly Diocletian, later, The Dunce, rather regularly annihilated by being sent to the flames or fed to the lions. The incalculably optimistic idea occurred to the new Emperor, a fierce general now in the uncomfortable role of a make-nice diplomat, that he might unite the faltering Empire anew by making the nascent faith the official religion of the Empire.

Despite catcalls from the nobles who still adhered to the pagan pantheon, he forged ahead, only to discover that, once in open proliferation, many a Christian theologian began to tear at the sanctimonious fabric he had so carefully draped over the fault lines of the quaking Empire. Growing anxious that his grand tarp might be rent irreparably, he called the diverse debaters to gather at the ancient city of Nicaea to hash out their disagreements once and for all time.

So intent was he to wrest unity from the 300 or so colorfully garbed theologians who assembled there that he deigned to sit among them, on his golden throne, where he harkened to their hair splitting and tearing until he grew, as most imperious people are likely to do on such occasions, impatient.

The principal debate, presented here with appropriate brevity, was based on what continues to be known as the heresy of Arius, which revolved around the unavoidably various word "begotten." What exactly did it mean that Christ was "begotten" of the Father? Was He actually flesh of His flesh or some sort of discontinuous emanation? There was also extensive rhetorical ping-pong with the equally quicksilver substitute for flesh, "substance." Finally, Constantine arose from his majestic duff and dictated what the resolution of the conflict would be.

Ever since the landmark Council, and the resultant Nicene Creed, dutiful theologians have fretted their conning brows over such daunting concepts as The

Holy Trinity, or "three Gods in one." The widely admitted conundrum is one reason there has long been a divide less traveled by between acute theologians and devout acolytes of any faith afoot in the contemporary world; while one will deal with facts along with the retention or diminution of faith, the other wishes to profess his or her faith without an uninvited tap on the shoulder.

Now, what have we to offer in terms of peaceful council? First, if you are a believer, we invite you to do as our title suggests. Imagine yourself in The Sistine Chapel, lying on the marbled floor, while you gaze up at Michelangelo's dramatic and inspiring presentation of God's hand in the Creation. Venture to St. Peter's Basilica, where you may stand before Mike's delicately evocative Pieta. You might also travel to the surprisingly modest church of St. Peter In Chains, where the artist's mighty Moses is on display, but be forewarned, the last time we were there, when you slipped your coin in the meter to illuminate the statue, all the better to view it, the spots did not shine forth. In summary, we suggest that you rest easy in the long and beautiful rendition of your faith and trust that it will go on.

If, on the other hand, you find yourself, as the dating services provide for the inclination, "spiritual but not religious," you may make peace with the brouhaha by understanding that religion, beyond one that prudently grows out of an enlightened faith in life itself, is not primarily about what is credible to the strong but about what is helpful to the fragile and, in that inviting sympathy, find your own eternal ease.

Also, as others have noted, the imbroglio over the currently troublesome Code is an opportunity for all attendees to the altar of civilization to show their reverence for toleration as a potentially reformatory example to the incendiary throwback of Muslim Fundamentalism, which currently encroaches on, and would very much prefer to incinerate, freedom everywhere.

Finally, remember there are many icons that have been around for so long people no longer care much about what they're actually made of. They simply either like them or they don't. And in this preferentially unexamined category we may find reverences as august as religion and trifles as mundane as Heinz Ketchup and Coca-Cola.

So, whatever you believe, we hope we've helped you lie back on the bank of time's tripping river while the ancient-timbered Da Vinci Code slips by, even with its newly outfitted sails and come-hither tooting, without casting even a ripple on your own supine, and, we trust, inspiringly sublime placidity.