





Photo : Sabrina Di Matteo

Dr. André Gagné

*How do modern-day Christians relate to the Bible? Dr. André Gagné, assistant professor in the Department of Theological Studies at Concordia University, addressed this question for Hi Fi.*

**Hi Fi:** How does our culture influence our reading of the Bible, considering that we have access to historical and archaeological data, and that we hear about sensationalistic theories upheld by popular novels? Have we become suspicious of the Bible?

**Dr. Gagné:** When we read the Gospels, for example, some of us wonder, “Did Jesus speak these words? Did he encounter and heal the sick? Is that historical?” Some of us might even be scared of reading the Bible because we feel we don’t have sufficient knowledge of how it was written. We have to realize that the Bible is basically a theological book, not a history book or a chronicle about what someone did and said. No one sat beside Jesus and wrote his words down, like a reporter. The Bible is basically a theological book. It speaks truth about an experience of God. However, truth is not always equivalent of factuality. Something can be true without it being equated with an historical event.

## Reading the Bible Today

*Interview with Dr. André Gagné*

I use this example with my students. In the beginning of the Book of Acts, and the end of the Gospel of Luke, we have the story of the Ascension, where Jesus goes up to heaven after being risen from the dead. As a modern reader in 2009, how do I interpret this? Did the writer actually see Jesus go up into the clouds? We have to understand that the worldview in the first century was not the same as ours. The believers of that time thought God was “up there”, while today we know that the universe is ever expanding. So, if you read this at the first degree, thinking Jesus really ascended, we could still be watching him today, with a telescope – he would still be going up! See, it doesn’t make sense to think of the Ascension as an historical fact. You have to read it as a theological truth. The Ascension, in that perspective, says that Jesus returned to God and is with Him, and received from Him all authority. It does not mean that Jesus has literally been sitting at the right hand of the Father for nearly 2000 years...wouldn’t he be tired?

Biblical texts unfold a possible world in front of us readers. We can embrace that, be inspired by it, pray it, and live it out. We have to look at the overall

message: how does it inspire me to live like a disciple of Christ, in 2009? As I embrace the truth of this message, then it becomes the Word of God because it changes me, as an individual.

**Hi Fi:** What do you observe, among your students, regarding their relationship to the Bible?

**Dr. Gagné:** It's interesting, even surprising, to see many young adults, in their mid-twenties to early thirties, have certain knowledge of the Bible. Some come from Evangelical type backgrounds, others from more traditional backgrounds, like Protestant and Catholic. They often suppose a Bible course or Theology course will be easy in their program of studies, and then they realize it's a little harder than they thought! I see a definitive interest in the matter, probably set off by the attention the media have given to stories and questions about Jesus in recent years. They want to find out what an academic standpoint would be on sensationalistic literature and movies, and their claims about discoveries which could overturn some of the usual Christian data. My job is to give them reference points, show them what interpretations and hypotheses on Jesus are credible or not. I am astonished by the fact that the student body proves to be interested in the origins of Christianity, whether it's because they are believers, or passionate about history, or intrigued by the Bible as a literary work.

Here in Québec, the "Quiet Revolution", especially among Francophones, lead to a rejection of many of the values, references and practices associated with the Catholic Church. A void can now be seen, in that the younger generations are searching for answers to their existential questions, and trying to make sense of the reality of religion, here and elsewhere in the world. The academic world can help them gain insight into these questions, and shed some light on their faith, while enabling them to think for themselves.

That being said, a phenomenon like the Da Vinci Code by Dan Brown, reaches many generations. People of all ages want to know about the "apocrypha", those books that were left out of the Bible, because they wonder, "Has the truth been hidden from us?" The good thing about the media hype surrounding sensationalistic literature is the curiosity it awakens in the general public. We have to take advantage of that to educate people about the origins of Christianity, about why only four gospels were chosen for the New Testament, and so on. Our culture forces us to re-evaluate our tradition, to question our faith, to strengthen what we believe, and why we believe it.

**Hi Fi:** Thank you for sharing your enthusiasm and your positive outlook on the relationship between our culture and the Bible. 📖