

## **A View from the Inside – The Making of *The Christ Files***

Looking for a resource for your Easter Outreach. Try a visual approach. I recently heard Allan Douthwaite, CEO of Anglican Media Sydney speak about the making of *The Christ Files* and am now considering ways to use this resource for Easter 2009.

Allan first gave a timely reminder about the need to look for forgotten bank accounts, as the funding for the project came from an account for the 1978 Anglican Prayer Book publication which had been left untouched earning compound interest for 27 years!

Allan outlined that the focus for Anglican Media had been to find the one-off idea that would connect with a contemporary issue in Australia. At this time (2005), one of the areas they had already been working on was providing responses to *The Da Vinci Code*, and they had already organised cinema adverts for the film release, and also established a website: [challengingdavinci.com](http://challengingdavinci.com).

Allan was still looking around when he came upon *The Christ Files*, a book about historical and archaeological evidence for Jesus Christ, which had been recently written by John Dickson. Allan and other Anglican Media members realised that this was the one idea and they began to develop plans for a film production. He highlighted that since Anglican Media already had a good relationship with Channel 7, and they knew it would be quality production this made it easier to have them come on board as the broadcaster and this relationship then helped in other areas of negotiation, especially in gaining access to documents and travel arrangements.

John Dickson is the Director of the Centre for Public Christianity, and as he was already an experienced communicator, was the clear choice as the presenter, providing continuity between the printed publication and the visual project. Allan was able to explain the variety of travel arrangements they had to make in the seven countries visited, showing filming of sections of the documentary, which highlighted how they overcame regular logistical difficulties and 'organised chaos', including trying to obtain permission to view the Gnostic gospels without knowing the cultural entry point.

They interviewed significant scholars, all renowned in their areas, including Bishop of Durham, Dr Tom Wright, Professor Alanna Hobbs (from Macquarie University), and Professor Martin Hengel (Tubingen) and used a number of visual aids and techniques, conducting 'experiments' at strategic locations, including an English pub, to illustrate issues to do with oral history.

If you watched the 1 hour special you will have an overview of the project and what is available on the DVD. The DVD has four episodes, and over six hours of extra interviews. The episodes cover:

1. Gnostics and Romans
2. Jews and Christians
3. Lost Sources and Oral Traditions
4. Archaeologists and Artefacts

The special programme aired during Easter 2008 on Channel 7, and attracted 350 000 viewers around Australia.

To date 9000 DVDs have been sold, and *The Christ Files* received the Pilgrim Media Prize for 2008.

Allan also shared some **helpful tips for religious communicators**, which are useful comments for all people engaged in connecting with our community:

1. *Pick a topic – don't generate one (focus on connecting with a major contemporary issue)*
2. *Timeliness is (almost) everything (agendas can change quickly)*
3. *Respect and engage with other views*
4. *Write for the audience intended (in this case around the Gen X group)*
5. *Quality is crucial (younger people especially appreciate quality visual production)*
6. *God is in control (learn to appreciate the providence of God)*

For more information see: <http://thechristfiles.com.au/>

Anglican Media Sydney has a new project - *The Life of Jesus*. This will also screen nationally during Easter 2009.

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