

# SERIOUS TIMES

MAKING YOUR LIFE MATTER IN AN URGENT DAY

Vol. 2, No. 2

## A Million Little Lies

More than 1.7 million copies of James Frey's memoir, *A Million Little Pieces*, have been sold in the United States since Oprah Winfrey selected it for her book club. Only J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* sold more copies in the U.S. last year.

As cracks in Frey's account of his life began to surface through such investigative websites as *The Smoking Gun*, Frey admitted he lied about past criminality. Arguing that he wrote "the emotional truth," Winfrey called the uproar "much ado about nothing," intimating that the truth of the book mattered less than its story of redemption.

Yet even a skeptic as hardened as Sigmund Freud had to maintain that if "it were really a matter of indifference what we believed, then we might just as well build our bridges of cardboard as of stone, or inject a tenth of a gramme of morphia into a patient instead of a hundredth, or take tear-gas as a narcotic instead of ether."

Which brings us, again, to Pilate's eternal question: "What is truth?" Is it whatever I want it to be? Is it what I feel? Is it simply what works, or at least, what works for me? Or is what classical Christian thought has championed, and continues to champion, which is that truth is what corresponds to reality?

For once, a biblical worldview seems to be winning the day.

In a stunning switch from dismissive to disgusted, Winfrey has since accused Frey on live television of lying and letting down fans of his account of addiction and recovery. "I feel duped," she said on the show. "But more importantly, I feel that you betrayed millions of readers."

In discussing her change of mind, Winfrey said, "I left the impression that the truth is not important." More to the point, she left the impression that truth *as that which corresponds with reality* is not important.

It is interesting to compare Frey's deceit as non-fiction, with another author's longstanding attempt at truth through fiction.

P.D. James has recently published her 13<sup>th</sup> Adam Dalgliesh novel, *The Lighthouse*. At 85 years of age, it may be her last. As an unabashed fan of the famed British mystery writer, imagine my delight at meeting her this past summer while studying at Oxford, and having her sign a copy of *Death in Holy Orders*, my favorite novel featuring her famed sleuth.

Our encounter was through a lecture she gave at Oxford on the interplay between her Christian theology and her mysteries. In a question and answer period following the address, she noted that she was often asked how she could write about murder as a Christian. Her answer was that she was writing about the human condition, including sin, and murder brought that condition into the clearest of lights.

She then added that the world needs such clear thinking, rooted in reflection, "For there is much in our world that is clever," she said, "yet is not true."

One hopes that this would be the lesson learned by Oprah, and the millions of readers who embraced Frey's falsified account of addiction and recovery. Cleverness is not enough; truth is what matters.

Unfortunately, at the time of this writing, Frey's book continued to rank among the top five bestselling books on both Amazon.com and Barnes & Noble.com.

And still as non-fiction.

James Emery White

## Sources

"Latest question in culture wars: What is truth?", Richard N. Ostling, Associated Press, January 24, 2006 ([www.clarionledger.com](http://www.clarionledger.com)).

*The Smoking Gun* article on Frey:

<http://www.thesmokinggun.com/jamesfrey/0104061jamesfrey1.html>

"Oprah confronts author on live show," Hillel Italie, Associated Press, as printed in the Charlotte Observer, Friday, January 27, 2006, p. 3A ([www.charlotte.com](http://www.charlotte.com)).

The comment by Freud was cited in the article "Truth" in *The Great Ideas: A Syntopicon of Great Books of the Western World*, Mortimer J. Adler, Editor in Chief.

For an introduction to the worldview of P.D. James, see the review article by Ralph Wood in *Books and Culture*: <http://www.ctlibrary.com/bc/2004/marapr/20.13.html>.

Sign-Up for the Serious Times Update

If this email was forwarded to you, consider signing up for the bi-weekly Serious Times Update at [www.serioustimes.com](http://www.serioustimes.com) Beyond signing up for the Update, at [www.serioustimes.com](http://www.serioustimes.com) you will find reading lists and book reviews, "whitepapers" on critical issues and strategic links to other sites, small group resources and homeschooling curriculum, tapes/cd's and study guides.

(To remove your address from the list, just send a message to [update-Unsubscribe@serioustimes.com](mailto:update-Unsubscribe@serioustimes.com))