

## The Meetinghouse

### The DaVinci Code as a Symbol of Anti-Catholic Bigotry

Everyone loves a good conspiracy. Dan Brown's book *The DaVinci Code* hit a responsive chord with his attack on the basic teachings of the Catholic Church. The book is not just another salvo across the broadside of a Church that has been under fire for nearly 2000 years. It denies the Church's essential reason for being, under the guise of a potboiler novel. And now the book is a movie.

#### JUST ENTERTAINMENT

The colonial meetinghouse was a gathering place where religiously minded communities assembled to share their thoughts, problems, and family life. A new kind of meetinghouse debuts on May 19<sup>th</sup> with the first showing of *The DaVinci Code*. Thousands of theaters around the nation will act as meetinghouses, where anti-Catholic bigots can assemble to have their prejudices re-enforced with popcorn and in living color.

For this blockbuster movie, Sony Pictures assembled the award-winning team from *The Beautiful Mind*, director Ron Howard and producer Brian Grazer. Academy Award-winning actor Tom Hanks and relative unknown French actress, Audrey Tautou, star as the beleaguered protagonists. The \$125 million production will appeal to the darkest suspicions that many unbelievers and even some faithful Catholic have about the Church. Patrons will leave the theaters firmly convinced that their bigotry toward the Church has been justified and that anyone who claims to be a loyal Catholic is either very naïve or a mindless fool. Moviegoers will relish the opportunity to silence the Church's ringing objections to the culture's unbridled sexual promotion. It will also assuage the public's guilty conscience over its compliance with the country's steep moral decline.

While the film cannot recreate the entire novel, Howard vowed to be faithful to the book. In the cover story for *Newsweek* on January 2, 2006, the director said *we are doing the movie because we liked the book*. One can only expect that the movie will be a harsh rebuke of the doctrinal integrity of the Church. The Catholic faith will be beaten, battered, and bruised by a film that the producers claim is *just entertainment*.

#### HIDDEN TRUTH

According to its propaganda, the movie is nothing more than entertainment and the book is *just a novel*. *The DaVinci Code*, published by Doubleday in April of 2003, has spent a solid three years near the top of the *New York Times* best seller list. The

41-year-old author Dan Brown, who resides in New Hampshire, is not surprised by the extraordinary success of his book. There are 40 million copies in print around the world and the book has just gone to paperback.

Like the movie, the novel is a griping thriller that involves secret societies, conspiracies, and a mysterious albino Opus Dei monk, who stalks his victims all over Europe. Robert Langdon is a Harvard *Symbolist* who reprises his role in Brown's previous book, *Angels and Demons*. While in Paris, the witty and urbane Langdon gets immersed in a complicated murder mystery that involves ancient religious secrets and a beautiful young French companion, cryptologist Sophie Neveu. As the plot unfolds, Langdon cannot hide his religious skepticism that *every faith in the world is based on fabrication*, a statement worthy of Voltaire or Sartre. They scurry all over Europe from the Bank of Zurich to Westminster Abbey in search of clues to DaVinci's Code.

Leonardo DaVinci is depicted as a late grand master of the Priory of Sion, a secret society that has guarded the *hidden truth* about Jesus since 1099. Some of the other alleged guardians of the Priory include such European luminaries as Sir Isaac Newton, Botticelli, and Victor Hugo. There is little proof that the group existed in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The few existent documents point to four Frenchmen, including Andre Bonhomme, its first *grand master*, and felon Pierre Plantard as the real founders of the society, seven centuries later in 1956.

And what is this *hidden truth*? Jesus never died on the cross. He escaped with his wife Mary Magdalene and their daughter. It was Constantine, not Jesus, who founded the Catholic Church in 325. According to *The DaVinci Code*, the Vatican, which did not exist until 800 years later, has been covering this up since the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

Legend has it that DaVinci planted several codes and secret symbols in his paintings. The most controversial symbols are alleged to be in his *The Last Supper*, where a feminine-looking apostle sits on Jesus' right hand. Brown contends that this apostle was Mary Magdalene. Her special positioning signified her exalted status among the apostles.

#### OLD WINE

The book also relies heavily on the *Holy Grail*. In Christian tradition the Grail refers to the actual cup Jesus used at the Last Supper. To the Gnostics, the Grail is not a cup, which held Jesus' Eucharistic blood but Magdalene's womb, which held his

bloodline. *The DaVinci Code* attempts to radically alter the Biblical accounts of Jesus' life, death, and most importantly, His Resurrection. The book is just regurgitated Gnosticism, old wine in the new wineskins of an early heresy that denied the divinity of Jesus. As St. Paul said: *if Christ is not risen, vain is our faith.* (1 Cor. 15:13-14.)

The book fosters the *Big Lie* that the Church has been covering up the historical truth for nearly 2000 years and would stop at nothing, even serial murder, to protect its image, wealth, and power. Brown's novel says categorically that the Catholic Church has been engaged in the greatest conspiracy and the darkest hoax in recorded history.

*The DaVinci Code* has created a cottage industry for others promoting the Gnostic Gospels or what the National Catholic Register called *The Invasion of the DaVinci Clones*. Javier Sierra's *Last Supper*, Kate Mosse's *Labyrinth*, and Stephen Berry's *The Templar Legacy*, push the envelope of Biblical revision to new depths. Brown's *inspiration* apparently emerged from Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh's 1982 book *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, which has already enjoyed resurgence in sales. Baigent has a new book *The Jesus Papers*, similar to *The DaVinci Code*. All smear the Catholic Church as the archenemy of enlightened truth.

### A CONSPIRACY OF LIES

The key to understanding *The DaVinci Code* lay in the Gnostic Gospels, the so-called *hidden gospels*. According to Dr. James Hitchcock, in Beliefnet.com (December 30, 2003) *The Gnostics did not accept the Incarnation of Jesus and treated doctrinal orthodoxy as being too literal-minded*. This makes them the source for the false belief that Jesus, to the early Christians, was *just a man*. Hitchcock stated that *The DaVinci Code* holds that *the New Testament can be dismissed as historically false, even as a conspiracy of lies*. Feminists like the Gnostic Gospels because *women held leadership roles*.

The controversy began in 1945 with the accidental discovery of some ancient Gnostic texts in Nag Hammadi, Egypt. The Gnostic Gospels were bound not as scrolls but as codices. Brown erroneously links them to the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were discovered by Bedouins at Qumrum, near the Dead Sea in 1947. They contained about 800 manuscripts related to the Old Testament but had nothing to do with Jesus.

The Gnostic Gospels of Thomas, Philip, and Mary Magdalene are at great variance with the traditional Gospels of the Catholic Church. While they depict a confused and enigmatic Jesus without family history or semblance of human feeling, the Gnostic Gospels hold him to be some great human teacher who gave no pretense of divinity. Their *alternate Jesus* is the nice but misunderstood man of *Jesus Christ, Superstar*. This new interpretation of Jesus resonates well with the Zeitgeist of a culture that has cut its ties with the religious faith of Western Civilization.

### THE SACRED FEMININE

Religion professor Philip Jenkins argues that the Gnostic Gospels *saw Jesus and his first followers as protofeminists, whose radical ideas were swamped by a patriarchal orthodoxy*. According to author Sandra Meisel, one of the first Gnostic texts used effectively by early feminists was *Pistis Sophia*, (The Book of

the Savior.) which was published in English in 1896. It portrayed Magdalene as the *foremost apostle of Jesus*.

*The DaVinci Code* charges that the early Church leaders deliberately lied about Jesus, his friendships, and his fate in order to keep women subjugated. The guardians of the Priory still worship Magdalene as a goddess and keep lighted the flame of the *sacred feminine*. Brown's first murder victim, Jacques Sauniere, the Curator at the Louvre is ritualistically murdered and splayed like Leonardo's *Vetruvian Man* because he was a true guardian of the secret of the *sacred feminine*.

According to Brown's Gnostic theme, Original Sin was invented to undermine the *sacred feminine*. One cannot ignore the dark sexual implications of the *sacred feminine*. The book provides graphic explanation of the *Hieros Gamos* or *ritual sex*, which rejects its procreative powers and regards sex as a *spiritual act* designed to *achieve gnosis*. The novel elaborates how *mankind's use of sex to commune directly with God posed a serious threat to the Catholic power base*. Liberation from the Church's proscriptions against unfettered sexual behavior is at the heart of Brown's veiled attack on the Church.

### AN ORDINARY SAINT

One of the more controversial aspects of the book is Brown's slanderous depiction of Opus Dei. In his book the Church hierarchy recruits Silas, an albino monk from Opus Dei, to prevent the revelations of the *sacred feminine*. His brutal murders provide the grizzly excitement for both the movie and book.

The real Opus Dei organization bears little resemblance to Brown's creation. A Catholic priest, St. Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer, *the saint of ordinary life*, founded the real Opus Dei in Madrid, Spain in 1928 for the purpose of promoting the holiness of ordinary Catholics in their mundane lives in the secular world. St. Escriva placed special theological importance on traditional family life and work, meshed with personal pieties. Over 70% of Opus Dei's members are ordinary working Catholics, who live at home. About 20% are *numeraries*, laymen who have given their lives entirely to the organization, taking a vow of celibacy and living in one of their centers. Some hold outside jobs but the vast majority work in affiliated institutions. The remaining 10% are celibate *associates*, who live on their own. Worldwide there are over 80,000 members out of a billion Catholics.

Several Popes have blessed and encouraged Opus Dei's work. The Holy See approved it as a secular institute of political right in 1950. Pope John Paul II established it as a personal prelature of the Catholic Church. Opus Dei reached its zenith with the 2002 canonization of its founder. Because of its popularity among traditional Catholics, it has become a target by those who fear that its emphasis on tradition threatens the *spirit of Vatican II*. With Brown's full cooperation, Hollywood sighted Opus Dei in the same crosshairs it usually reserves for South Africa, pharmaceutical companies, or the IRA.

### FICTIONAL CLOTH

Brown's work of historical fiction might excite as a crypto-religious thriller. As a work of serious historical fiction, its many errors have produced a small library of corrections and disclaimers. The book's introduction boldly states *all descriptions*

*of documents and secret rituals are accurate.* This is the book's most fictitious statement.

His profound ignorance of Catholic history is staggering. Opus Dei is not a sect, a religious community, or an order of priests. The book also misrepresents the respective roles of Constantine, the origins of the Bible and the Council of Nicea. When Constantine converted, the Church's leaders had already recognized those books of the Bible which reflected the true word of God and excised the Gnostic Gospels because of their heretical content. Brown's claim that the medieval Church killed five million women in 300 years is ludicrous and totally without foundation. The claim that Christians were constantly making war on pagans is an egregious error that reverses the historical facts.

The author defends his many mistakes and distortions that have sullied the edifice of the Catholic Church by hiding behind the fictional nature of his book. The dialogue of characters, such as Professor Leigh Teabing who, like a Greek Chorus, serves as Brown's *voice of truth*, clearly indicates that the author intended his book as an historical account wrapped in fictional cloth.

#### A SEISMIC CONSPIRACY

**D**espite the whiney refrain that Brown and Howard have created *fictional entertainment*, millions will be unable to separate the truth from the fiction. It is quite possible the movie will further cloud the reality of the Biblical Jesus. Professor Hitchcock views the book as a vertical attack on the Church, which portrays its orthodox beliefs as "a terrible hoax". The movie will visually shake the doctrinal foundations of Catholicism with a seismic force comparable to what hit San Francisco in 1906. Doubt, hostility, and confusion will rain like persistent spring showers.

Perhaps the idea of a conspiracy does have the ring of truth to it. But what if the conspiracy glove were on the left hand. What if the movie and the book have been part of the natural vendetta against the Church that traces its fertile roots to the French Revolution in 1789? Could Brown's book and Howard's movie be unsuspecting partners to the long-lived conspiracy to remove the Church as an obstructionist force from the full-blown *Culture War*?

Conspiracy or not, Catholics must take heed of this attack on their faith. *The DaVinci Code* is a cultural main event. Its ramifications cannot be easily ignored, as its images will flood a culture that is already saturated with anti-Catholic bigotry. One way to combat assaults such as these is to learn how to defend the teachings of the Church. This must be augmented by fervent prayer and disciplined study. Catholics must also understand what *The DaVinci Code* is saying so that its errors can be dispelled. His Eminence Avery Cardinal Dulles' book, *A History of Apologetics* is a perfect place to begin. Other helpful books include *The DaVinci Deception* by Mark Shea and Edward Sri, Amy Wellborn's *Decoding DaVinci* and Carl Olson and Sandra Meisel's *The DaVinci Hoax*. Now is the time for Catholics to come to the defense of their Church!

*William A. Borst, Ph.D., Feature Editor, is the author of Liberalism: Fatal Consequences and The Scorpion and the Frog: A Natural Conspiracy available from the author at PO Box 16271, St. Louis, MO 63105.*

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## News & Notes

**CHICAGO/OAKBROOK, IL**—April 20, 2006. The 27<sup>th</sup> CMF Conference on Faith • Family • Freedom was MC'd smoothly by John O. Shields, chaired by Kevin Haney, with experienced Committee volunteers, ushers, table hosts, publicists, exhibitors, second generation families, friends, revered priests and religious. The opening Mass, offered for the recently deceased foundress of Chicago Conferences: Kay M. McGillicuddy, was celebrated by Fr. Charles Fanelli, Fr. Eduardo Garcia, Fr. Dudley Day, Fr. Christopher Layden, and Deacon James Sinacore.

**Speakers:** **Humberto Fontova**, Castro and Katrina survivor, exposed Hollywood's outrageous support of Castro; **Ronald J. Rychlak** gave superb defense of Pope Pius XII's heroic rescue of 800,000 Jews from Nazis; **Msgr. Robert J. Dempsey's** keynote address urged Catholics to renew American society; **Jack Cashill** told shocking facts on how intellectual hucksters have hijacked American culture. The talks are available on cassette or CD for \$8 from ACTS, 1-800-642-2287.

**Mrs. Cathy Ambuul Severance** was given the Motherhood Award. Her devotion to God has rewarded her with happiness and a beautiful family. Her generosity, kindness and deep faith dominate her life. **Leo P. McGrillen**, a persevering CMF member, accepted the Freedom Award. He was a quadriplegic shut-in 20 years until advances in rehabilitation gave him nearly complete independence. In time, he graduated from DePaul University with honors and went into full-time employment!

*"May our Father in heaven, in the name of His Son Jesus, bless, love, keep, comfort, guide and further sanctify you and all members of CMF with Gifts of His Holy Spirit."*

—Leo P. McGrillen

### Mother's Day—May 14

*"The most important person on earth is a mother. . . Mothers are closer to God the Creator than any other creature."*

—Joseph Cardinal Mindszenty

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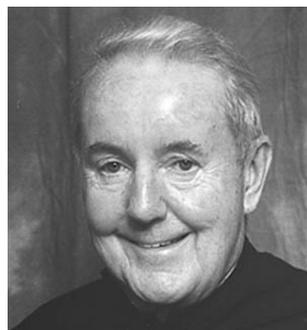
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