

The Da Vinci Code

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Last week, I went to see the much-heralded movie directed by Ron Howard “The Da Vinci Code.” Having read the book by Dan Brown, I awaited the movie with eagerness and apprehension. I was eager to see the movie because the book is an extraordinary thriller. As has happened to millions of readers all over the world, when I began reading the book, I could not put it down. Nevertheless, I was apprehensive because I was concerned with the effect the movie might have on the general public regarding the gospel according to Dan Brown. In a secular world where faith is scarce and doubt is the order of the day, Brown’s apocryphal story about Jesus can be a weapon of mass destruction. The movie was not what I expected. As a thriller, the book is much more engaging than the movie. The movie is not only mediocre, it is boring. The acting is bad. The casting is awful.

Nevertheless, I still felt apprehensive. True, many movies today have such fantastic plots and use so many special effects that audiences are accustomed to these flights of fantasy and very few people take them seriously. However, Brown’s slanderous fabrications about Jesus and Mary Magdalene, his outright defamation of the Catholic Church and Opus Dei will be seen by millions throughout the globe.

Then, there is the book. There is something about print that gives legitimacy to the written word and, though Brown protests that he is writing fiction, he asserts his fiction rests upon a factual foundation. Not only that, but historical figures such as Leonardo Da Vinci are part of his wrenched plot. There is nothing more deceptive than half-truths. The unwary reader easily ends up, at best, confused, at worst, convinced.

Brown’s story goes something like this: Jesus, who was not originally considered to be the Son of God, married Mary Magdalene and had several children. Mary Magdalene was the Holy Grail, not the chalice Jesus used at the last supper. Jesus entrusted the Church to Mary Magdalene but the apostles conspired against her and she had to escape to France. Since then, the Priory of Sion, a clandestine organization, has protected the descendants of Christ from the attacks of the Catholic Church. A group of Cardinals entrusts the Prelate of Opus Dei to kill the Grand Master of the Priory and the last descendants of Mary Magdalene. A deranged albino monk from Opus Dei carries out the murders but the last descendant of Mary Magdalene is saved by a Harvard professor knowledgeable about the arcane mysteries surrounding the Priory. The professor ultimately unravels the mystery of the identity of this descendant and the burial place of Mary Magdalene, which happens to be in Paris, deep beneath the glass pyramid by I. M. Pei at the Louvre.

The message that Brown communicates through his narrative and the dialogue of his characters is that Jesus did not consider himself divine, nor was he considered as such by his disciples. Belief in his divinity was imposed by Constantine, the Roman emperor, at the Council of Nicaea in 325. Jesus and Mary

Magdalene represent the masculine-feminine duality in the same way as Mars and Athene for the Greeks or Isis and Osiris for the Egyptians. The first followers of Christ worshipped the “sacred feminine” but this was later eliminated and the church became misogynistic. The Church is based on a great lie: Christ was just a normal person. In order to hide this, the church has destroyed documents; it has murdered millions of witches and heretics and has manipulated the scriptures.

This, of course, is pure fiction, but Brown’s assertions as to the factual underpinnings of the novel and the incorporation of historical characters have brought many of his readers to a new way of thinking about religion and about life. A case in point is reflected in the opinions collected by Amazon.com regarding the book. It synthesizes the effect of the novel on many of Brown’s unwary readers. One reader states that the book “completely turned my opinion of the Bible and the Catholic Church upside down.”

Therefore, this book and this film can’t be dismissed by merely pointing out that they are pure fiction. The extent of Brown’s audacious manipulation of history must be pointed out. It is hard to find a page in his book that does not contain mistaken or preposterous historical assertions. I will just address two of them, which are to me of particular importance, but a series of columns could be written on the extensive collection of absurdities advanced by Brown.

First, on the divinity of Jesus, a category whose authorship Brown attributes to an imposition of the Roman Emperor Constantine on the bishops attending the Council of Nicaea in 325.

After the resurrection of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit, it became clear to the apostles that Jesus was the Son of God, not an ordinary man as Brown contends. The Gospels written a few decades after the death of Christ bear this out. Such was the belief of the early Christians. This is born out by the writings of the fathers of the Church who wrote before the Council at Nicaea. For instance, St. Ignatius of Antioch, begins his epistle to the Romans, written around A.D. 107, as follows: “Ignatius, to the church that has achieved mercy in the magnificence of the Heavenly Father and of Jesus Christ, his only Son.”

The Council of Nicaea was convened in 325 because Arius, a priest from Alexandria, was preaching with considerable success the contrary doctrine—that Jesus was not the Son of God—to what the church had believed since the resurrection. The Council, confirming this belief, coming from the Church not from Constantine, rejected the Arian doctrine. Brown says it was a tight vote. This again is false, for the Nicene Creed was subscribed to by more than 300 bishops who were present. Only two refused to accept it.

The other preposterous assertion that I will take issue with in this column is that the Church prohibited the name of Mary Magdalene and thereafter she became known under the pseudonym of the Holy Grail. This again is completely false. From the beginning, the Church has venerated its saints, among them Mary Magdalene. Since antiquity, and up to this day, the Church celebrates the feast of Mary Magdalene July 22. Following an old Christian custom, down through the centuries, thousands of infant girls have been named Mary Magdalene in honor of the saint.

The most important question in human existence is to believe or not to believe. Though faith transcends reason, it must be compatible with truth. Postmodern humans are called upon to believe from the foundations of historical truth. When flagrant lies disguise themselves as truth and filter themselves to unsuspecting audiences through the mass media, we must all contribute to set the record straight.

