

The Da Vinci Code: fact or fiction?

By Bishop Victor Galeone

The movie version of Dan Brown's bestseller *The Da Vinci Code* is due to be released on May 19th. So please read Father Joe's column, which addresses some of the novel's misrepresentations. In view of all the hype surrounding the movie, I want to cover some features of the novel not treated by Father Joe.

Suppose that an author writes an historical novel set during the period of our nation's Revolutionary War. And then suppose that the author has George Washington cavorting with a mistress, a camp follower by the name of Betsy Ross, by whom he fathers a daughter. After the war, the author has Washington attempting to set up a dynasty whereby his daughter is to rule our country, only to be thwarted by Thomas Jefferson and the Continental Congress. How many books do you think this piece of fantasy would sell, notwithstanding its exciting plot?

Therein lies the mystery of the success of Brown's novel, which has surpassed even *Gone With the Wind* as the best adult fiction book of all time - " more than 40 million copies sold to date!

Dan Brown admits that his book is fiction. However, in the introduction he asserts: "All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate. Are they? Let's compare some of Brown's myths with the facts.

Myth: The Gnostic heretics are the real truth tellers. Fearing its power-base threatened, the church suppressed their writings and replaced them with the four gospels, written much later.

Fact: The gospels were all completed before the year 100, while the first Gnostic writings did not appear before the end of the second century.

Myth: Mary Magdalene is the victim of a Catholic smear campaign. Jesus intended her to be the leader of his followers, only to have Peter thwart his desire after Jesus had died.

Fact: Mary Magdalene is a Catholic saint, with many churches named in her honor - a strange position for someone being smeared. And who figures most prominently the morning of Christ's resurrection? Is it the male disciples, terror-stricken cowards behind locked doors? Or Mary Magdalene, the first one to see the risen Lord? A smear campaign?

Myth: Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene who bore him a child. She is pictured to the right of Jesus in Da Vinci's painting of the Last Supper.

Fact: There's not a hint in any of the gospels, epistles, or early church fathers about this supposed marriage. Jesus does have a bride, however, mentioned in the Book of Revelation: "Come and I will show you the Bride of the Lamb." The angel then points out to John the New Jerusalem - the church. "Husbands love your wives just as Christ loved the Church, and gave his life for her" (Eph. 5:25). And as for the person in Da Vinci's painting on Jesus' right, it's John, the youngest of the apostles. In those days youthful men were depicted beardless. Besides, since there are only twelve figures with Jesus " one for each apostle " Mary Magdalene is not there.

Myth: Constantine suppressed other religions, chose the books of the New Testament, and forced the bishops to accept the divinity of Jesus at the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D.

Fact: In 313 Constantine put Christianity on a par with paganism, but he suppressed no other religions. He did assemble the bishops at Nicaea " true! But it was the bishops alone who declared explicitly what is implicit in the New Testament, that Jesus is the eternal Son of God in the flesh. The major

corpus of the New Testament was collected by the year 200, and finalized at a Church Council in 393 A.D.

Myth: Opus Dei is a sinister, secretive organization of the church, one of whose members Brown makes his killer, calling him a “monk”³⁶ times.

Fact: John Allen, the Vatican correspondent for the progressive National Catholic Reporter, just published the book *Opus Dei*, the result of meticulous research. He concludes that Opus Dei is neither sinister nor secretive. The core idea behind the movement is to sanctify ordinary work, “meaning that one can find God through the practice of law or engineering... by picking up garbage or by delivering the mail...” And there are no monks in its ranks.

Hey, it’s only a fun book/movie! Why take it so serious?”

It’s always cause for concern when someone with an anti-Catholic bias produces a docudrama or writes historical fiction about the church. Recall what *The Deputy* and *Hitler’s Pope* - “both of them libelous” did to the reputation of Pius XII!

As shooting began on *The Da Vinci Code* film in August 2005, the co-producer, John Calley candidly admitted that this would be an “anti-Catholic movie.”

What would happen if the producer of a film about the Seven Day War were to confess that his work was “anti-Semitic?” Or if the producer of another film about the Ayatollah were to admit that it was “anti-Islamic?” Would Jews support the former, or Muslims flock to the latter?

I’m mystified, then, why Christians and especially Catholics would want to see *The Da Vinci Code*. It’s bad enough when somebody wants to lynch you. But why help them pay for the rope to do it?