THE 'DA VINCI CODE' - UNVEILING THE UNTRUTHS

'The Da Vinci Code is a thriller presented as a historical novel. It is fiction, yet it seeks to convince the reader that it is based on fact. It pushes an attack on the Catholic Church and claims to do so in the name of historical authenticity and sound scholarship. The claim is preposterous, but for many it is persuasive……There have been such writings before and, no doubt, there will be again. Why single out this novel? I read it because so many people who read it kept asking me questions about it. It has had a remarkably large and credulous readership, reminding me of the dictum that those who have lost or do not know the faith are likely to believe anything. It matters what we read, what films and television shows we watch. If we feed our minds on error, we risk losing touch with the truth about who we are and how we ought to live.' Cardinal George of Chicago, from his Foreword to *The Da Vinci Hoax* - a book written to expose the errors in *The Da Vinci Code*.

INTRODUCTION

Attacks on the Church come in many forms - sometimes subtle, sometimes blatant - but always the purpose is the same: to attempt to undermine the Truth and to question the authority and traditions of our Faith. Lies, omissions, half-truths and misleading statements can, by themselves or coupled with seemingly plausible alternatives, lead astray the unsuspecting reader or listener. It is into this arena, this battleground, that *The Da Vinci Code* has been introduced. Now, on the principle of 'know your enemy' it is important for all Catholics - and, indeed, all Christians - to be aware of the errors contained in this best-selling book. To help in this task two American authors - Carl Olson and Sandra Miesel - joined forces to write *The Da Vinci Hoax* in order to highlight and refute the errors being propagated by the 'Code' and its author, Dan Brown. It should be made clear straight away that it is not necessary to read the 'Code' in order to understand the 'Hoax' - because the authors of the 'Hoax' quote extensively from the 'Code' throughout their own book. The purpose of this leaflet - a brief summary of the contents of *The Da Vinci Hoax* - is to raise awareness and to stress the importance of having answers ready when the 'Code' enthusiasts (who, unfortunately, are numerous) challenge our beliefs and the authority of the Church. (n.b. quotations from the 'Hoax' are in *italics,* followed by the page number).

AGENDA AND PURPOSE

In its introductory chapter *The Da Vinci Hoax* deals with the agenda, the purpose and the major problems associated with the 'Code'. Here we are reminded that: *'Readers have enthusiastically embraced The Da Vinci Code and many of them point to the historical, artistic, religious, and theological details it contains as central reasons for their fascination with it.'* (p.21). *The Da Vinci Code* is a publishing phenomenon - that much at least is beyond question. At the time of writing (2005) in the two years since its publication (April 2003) sales are estimated to have reached 20 million copies; it is being translated into more than 40 languages; and there is the prospect of a high-profile, big-budget Columbia Pictures film, starring Tom Hanks, to be released in May 2006. The plot of the 'Code' concerns a renowned Harvard symbologist (Robert Langdon) who is summoned to the Louvre Museum in Paris to examine a series of cryptic symbols relating to Leonardo da Vinci's artwork. In decrypting the code he claims to uncover the key to one of the greatest mysteries of all time (the Holy Grail) and he becomes a hunted man. The novel alleges that the Catholic Church has perpetuated a centuries-long conspiracy to hide the 'truth' about Jesus Christ from the public and will stop at nothing, including murder, to do so.

The authors of the 'Hoax' point out that: *'The immense success of the 'Code' and its strong language about early Christianity and the Catholic Church has resulted in substantial confusion over the many (alleged) 'facts' within its pages. Not only is the novel influencing the views of non-Christian readers, it is raising difficult questions in the minds of many Christians, some of whom are being asked about Brown's interpretation of Church history and theology.'* (p.29)

MAJOR PROBLEMS

This opening chapter of *The Da Vinci Hoax* also provides a list of the major problems with the 'Code' as follows: that it claims to be based on fact, but often it is not; that it repeatedly misunderstands or misrepresents people, places, and events; that it promotes a radical feminist, neo-gnostic agenda; that it incorrectly and unfairly misrepresents Christianity and traditional Christian beliefs about God, Jesus and the Bible; and, finally, that it propagates a relativistic, indifferent attitude toward truth and religion. Before commenting in detail on these problem areas Olson and Miesel make the general point that *'...many readers do not have the background, time, or inclination to find out the truth. Even worse, many readers accept Brown's claims without consulting an encyclopaedia or other resources, apparently believing that if it is in print, it must be true. Or perhaps they want it to be true. Or maybe truth is not a concern to them. Regardless, the misrepresentation of Christian beliefs in the novel is so aggressive and continual that we can only conclude that it is the result of wilful ignorance or purposeful malice.'* (p.37) So, why has *The Da Vinci Code* achieved, in just two years, almost a cult status? Why has it been so successful? The authors of the 'Hoax' suggest several reasons: *'On an immediate level, fans of the novel find it to be a quick and exciting read'* - it has been described as a 'real page-turner'.... *a thriller with twists and turns, conspiracies and mystery....The book reads much like a made-for-television movie, with short chapters, curt conversations, little character development and sparsely constructed backdrops.....*(but) *Perhaps most important is the gnostic aspect. 'Gnosis' is a Greek word for 'knowledge' - meaning a special, hidden knowledge available only to an elite few...* and (whilst millions of readers may not sound like 'a few')*…readers' comments confirm how thrilled they are to 'discover' the* (so-called) *'hidden truth'.'* (p.39)

FACT, FICTION AND FALSEHOOD

Most of *The Da Vinci Hoax* (some 235 pages out of a total of 329) is taken up with exposing specific errors in the 'Code'. The subjects are indicated by the chapter titles which make it easy to pinpoint particular topics for reference purposes. In addition, there is a comprehensive index and bibliography. The following extracts are taken from the main chapters in the book:

(1) Gnosticism - The Religion of the *Code.* This chapter opens with these comments: *'Drawing deeply upon gnostic ideas about spirituality, Jesus Christ, Mary Magdalene, and the early Church, The Da Vinci Code weaves elements taken from that ancient belief system into a modern-day story of murder, intrigue, and conspiracy.'* And we note that *'...gnosticism is alive and well, a vibrant part of the world of alternative faiths.'* (p.45). Furthermore, *'...(gnostism) is a perenniel heresy that continually follows Christianity seeking to subvert and invert essential beliefs of the orthodox Christian faith.'* (p.45) In a footnote, the authors draw attention to the fact that *'As for the novel questioning authority, especially that of the Catholic Church, many readers have told us stories of being confronted by friends, family members, or co-workers who believe the novel accurately depicts Catholic beliefs and events in the Church's past.'* (p.48)

(2) The Magdalene - Saint, Sinner or Goddess. Here we learn that: *'In the course of about twenty-five pages, readers of Dan Brown's novel are exposed to a flood of claims about Mary Magdalene, her identity, her supposed relationship to Jesus, her role in the early Church, and what she supposedly had to do with the Holy Grail.'* (pp.73-74) For example, Brown maintains that the quest for the Holy Grail is the search, not for the chalice used at the Last Supper, but for the resting place of Mary Magdalene. He also asserts that the Catholic Church launched a 'smear campaign' against Mary Magdalene…slandered her name, and labelled her a prostitute out of spite and that Jesus and Mary had children. Each of these errors is refuted and dealt with in some detail by the authors of the 'Hoax.

(3) The Christ and the Code. This chapter makes it clear that: *'If The Da Vinci Code's depiction of Jesus Christ is correct, Christians might as well play golf on Sunday mornings and put their Bibles in storage.'* (p.108). The 'Code' makes the claim that, prior to the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325, no-one, not even Jesus' followers, believed He was anything more than a mortal prophet and great man. However, as we know, and as the 'Hoax' affirms with examples from the Gospels and early Christian writers: *'There is clear and copious evidence that the early Christians, dating back to Jesus' time on earth, believed that Jesus of Nazareth was divine.'* (p.112).

(4) Constantine, Paganism and Nicea. One of several claims made in the 'Code' is that it was the Emperor Constantine who transformed Jesus from a mere mortal man to the 'Son of God' and by so doing cemented the Catholic Church's control of the person of Jesus. The 'Hoax authors point out that: *'Brown is especially adamant that Constantine was at the heart of the move from matriarchal paganism to patriarchal Christianity by waging a campaign of propaganda that demonized the sacred feminine, obliterating the goddess from modern religion forever.'* (p.141) but, as far as the Emperor and the Council are concerned, *'a brief overview of the basic facts…show that the claims made in The Da Vinci Code are wide of the mark on a number of counts.'* (p.169)

(5) Myths of the Holy Grail. In this chapter, and the remaining chapters, more of the 'Code' errors are exposed and corrected. For example: *'Brown makes large claims for the Grail story, calling it 'the most enduring legend of all time' (even though) it was unknown until the late twelfth century. (He) says that the Grail has been the object of wars and quests - as if these were real and not literary events.'* (p.180) *'The manic enthusiasm for Mary Magdalene as wife or at least sexual partner of Christ requires the dethronement of the Blessed Mother as Queen of Heaven. This is a long-standing feminist strategy.'* (p.192)

(6) The Real Templars and (7) The Templar Myth. According to the 'Code' the Knights Templar were a 'law unto themselves'. But, the fact is that: *'The Templars' unique vocation earned them enthusiastic support throughout Europe'* and though '*a Papal Bull of approval in 1139 made them independent of local bishops they remained answerable to the papacy, as every religious congregation of pontifical right still is.'* (p.196). *'The Da Vinci Code and its sources… trade heavily on (the) supposed continuity between paganism, gnosticism, and the Templars, as well as on the supposed gnostic connotations of the Holy Grail.'* (p.217)

(8) The Priory of Sion Hoax. *'Whatever its popularity and influence, the Templar myth at its most mystical failed to satisfy some tastes. Deeper levels of mystification were devised by inventing the Priory of Sion, a secret society reputed to be the hidden power behind major events in Western history.* (p.223) *'Although the false history of the Priory has been repeatedly exposed….since at least 1985, Dan Brown wants his readers to think it is real and that its preposterous claims are genuine.'* (p.239)

(9) The 'Code' Puts on Artistic Errors. Because Leonardo has fascinated people for centuries it is no surprise to find that: *'Some of the appeal of Brown's novel is undoubtedly due to its use of the Renaissance genius and its striking claims about the meaning and content of his paintings.'* (p.240). However, *'The distorted nature of the novel's depiction of Leonardo culminates in the assertion that from 1510 to 1519 the artist presided as Grand Master over the Priory of Sion, the (so-called) 'secret society' that protected the (alleged) 'truth' about Jesus and Mary Magdalene.'* Brown also claims that Leonardo was fascinated with goddess iconology, paganism, feminine deities and contempt for the Church. - claims that are seriously flawed *'as an examination of Brown's 'evidence' will demonstrate.'* (p.250).

(10) More Errors and Final Thoughts**.** In this final chapter of The Da Vinci Hoax the authors draw attention to the fact that about a quarter of the way into Brown's novel: …' *readers are treated to a page-long diatribe about the Catholic Inquisition, the murder of witches, and the supposed hatred of women found within conservative religious bodies - especially the Catholic Church.'* (p.280). In dealing with these allegations, this chapter also quotes other claims in connection with original sin, the ordination of women, 'sacred' sex, and a right-wing conspiracy - all as they are referred to in the 'Code'. In every case the errors are clearly identified and are refuted with reliable, authoritative evidence. The final paragraph of the 'Hoax' carries this compelling message: *'So what is The Da Vinci Code? Is it just a fad? A one-hit wonder? A novelty novel? Will people remember it in ten years? Will it matter? Is it worth writing an entire book in response to it? We think it necessary, especially considering the impact and influence the novel has had and continues to have.'*

CONCLUSION

According to Dan Brown, almost everything most Christians and non-Christians think they know about Jesus is completely wrong - it is just the result of Catholic propaganda designed to hide the truth from the world. Are the 'Code's' claims fact or just plain fiction? Is the novel well researched as is claimed? What is the truth about Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and the early Church? Has the Catholic Church distorted the real Jesus? Why is the novel so popular? What about the anti-Catholic, anti-Christian agenda behind the novel? 'The Da Vinci Hoax' answers these questions and many more, revealing some surprising truths about Brown's book. As one reviewer, a distinguished Professor of History and Religious Studies, put it: 'Finally! Someone has taken the trouble to counter the absudities of *The Da Vinci Code*.'

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For additional information please refer to any the following websites:
www.catholicanswers.org (an answer guide) www.davincihoax.com (a study guide) www.opusdei.org (response to the Code) www.amywelborn.com (de-coding Da Vinci).