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[English](#) [Español](#)

FONT: [SM](#) [MED](#) [LG](#)

Site Search


Our Diocese

[Home](#)
[Our Diocese](#)
[News & Information](#)
[Prayer & Scripture](#)
[Education](#)
[Office of Religious Educ](#)
[Clergy & Religious](#)
[Diocesan Services](#)
[Outreach](#)
[Office of Stewardship & Development](#)
[Diocesan Media Center](#)
[Worship](#)
[Marriage Tribunal](#)
[Human Resources](#)
[Contact](#)

[Our Diocese](#) | [Bishop Dorsey](#) | [Bishop Wenski](#) | [Parishes](#) | [History](#) | [Statistics](#) | [Archivist](#)

Bishop Wenski - Column

The DaVinci Code Movie - May 2005



On May 19th the movie version of Dan Brown's novel, The Da Vinci Code, will hit the big screen. Given the popular success of the novel (some 40 million copies sold), the film version promises to be a blockbuster. And, if history teaches us anything, Christians, especially Catholics, are rightly concerned.

One hundred years ago, a similar book purporting to be "fact" and also plagiarized from and inspired by earlier works, appeared. Entitled "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion", this anti-Semitic polemic demonized the Jews as evil schemers plotting the takeover of the world. It recounts the supposed secret minutes of a non-existent Jewish ruling clique. Though a hoax, capitalists such as Henry Ford and national socialists such as Adolph Hitler took it as fact. And a century later, people are still taken in. Translated in a host of languages, untold numbers of copies are published throughout the Islamic world – and just recently a new Spanish language edition appeared in Mexico. As Hitler's propagandist, Joseph Goebbels, held: people will believe a big lie sooner than a little one; and if you repeat it frequently enough people will sooner or later believe it.

And Dan Brown's novel is replete with lies. What he alleges to be "historic facts" that denigrate the Catholic Church and the most cherished beliefs of all Christians are unsupported by any real evidence. One could scarcely imagine Ron Howard or anyone else in Hollywood attempting to bring "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion"

to the big screen. And recently, in the face of Muslim riots, newspapers in Europe fell over themselves in apologizing for publishing a caricature of Mohammed. Yet, no one sees a problem in mocking the deeply held beliefs of Christians, and especially Catholic Christians. And don't think these slights are not deliberate. Last August, one of the movie's producers, John Calley, told the New York Times that the movie was "conservatively anti-Catholic". Hoaxes when given credence do have consequences – and while one of the consequences might be a re-enforcement of the anti-Catholic prejudice that has long been a blot on our American culture, a more insidious consequence is that this movie with its distorted and blasphemous presentation of Jesus and the Church could undermine the susceptible viewer's relationship to the person of Jesus.

In the face of yet another revival of "The Protocols", the Washington based, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum saw fit to devote space to a special exhibit detailing that forgery's history and its adverse affect on Jews. The exhibit is called: "A Dangerous Lie: The Protocols of the Elders of Zion". And Catholics and other Christians will and should protest Sony's version of its own big lie, The Da Vinci Code. Perhaps, the best protest would be not only not to see the movie, but to deliberately go and see another, perhaps a more family friendly and less Christian bashing movie. Maybe then Hollywood would get the point. At any rate, if the Holocaust Memorial Museum can fight back against resurgent anti-Semitism, so can we - against a persistent anti-Catholicism. In fact, a number of books are now available debunking the premises of the Da Vinci Code. The U.S. Bishops Conference also offers a website, www.jesusdecoded.com that helps set the record straight. And, of course, if anyone wants to seek out the true Bride of Christ (cf. Ephesians 5: 25ff), or to learn about a Holy Grail or chalice containing the real blood of Christ, they are welcome to join us at Sunday Mass.

[HOME](#) | [OUR DIOCESE](#) | [NEWS & INFORMATION](#) | [PRAYER & SCRIPTURE](#) | [EDUCATION](#) | [CLERGY & RELIGIOUS SERVICES](#) | [OUTREACH](#) | [STEWARDSHIP](#) | [MEDIA CENTER](#) | [WORSHIP](#) | [MARRIAGE TRIBUNAL](#) | [HUMAN RESOURCES](#) | [CONTACT](#)