

Abusing my religion

An op-ed by the head of Opus Dei's women's programs in the U.S.

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You probably wouldn't have known me in the first place if you saw me walking down a New York City street. But now, because of "Da Vinci Code" author Dan Brown and the movie's director Ron Howard, I have been rendered even more obscure.

You see, I am a female member of Opus Dei. Not only does the book

describe me as "brainwashed," it further makes me invisible within my organization and subservient to men.

Nothing could be further from the truth. It's hard to know what motivated Brown to pick on us, but it's time to set the record straight about some of his many gaffes.

To start, the book and movie depict a Catholic organization run by a cadre of powerful monks and bishops. The truth about Opus Dei: Only a small minority of our members are clergy, and there are no monks. Lay men and women are vital and active members of our institution.

In the "Da Vinci Code," women's emancipation seems to mean nothing but serving as the child-bearer, either to a nondivine Jesus Christ or to some other man. We are the weaker sex and seem not to care. Reality: Opus Dei was the first

institution within the Catholic Church in which both lay men and lay women have the same vocation, the same rights and duties and receive the same in-depth theological and philosophical training.

Though women (and men) in Opus Dei strive to be thoroughly dedicated to God, we wear no habits nor take any vows. We try as much as possible to blend in, to be a quiet Christian presence wherever we work and live.

Women participate in the collegial governing of Opus Dei at every level - international, national and local.

Of course, the most serious lies and blasphemy in this book and movie aren't about ordinary men or women. They're about Jesus Christ Himself.

History and the Catholic Church confirm for me that Jesus Christ has

both a human and divine nature, and that He suffered, died and was resurrected from the dead on behalf of all of us, who were and are in need of redemption. In respected historical and theological circles, no one doubts the Crucifixion.

But according to Brown, Jesus' death on the cross never happened. It was a lie.

This cartoon story vilifies my religion and effectively casts me, a female adherent to it, as a stooge. It will sell millions of dollars in tickets and popcorn.

But the truth is stronger than slander. Catholicism is a faith of love. And women in Opus Dei work as lawyers, judges, teachers, doctors, professors, chefs, homemakers, artists, engineers, clerks, hairdressers, college presidents, writers, etc. For us, it's about doing

one's work - whatever it may be - well and with love.

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