

Opus Dei complains to BBC of 'defamatory' TV portrayal

The Prelature of Opus Dei in Britain has lodged an official complaint with the BBC following what it says was a "defamatory portrayal" of the organisation in a programme broadcast earlier this week.

08/04/2007

Opus Dei says its depiction in "Waking the Dead" shown on Sunday

and Monday evenings on BBC1 at prime time is in breach of the Corporation's guidelines.

FULL TEXT OF LETTER FOLLOWS:

BBC Complaints

P O Box 1922

Glasgow G2 3WT

23 January 2007

Dear Sir

We wish to lodge an official complaint against your defamatory portrayal of Opus Dei in "The Fall" episodes of "Waking the Dead" broadcast on BBC1 on 21 and 22 January.

In these programmes Opus Dei was portrayed as an organisation of murderers, thieves and adulterers who justify and cover up evil actions while hiding behind a veneer of

hypocritical piety and penitential rituals of self-flagellation. The three characters portrayed as members are self-serving hypocrites whose main reason for belonging to Opus Dei is depicted as being their wealth.

This portrayal is lifted from the Da Vinci Code, a book and film which claimed - against all evidence - to be based on fact. Despite strenuous and well-publicised objections at the time by the Catholic Church, and despite countless press reports into Opus Dei which found the organisation innocent of Dan Brown's depiction, the BBC chose to exploit this portrayal as if it were commonplace fact.

Unlike the Da Vinci Code, the BBC's programme does not claim to be true. Yet we note from your Editorial Guidelines that the BBC believes that in dramas "the same standards of fairness which apply to factual

programmes should generally be observed." The Guidelines go on: "It is inevitable that the creative realisation of some dramatic elements such as characterisation, dialogue and atmosphere, will introduce a fictional dimension, but we have an obligation to be accurate and to ensure the drama does not unduly distort the known facts and thus become unfair."

In "Waking the Dead" the BBC chose to identify Opus Dei by name while portraying it unfairly. The BBC chose to create a fictional bank ("BICF") but not a fictional religious organisation, when it would have subtracted nothing from the plot to have done so. We also note, from the same Guidelines, that the BBC is committed to avoiding the perpetuation of "prejudice and disadvantage which exist in our society".

We further note from the BBC's Religion Editorial Guidelines that the BBC "will ensure the religious views and beliefs of an individual, a religion or religious denomination are not misrepresented, abused or discriminated against, as judged against generally accepted standards."

In the making of this programme, no attempt was made to contact Opus Dei or to secure consent to its portrayal. Our doors are always open and we welcome all journalists and members of the public to come and see for themselves the real Opus Dei.

The BBC has a well-earned reputation for quality programmes. We now ask the BBC to investigate this complaint as a breach of its editorial guidelines as well as a breach of its responsibility as a public broadcaster under Articles 3 and 4 of the Charter.

Yours faithfully

Jack Valero

Statement by Jack Valero, from the
Opus Dei Information Office:

"We are disappointed that the BBC
has chosen to lift its portrayal of
Opus Dei directly from the Da Vinci
Code, ignoring the hundreds of press
reports which contradicted that
portrayal.

"All through last year we noticed a
great interest in journalists and
members of the public to find out the
truth about Opus Dei by going to the
sources, visiting our centres and
talking to real members. We only ask
that the BBC do the same: our doors
are always open.

"We accept that these programmes
make no claim to fact, but the
depiction of Opus Dei is drawn from
a book and film which did make that

claim. As a survey last year showed, people have been influenced by that depiction. We believe that it is irresponsible of the BBC, as a public service broadcaster, to have perpetuated that prejudice, in breach of its editorial guidelines. Opus Dei is not an anonymous corporation but a family with feelings and values.

"We hope that the BBC will investigate the matter and apologise. But more importantly, we want the Corporation to think carefully before choosing again to portray us in this irresponsible way."

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