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Vatican Crusade Against "Da Vinci Code"? Hardly

Clarifications About Debate
Organized by Genoa
Archdiocese

08/08/2005

Newspapers and agencies worldwide have announced over the past two days that the Vatican has launched a crusade against Dan Brown's best seller "The Da Vinci Code."

In fact, what happened is that the Office for Culture and the University

of the Archdiocese of Genoa simply organized a debate on the book today, entitled "The Da Vinci Code ... Stories Without History."

Given the repercussions of this initiative, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, archbishop of Genoa, gave an interview Tuesday to Vatican Radio and said, "One cannot be a modern young person without having read 'The Da Vinci Code.'"

"We are aware of the circulation of this book in schools and, for this reason, have taken measures of reflection and also of public, open and determined confrontation," said the cardinal, a former secretary of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

The cardinal attributed the success of Brown's book to a visible strategy, especially after the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000.

"The Church, with our Pope John Paul II, has made an exceptional impact on present-day humanity, and this has bothered many," he noted.

"The strategy of distribution is the result of absolutely exceptional 'marketing,' including in Catholic bookstores," the cardinal said. "I have complained to Catholic bookstores which, for the sake of profit, display piles of this book.

"And, then, there is the strategy of persuasion: You are not an adult Christian if you don't read this book."

Cardinal Bertone mentioned sociologist Philip Jenkins, who says that the success of the book is one more proof that anti-Catholicism is the last acceptable prejudice.

"I wonder," said the cardinal, "what would have happened if a book like this had been written, full of lies, on the Buddha or Mohammed or even,

for example, if a novel had been published that manipulated the history of the Holocaust."

The debate held today was entitled "The Da Vinci Code -- Stories Without History."

The event's guest speaker Massimo Introvigne, founder and director of the Turin-based Center of Studies on New Religions, sent a written response to ZENIT about the book's historical errors.

Introvigne said that it was necessary to refute the work's errors because it has a page entitled "Fact," where the author Dan Brown asserts that all the descriptions of documents and secret rituals in the novel are accurate and are based, specifically, on the claim that in 1975, the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris discovered parchments, known as Les Dossiers Secrets, which reveal the story of the Priory of Sion.

"The Da Vinci Code" implies that Opus Dei is a "sect" which has entered into conflict with the Church in terms of its knowledge of the Priory of Sion's secrets.

"In the first place, nobody can conceivably blackmail others on the basis of the 'secrets of the Priory of Sion,' which basically do not exist," wrote Introvigne. "These alleged secrets are part of a hoax which proceeds from Plantard to de Sède, from de Sède to Lincoln, and from Lincoln to Dan Brown.

"In terms of the Opus Dei -- where, by the way, there are no 'monks,' contrary to what Dan Brown proposes in his book -- not only it is an institution approved and praised by the Catholic Church, but its founder, José María Escrivá (1902-1975), has been canonized as a saint by the Pope in 2002.

"Dan Brown's 'information' comes from an association of ex-members and other people hostile to the Opus Dei, known as The Opus Dei Awareness Network (ODAN), mentioned explicitly in the novel, which is connected to a much larger 'anti-cult movement.' ... ODAN's aggressive opinions on Opus Dei and its founder are in no way shared by the Catholic hierarchy."

Introvigne said he believes that "The Da Vinci Code" has had such enormous success because it "brings together two types of social 'tastes' which appear to be quite widespread": "on the one hand, the notion of 'conspiracies' and secret societies that dominate the world; and, on the other hand, an increasingly unashamed and virulent anti-Catholicism."

An interview with Introvigne on the historical errors of "The Da Vinci

Code" is posted at [https://
www.cesnur.org/2005/
mi_02_03d.htm](https://www.cesnur.org/2005/mi_02_03d.htm)

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