

Associated Press: 'Da Vinci Code' Boycott Sidestepped in U.S.

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A senior Vatican official has called for a boycott of "The Da Vinci

Code," while the Council of Churches in Jordan and Roman Catholic

activists in India want their governments to ban the film altogether.

But what's notable in the U.S. where the film's release next week has believers of many denominations nervous and angry is that boycotts are taking a back seat to anti-"*Da Vinci*" books and teaching sessions about the Gospels.

Some religious commentators figure that movie boycotts make Christians look bad and don't accomplish much. Even Opus Dei, the Catholic organization that's villainously portrayed in Dan Brown's story, is going for educational outreach.

"It seems that boycotts are becoming less and less effective," said

Bob Waliszewski of the conservative Focus on the Family, whose pluggedinonline.com media guide draws 1 million visits a month.

The practical problem with boycotts, and even harsh criticism of a film, is that it winds up drawing more attention to the movie in question, they figure.

An Opus Dei leader cited attacks on Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ" as one reason his community was bypassing a boycott. And while the gay-themed "Brokeback Mountain" irked some conservative groups, commentator Dick Rolfe of the Dove Foundation, which encourages production of family-friendly films, cautioned last year

that: "If Christians protest too loudly, they can end up making the mistake of calling attention to a movie that otherwise may not do very well at the box office."

Another problem, said Christian media consultant Phil Cooke, is that so many entertainment offerings denigrate faith that believers would need to "set up a permanent boycott office underneath the Hollywood sign."

Movie boycotts basically don't work, says Bob Waliszewski of Focus on the Family, though protests can sometimes kill TV shows because advertisers don't want to offend consumers.

What has believers across the theological spectrum upset about "Da Vinci" is the idea that the film will echo Brown's novel by having

scholarly characters dismiss the Bible and church teachings about

Jesus as fraudulent. The plot also revolves around Jesus marrying

Mary Magdalene, and a conspiracy to cover their union. "Da Vinci"

director Ron Howard has rejected pleas for an on-screen disclaimer

labeling the tale as fiction.

Advocates of a box-office boycott include Archbishop Angelo Amato,

No. 2 in the Vatican's doctrine office, and India's Catholic Secular

Forum. Jordan's Council of Churches said "Da Vinci" contradicts both

the Bible and Islam's Quran.

In America, one person suggesting an alternative is Barbara Nicolosi,

whose Act One trains Christians in entertainment careers. She's

promoting an "othercott" through her "churchofthemasses" blog:

Believers are to purposely attend Disney's "Over the Hedge" to bump

"Da Vinci" from first place in opening weekend box office.

Otherwise, church groups are sponsoring an unprecedented avalanche of

pre-emptive Web sites, broadcasts, sermons, books, pamphlets, panel

discussions, news conferences and ads.

Retired University of Missouri-Kansas City professor Gregory Black says boycotting was once a more potent threat. His book "The Catholic Crusade Against the Movies" recounts the story of the Catholic bishops' Legion of Decency, founded in 1934.

The group controlled sexual and other offensive content for more than two decades by monitoring forthcoming films and threatening to direct millions of parishioners to shun unacceptable fare.

These days, cultural changes and new channels of movie distribution make boycotts much more difficult, he said. Besides, "boycotts

generally have driven people to the box office."

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