

# BIG MARKET FOR CATHOLIC-BASHING BOOKS

*by Robert P. Lockwood*

Anti-Catholic books have been dominating the *New York Times* bestseller list lately. Three books riddled with anti-Catholic themes and imagery have been listed at the same time. All are novels.

Unless you have been hiding under a rock for over a year, you've heard of *The Da Vinci Code*, the hardbound bestseller now available in paperback. Opie and Forest Gump's movie based on the book will be released in May.

Without getting the publicity of *The Da Vinci Code*, two other books have climbed the bestseller list as well.

A newer entry—at number five on the list in March—is *The Last Templar*, by Raymond Khoury (Dutton). A previous hardbound bestseller and ranked in the top five in paperback sales at the same time is *The Third Secret* (Ballantine Books) by Steve Berry.

Since these are novels, the authors and publishers can glide over the anti-Catholic themes that permeate the books by responding that these are just stories. But all three have a pseudo-intellectual wink to them as if they are rooted in established facts of history that give legitimacy to the tales they tell.

Because of the movie connection Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* has received most of the attention. But the proliferation of these additional anti-Catholic novels proves an ancient adage: there is money to be made in appealing to visceral anti-Catholicism.

The plots in *The Third Secret* and *The Last Templar* center on intrepid couples running around the globe tracking down hidden historical truths that will prove the Catholic faith to be fake.

In *The Last Templar*, our intrepid couple track down the diaries of Jesus, which had been discovered in the Holy Land during the Crusades by the Knights Templar. The diaries reveal that all that stuff about miracles, salvation and the Resurrection was a fabrication of the Church to consolidate its power.

In *The Third Secret*, Steve Berry has an intrepid couple discovering that Church leadership had hidden the true revelation of the Blessed Mother at Fatima, namely that birth control and abortion are fine, priestly celibacy is wrong and the ordination of women right, and that homosexual marriage is a noble thing.

After revealing her message, Berry has the Blessed Mother say to the children at Fatima: "Go my little ones and proclaim the glory of these words."

The Church, according to *The Third Secret*, had hidden the true revelation of Fatima in order to maintain its grip on power that would be undermined if the Blessed Mother contradicted 2,000 years of defined truth. So the Blessed Mother had to return to Medjugorje to give the same lecture in the late 20th Century.

Berry has also added another book—*The Templar Legacy*— which has made it to the hardbound bestseller list. And *The Da Vinci Code* has gone paperback as well, no doubt in preparation for the movie.

In commenting on Berry's *The Templar Legacy*, Publisher's Weekly reports that the book "soft-pedals the genre's anti-Catholicism."

Which is a pretty clear understanding from even a secular perspective of what all these books are essentially selling.

Both *The Third Secret* and *The Last Templar* portray the Catholic Church as ruthlessly destroying anyone that would reveal these secrets. In *The Last Templar* there is a murderous monsignor working for a brutal cardinal. In *The Third Secret*, Berry has a murderous priest who reports to a murderous cardinal.

Berry's book goes to the greatest lengths—two popes commit suicide, and a good priest is murdered by the ruthless monsignor while a future pope looks on, then gives absolution immediately after for the crime.

Berry also has the curious figure of a not-particularly sympathetic priest who is sleeping with the female protagonist while undergoing a trial for excommunication led by the evil cardinal.

We also find out that the “good pope” who commits suicide has also had an ongoing love affair, and the point of all this is to show the evil of priestly celibacy and the pain it has allegedly inflicted on the world. Without celibacy, we are led to believe, the Church would never harbor such love-defeating teachings on contraception and abortion.

These books in one way or another sell three anti-Catholic stereotypes that are as old as the Reformation. The first anti-Catholic legend is that the Catholic Church forcibly repressed a true Christianity that had existed since the days of the Apostles. It was a common post-Reformation propaganda point that there was a pure Christianity subversively maintained over the centuries that served as a counterpoint to the apostolic claims of the Church. The real Church was this “invisible Church.”

Khoury's book takes that anti-Catholic tenet and gives it a New Age twist. He describes the alleged purity of the original

teachings of a thoroughly human Jesus mouthing pious platitudes. Berry puts in the mouth of the Blessed Mother a laundry list of contemporary secular grudges against the Church that can be found in any news story: abortion, contraception, homosexual marriage, celibacy and a male-only priesthood.

In each case, however, is the clear idea that the Catholic Church had repressed the true teachings of Jesus and is simply the invention of the Roman Emperor Constantine in the Fourth Century.

It's a gnostic gospel being preached based on nothing more than a wise teacher, rather than a revelation of God.

Berry is at least more straightforward—attributing to the Virgin Mary the kinds of things that are routinely said by the Church's most irresponsible critics.

The books, however, are not arguing from a Protestant perspective. Evangelicals who might be tempted to sample the "puritan pornography" in these books should understand the secular interpretation of this long-standing anti-Catholic tenet.

The secular interpretation has it that in a rigged Church council at Nicene in 325 under the Roman Emperor Constantine's thumb, a belief system surrounding Jesus was created by putting an official seal on false Scripture, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

This marked the beginning of a ruthless suppression of various gnostic writings that told the real story of Jesus. That's not an interpretation that the average evangelical would favor.

The problem is that Brown and Khoury within the context of their novels present this combination of post-Reformation and New Age gnostic propaganda as undeniable fact, not something merely made-up to fit a fictional plot. Berry simply confirms

essentially gnostic beliefs by the *deus ex machina* of the Blessed Mother at Fatima.

The second anti-Catholic legend permeating these books is that the Church is in this only for power. All its teachings, all its beliefs, all its sacred devotions exist to consolidate a nefarious hold on worldly power and wealth.

It is a given in both books that the Church is fighting and has fought the revelation of their alleged secrets not because it would prove Christian teaching false, but because in doing so the power of the Church would be undermined. Power—particularly power exercised over women—is a more important motivation to the Church than truth itself.

That is why the Church will respond so murderously. Khoury sees it as a compelling motivation of the cardinals. Berry makes the trappings and exercise of power the sole motivation of a newly elected pope.

Khoury portrays a Church that first paid extortion, then viciously suppressed the Knights of Templar so that their secret would be maintained and the Church could still exercise power. Berry has the Church repressing the Blessed Mother's revelation because it would mean that the Church taught error for 2,000 years, thus undermining magisterial authority.

Which leads to the third anti-Catholic theme that permeates these books. Basic to anti-Catholicism has always been the charge that Church leadership knows that it is teaching falsehood. According to these books, not only does the Catholic Church teach and believe falsely, it does so knowingly.

Khoury has his Church leadership arguing that it knows the Scripture to be false, but that it maintains its beliefs solely because people can find some glimmer of hope in an otherwise senseless world. Berry has the pope knowing the teachings of the Church are false, but holding on to them

because the applecart of power cannot be overturned.

The anti-Catholic themes propagandized in these novels are part and parcel of America's cultural baggage. They are still used to counter Church positions in the public arena without ever addressing the actual positions themselves.

Khoury's book is the least offensive of the two, if only because of a plot twist at the end and at least a vague acknowledgment that faith accomplishes some good in the world. (Although he is at pains to point out that it is a faith not grounded in reality.)

Berry, on the other hand, is probably the only author of an anti-Catholic book that would stoop to use the Blessed Mother as his *deus ex machina* to promote abortion.

Berry in particular seems to evidence a real anti-Catholic animus though, on his website, he "credits the nuns who taught him in elementary school with instilling the discipline needed to both craft a novel, then sell it to a publisher." And I'm sure some of his best friends are Catholic, too.

People make their points with anti-Catholic legends disguised as facts. And these books encourage those legends.

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