

SMITHSONIAN LINKED TO ANTI-CATHOLICISM

Catholic League president Bill Donohue wrote a letter today to the members of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees, the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution, the Editor-in-Chief and Publisher of the *Smithsonian* magazine and the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution. His letter concerns an article in the June edition of the *Smithsonian* by James Carroll titled, "Who Was Mary Magdalene?"

Donohue summarizes his position as follows:

"James Carroll has a long record of seeking to discredit the historical record of the Catholic Church so as to impugn its credibility today on issues that have little or nothing to do with his immediate subject. For example, in his book on the role of the Church during the Holocaust, he ends with a plea for the Church to change its teachings on women and sexuality. In his latest foray, he exploits and inflates the role of Mary Magdalene to accomplish the same ends. And he does so by treating Gnostic texts as if they carried the same historical weight as the New Testament. He also relies on two books that have been dismissed by serious students of history for their shoddy scholarship.

"Were it not for the source of Carroll's commentary, all of this could be written off as interesting discourse, or the mere chatter of cynics. But the *Smithsonian* is not just another magazine: it is the flagship publication of the highly revered Smithsonian Institution, and thus carries the implicit imprimatur of the federal government.

"For the Smithsonian Institution to be associated with an article about Roman Catholicism that is written by a man who questions the Resurrection, the need for salvation and the

divinity of Christ is reprehensible. It is obvious that anyone who would deny the heart and soul of Judaism or Islam would not find a receptive audience at the Smithsonian. What needs to be explained is why the same level of editorial scrutiny broke down in this instance.”

A&E'S DEMONS MERIT EXORCISM

Catholic League president Bill Donohue commented today on an A&E documentary based on the work of Simon Cox, author of *Illuminating Angels and Demons: The Unauthorized Guide to the Facts Behind the Fiction*:

“Beginning the day before ‘The Da Vinci Code’ opened, A&E has thrice aired a documentary, ‘Illuminating Angels and Demons,’ that is replete with lies about the Catholic Church; the next airing is tomorrow.

“Drawing on the work of a Dan Brown wannabee, Simon Cox, the viewer learns that Peter was the first person to see the resurrected Jesus (he wasn’t—it was Mary Magdalene); the Vatican existed in the Fourth Century (it didn’t exist until a 1000 years later); there are ‘hidden gospels’ buried in the Vatican that could be used to destroy the Church (the innocuous books can be found online); Jesus was a follower of John the Baptist (he’s got it backwards); the Church is anti-science (no institution has contributed more to science than the Catholic Church); the Church ‘would still kill Galileo today’ (no one—not even an albino monk—killed him); and so on.

“Had A&E accessed serious scholars, these embarrassing errors would have been avoided. Instead, they relied on amateurs and charlatans.

“While we can’t be exactly sure what’s possessing A&E these days, the signs are ominous. Better call on the services of an exorcist, just to be sure.”

HOLOCAUST WINDS MISS UNIV. OF OREGON

Last night, a meeting of the Student Senate at the University of Oregon ended when seven students walked out in protest of a proposal to condemn the *Insurgent*, the campus paper that featured an obscene attack on Jesus in the March edition. Catholic League president Bill Donohue blames the university’s president, Dave Frohnmayer, for the turmoil:

“On April Fool’s Day, 1996, some white students yelled racist slurs out the window to some black students. President Frohnmayer did not see the humor in this and proceeded to drop the hammer. In the April 15, 1996 edition of *News & Views*, the campus newsletter, he flatly declared, ‘We do not tolerate racism.’ He backed up his rhetoric with action: He immediately summoned the Office of Public Safety and the Office of University Housing to issue reports on ‘racially based incidents’ so that he could answer them ‘quickly.’ He also called for a joint meeting of the university’s Race Issue Task Force and Racial Issues Advisory Council.

“Frohnmayer was so worked up that he drew a parallel to the Holocaust: ‘It may seem a far leap—even an unimaginable leap—from slurs yelled out a residence hall window to the horrors of the Holocaust. It is, regrettably, not unthinkable.’

“Now if Frohnmayer had treated the Catholic-bashing incident

the way he treated the racist incident, he would have drawn another parallel to the Holocaust. So as not to be misunderstood, it was irresponsible of him to make the Holocaust analogy in 1996 and it would have been equally irresponsible had he done so now. But the essential point remains: Had he acted quickly to morally condemn the *Insurgent*, this matter would have been closed by now. Instead, he fell back on legalisms, citing Supreme Court cases on students' rights. Hence, the chaos.

"Frohnmayr can dismiss Bill O'Reilly—it's not hard to do—but he cannot dismiss outraged Catholics, public officials and the taxpayers. He needs to commence a campus-wide discussion on two subjects: anti-Catholicism and the relationship between rights and responsibilities." *Contact Frohnmayr at pres@oregon.uoregon.edu.*

SONY OKAYS "DA VINCI CODE" DISCLAIMERS

"The Da Vinci Code" will open in India on Friday. The one-week delay was due to negotiations between Sony Pictures and the nation's censorship board over the propriety of inserting a disclaimer. Sony has now agreed to put the following statement before and after the movie: "The characters and incidents portrayed and the names herein are fictitious, and any similarity to the name, character or history of any person is entirely coincidental and unintentional."

Last week, Sony agreed with Thailand's censorship board to put a disclaimer at the beginning and end of the film saying its content is fictional.

Catholic League president Bill Donohue was amused:

“Some people will do anything for a buck. Having run up against a brick wall in India and Thailand, Sony caved and delivered on the disclaimer they said wasn’t necessary. It was either buckle to the demand or lose money, and Sony did what everyone knew they would do.

“I wrote to Ron Howard on March 18, 2005 asking for a disclaimer. I also wrote a *New York Times* op-ed page ad that was run on March 6 this year asking for a disclaimer. All I ever heard in response was that such requests would compromise the artistic integrity of those associated with the movie, and that it wasn’t needed because it was just a spy thriller. But neither argument holds water: many movies offer disclaimers and ‘The Da Vinci Code’ is anything but a thriller.

“How ironic it is that in the U.S. and Europe, which are predominantly Christian, no disclaimer is afforded, but in nations that are three percent (India) and one percent (Thailand) Christian, a disclaimer is given. It shouldn’t take the presence of a censorship board to persuade Sony to do the right thing—ethics alone should dictate.”

MATERIAL GIRL STRIKES AGAIN

The singer Madonna kicked off her “Confessions” tour in Los Angeles yesterday. Between political statements and oral sex jokes, Madonna found the time to don a crown of thorns, hang from a mirrored cross and croon her ballad “Live to Tell” in front of a screen flashing images from the Third World.

Commenting on this is Catholic League president Bill Donohue:

"When the Material Girl first embraced Kabbalah, we thought her new-found faith would inspire her to show some respect for religion. It stands to reason that a woman whose faith is so important to her that she drags her rabbi to her concerts would not want to mock the faith of others.

"But I guess you really can't teach an old pop star new tricks. Madonna has been spicing up her act with misappropriated Christian imagery for a long time now. Perhaps she can't arouse any interest in her work without it. Poor Madonna keeps trying to shock. But all she succeeds in doing is coming across as a boring bigot.

"Do us all a favor, Madge, and stick to singing and dancing. Knock off the Christ-bashing. It's just pathetic."

"DA VINCI CODE" IS INANE

Bill Donohue saw "The Da Vinci Code" today. Here are his comments:

"The movie theater was packed, and at the end of the film there were three or four people who clapped, and three of four who hissed. Most just walked out in a zombie-like fashion, eerily mimicking the characters on the screen.

"This was one of the most inane films I have ever seen. It takes forever to get going, and even when it finally does, it fails to sustain the momentum. Indeed, it somehow manages to revert back to its original slumbering style, delivering one of the most thoroughly anti-climactic endings ever to grace the screen.

“There are too many symbols and too many arcane codes, but the real reason the movie fails is because it lacks suspense, is hopelessly melodramatic, and is way too long. The few times the audience laughed was due to a quip made by one of the characters: these moments were much appreciated—it broke the boredom.

“As for the anti-Catholic nature of the movie, it is a credit to Ron Howard that he softened the edges. To be specific, the conversation about the divinity of Christ, and about religious belief in general, was portrayed with greater sensitivity to Christians than was depicted in the book. But in doing so the film may have lost some of its punch. I say this not because I would have preferred a more in-your-face style, but because it simply happens to be true.

“Had the movie been a success, the effect would have been troubling. But because it fails to persuade, this is one movie practicing Christians have nothing to worry about.”

BILL O'REILLY HUMBLER HIMSELF

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments today on Fox News Network host Bill O'Reilly:

“On last night's show, O'Reilly told two guests that ‘I can't lead this crusade.’ He was referring to the incident at the University of Oregon where a campus newspaper, the *Insurgent*, posted graphics of a naked Jesus with an erection kissing another aroused naked man.

“O'Reilly needlessly humbles himself when he says he can't lead this crusade. Of course he can't: it is not his fault

that he has no constituency, no institutional base. So how could someone who represents no one lead this crusade?

“The Catholic League learned of this incident when some students sent us a copy of the offending newspaper. We quickly had hundreds of color copies made by a local printer. Copies, along with a two-page letter I wrote, were then sent on April 26 to the approximately 90 members of the Oregon legislature, the governor, the state’s three Catholic bishops, the president of the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, and the chancellor of the Oregon University System. This is not a job for a guy like O’Reilly—it requires the resources of an organization.

“The graphic that O’Reilly held up on TV came from worldnetdaily.com—we e-mailed them the photo and they properly blocked out the genital area. Unlike O’Reilly, we credited the Internet site in our news release of April 27.

“What O’Reilly did not mention was that progress has been made: State Senator Doug Whitsett is introducing legislation to deal with matters like this in the future. But O’Reilly can be forgiven for not mentioning this on his show, and that’s because we didn’t post this letter on our website. Ergo, there was no way he could have stolen this aspect of the story.”

IS “THE DA VINCI CODE” JUST A MOVIE?

Catholic League president Bill Donohue commented today on how some movie reviewers are reacting to “The Da Vinci Code”:

"All of us are given to inconsistencies, but few merit the label 'rank hypocrite.' Jami Bernard, film critic for the New York *Daily News*, falls in the latter category.

"In her two-and-a-half star review of 'The Da Vinci Code' today, Bernard says that 'It's the must-see movie of the summer, if only because of the religious protests akin to the uproar over the Danish political cartoons. We're living in dangerous times when a merely okay summer movie can make everyone forget the golden rule: It's only a movie, folks.'

"Now let's see if I understand her logic. Those like myself who have been critical of 'The Da Vinci Code,' and have asked for a disclaimer—not even a boycott—are morally identical to machete-wielding Muslims who want to chop people's heads off for publishing a non-obscene cartoon of Muhammad. Got it.

"By contrast, Bernard was so horrified by 'The Passion of the Christ' that she warned, 'No child should see the movie. Even adults are at risk.' She called the Mel Gibson classic 'the most virulently anti-Semitic movie made since the German propaganda films of World War II.' So what happened to the 'It's just a movie, folks' line of reasoning? It must have been more than just a movie to cause this woman to tremble in public.

"Bernard gives away her hand when she says of 'The Da Vinci Code' that 'The movie is so nervous about offending anyone that it's hardly any fun.' In other words, if Ron Howard had delivered a knock-out anti-Catholic film, she would have given it four stars. It obviously never occurred to her that according to her own logic, she should have given Mel's movie five stars: after all, he wasn't nervous about scaring the daylights out of her. To top it off, she didn't find his flick fun. Where's her sense of humor?"a

“DA VINCI CODE” BOMBS WITH CRITICS

Here's a sample of what critics who previewed "The Da Vinci Code" yesterday had to say about the movie:

- "Dud"; Unwieldy"; "Plodding." (Reuters)
- "A Bloated Puzzle"; "The movie is so drenched in dialogue musing over arcane mythological and historical lore and scenes grow so static that even camera movement can't disguise the dramatic inertia"; "No chemistry exists between the hero and the heroine." (*Hollywood Reporter*)
- "Almost as bad as the book." (*Boston Globe*)
- "High-minded lurid material sucked dry by a desperately solemn approach"; They've "drained all the fun out of the melodrama." (*Variety*)
- When the movie "takes a brief wrong turn, and Howard momentarily loses control of his huge, streamlined vehicle, it's hard to say where to put the blame." (FoxNews.com)
- "Critics Crucify 'Da Vinci Code.'" (Australian Associated Press)
- "Critics largely panned the cinematic version"; "The movie did receive some lukewarm praise, but the majority of the response was highly critical"; "One scene during the film, meant to be serious, elicited prolonged laughter from the audience. There was no applause when the credits rolled; instead, a few catcalls and hisses broke the silence." (CNN)
- "At one point, some of them responded in the auditorium with laughter to one of the developments in the plot—something director Ron Howard would not have

anticipated.” (Press Association Newsfile)

- “Shrugs of indifference, some jeering laughter and a few derisive jabs”; “The Cannes audience clearly grew restless as the movie dragged on to two and a half hours and spun a long sequence of anticlimactic revelations”; “Some people walked out during the movie’s closing minutes...and there was none of the scattered applause even bad movies sometimes receive at Cannes.” (AP)

Bill Donohue said, “If Ron Howard is being laughed at by those predisposed to believe the worst about Catholicism, he’s an utter failure.”

GUESS WHO BELIEVES “DA VINCI CODE” FABLE?

Catholic League president Bill Donohue commented today on who is likely to believe the “Da Vinci Code”:

“According to Reuters, those in England who read the Dan Brown novel are twice as likely to believe the tale that Jesus had children with Mary Magdalene. Perhaps the most astounding figure is the 30 percent who believe this and haven’t read the book, not the 60 percent who read it and believe it to be true. To explain this, consider the data in the U.S.

“In a USA/Gallup poll taken this month, 72 percent of Americans said that no movie had ever had a profound effect on their religious beliefs in any positive or negative way; 21 percent said they saw a movie that strengthened their beliefs; and 4 percent said they saw a film that caused them to question their religious beliefs. A Barna Group survey reported yesterday that 24 percent of those who read the book

said it was helpful in relation to their 'personal growth or understanding.' And only 5 percent said they changed any of their religious beliefs because of the *Da Vinci Code*.

"Why the disparity between England and the U.S.? There is an inverse correlation between religiosity and belief in the *Da Vinci Code*'s thesis: the more likely one is to attend church, the less likely he or she is to believe the book's thesis. For example, the 2001 British census revealed that 72 percent consider themselves Christian, but only 8 percent regularly attend church services. Now consider that in the 2004 presidential election, 59 percent of regular churchgoers voted for Bush and only 35 percent of regular attendees went for Kerry. Couple this with the Barna data which found that liberals were twice as likely as conservatives to have altered their religious beliefs after reading the book, and the implications are obvious: those most likely to swallow the *Da Vinci Code*'s moonshine are those with the weakest faith, and those who are liberals (often one and the same).

"In other words, it's always easy to seduce liberals—just invite them to reject religion, especially Christianity—and watch them lap it up."