

Office of the Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Calgary

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

One line from Dan Brown's "*The Da Vinci Code*" explains why there is so much hype concerning the release of the movie version of his novel: "Almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false." Regrettably, this piece of fiction thrives on the lure of apparent genuineness and it has the potential to mislead the unformed and uninitiated. Some would go so far as to see it as an attack on Christianity and the Catholic Church in particular.

I have been asked repeatedly in the past several weeks whether I was going to make a statement about the release of the film. Some believers are calling for protests and boycotts. Others have asked that Dan Brown be condemned, his book placed on some kind of Index of Forbidden Books, and that the faithful should be told not to attend the movie under pain of incurring some kind of ecclesial sanction.

Such action would certainly make great media headlines but it would only play into the hands of those who are designing the advertising and marketing strategy for the movie. Consequently, I am not going to go there.

I don't like the real or perceived assault on the foundations of my faith. As a matter of fact, it saddens me that some, for whatever reason, trash what is held as sacred by so many.

I am reminded of how Archbishop Vincent Landel of Rabat responded to the similar publication of cartoons on Mohammed in the Western press. He wrote a brief poem entitled "If the other really became my brother!"

If the other really became my brother!

Is not this the question one must ask given the debate in the media?

If the other really became my brother, could I question the faith that makes him live?

Could I ridicule his beliefs in one way or another?

If the other really became my brother, could I speak of freedom without living respect?

If the other really became my brother, could I reject him with violent acts against his person or properties?

If the other really became my brother, could I allow myself to speak negatively about him behind his back? Could I allow myself to destroy even his privacy?

If the other really became my brother, I could really meet him in truth; we could speak simply, even if we don't agree on everything.

If the other really became my brother, meeting with him would make me grow, and I am certain he would also grow.

If the other really became my brother, our gazes would meet and a real smile would illuminate our faces.

If the other really became my brother, what an exciting world we could build!

I regard the movie's release as a teachable moment much like the exchange at Caesarea Philippi between Jesus and his disciples. "... He put this question to his disciples, 'Who do people say the Son of man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' 'But you,' he said, 'who do you say that I am?' Then Simon Peter spoke up and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus replied, 'Simon, son of Jonah, you are a blessed man! Because it was no human agency that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven.'" (Mt.16)

It will raise some of the foundational questions: Who is Jesus? What about the beginning of Christianity? What were the first followers of Jesus like? What did they believe? To those searching for answers, I would simply point them in the direction of any one of the fourfold Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) and the Acts of the Apostles and invite them to read and pray over the sacred texts.

For those who want to explore in greater depth the historical misrepresentations, distortions, and errors, there are a whole host of responses to the Da Vinci Code.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has launched a spiffy web site to debunk the books's claims at www.jesusdecoded.com.

Ann Welborn's book, "De-Coding Da Vinci: the Facts Behind the Fiction of the Da Vinci Code," is featured on the USCCB web site.

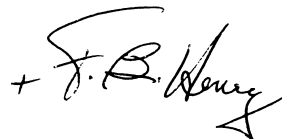
Another excellent resource is "Dismantling The Da Vinci Code" by Sandra Miesel which can be found at www.crisismagazine.com/september2003/feature1.htm.

I thought that one of the responses of Opus Dei headquarters was inspired when it suggested donating to African relief as a way of responding to the "pain" people might experience as the book's "lack of respect for the beliefs of Christians." We might think locally of donating to Feed the Hungry or The Mustard Seed.

The core problem is that the Da Vinci Code is billed as more than mere fiction. If you choose to view the movie, enjoy, but discount the historical claims which are nothing short of preposterous.

Wishing you all the best, I remain,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "F. B. Henry". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

α F. B. Henry
Bishop of Calgary.