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The Da Vinci Protocols

Jews should worry about Dan Brown's success.

By David Klinghoffer

With less than three weeks before the May 19 release of the Sony Pictures version of Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code*, worries continue to mount among Christians about both the book's and the movie's impact. But should non-Christians be concerned, too?

Absolutely. Jews in particular need to be aware of the gift mega-selling Dan Brown has given, in all innocence, to anti-Semites.

As everyone knows by now, Brown uses a gripping suspense story set in the present to inform us that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene, and that he has descendants living in Europe today. Furthermore, the members of this surviving Jesus family have been protected for centuries by an altruistic secret organization, the Priory of Sion, which is locked in combat with a sinister, violent Catholic group, Opus Dei. That latter seeks to keep the secret of Jesus' paternity from getting out. Behind Opus Dei stands the Catholic Church. For millennia, the church has perpetrated what the film calls "the biggest cover up in human history."

Opus Dei, the real-life Catholic lay order, asked Sony to place a disclaimer at the beginning of the movie admitting that the story is fictional—a request the studio has so far refused. Brown himself states at the outset of the novel that his tale is grounded in "fact": "The Priory of Sion—a European secret society founded in 1099—is a real organization," and so on.

Scholars have done a solid job of pointing out the fictions that interweave Brown's "facts." Notably, the "Priory of Sion" is "real" only in the sense that it really is the modern invention of Pierre Plantard, a peculiar Frenchman with royalist and anti-Semitic views. It dates to the year 1956, not 1099. Plantard's hoax merely took the name of a medieval monastic order that had ceased to exist by the 14th century and which had nothing to do with legends about Jesus' fathering children.

You may wonder if Brown's readers find his tale convincing, not as fiction but as truth. Seemingly they do. A Barna Group poll found that 53 percent of the book's readers said *The Da Vinci Code* aided their "personal spiritual growth and understanding."

But why should a non-Christian care?

Consider that the alleged conspiracy underlying the "biggest cover up in human history" bears a remarkable resemblance to another phony conspiracy, the famous hoax called the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Apparently authored by Russian monarchist and anti-Semite Mathieu Golovinski in 1898, the *Protocols* tells of a secret society of Jewish elders that work to keep gentiles ignorant of a plot to rule the world through "Darwinism, Marxism, and Nietzscheism."

In both conspiracy theories, an ancient world religion turns out to be a massive fraud perpetrated to gain or maintain power. In Dan Brown's version, the "Priory of Sion" ("Sion" simply means "Zion" in French) is the good guys. They've been waiting for the right moment to reveal the secret about Jesus having children and to introduce the world to the worship of the "Goddess," a.k.a. Mary Magdalene.

Meanwhile the Catholic Church plots to suppress forever the truth about the "sacred feminine." Opus Dei is willing to go to any lengths, including murder, to keep the male church hierarchy in power.

Pierre Plantard (1920-2000), the French monarchist and anti-Semite who gave us the "Priory of Sion," spent much of his life inventing minuscule esoteric organizations intended to "purify" France of the evil influences of modernity—and of Judaism. In 1940 he wrote of the "terrible Masonic and Jewish conspiracy" that threatened France.

The Priory of Sion was one group he started. The point of this occult order was to advance Plantard's claim to be the surviving heir of the ancient Merovingian line of French kings, whose "holy blood" was guarded by the Priory. The idea that the Merovingians were the descendants of Jesus and Mary Magdalene was added on later.

Besides highlighting the word "Zion" or "Sion," the two conspiracy theories share an understanding of how to deal with ideas you disagree with. Rather than taking traditional Christian beliefs at face value and arguing with them (as I do in my [current book](#) by the way), Dan Brown portrays the religion itself as resting upon a conscious deception. That excuses him from having to make arguments at all.

Anti-Semites do the same thing. Rather than coming out honestly against Darwinism or Marxism or modernity in general, they concoct a story about Judaism as a lie and a conspiracy. The *Protocols* remains a global phenomenon of staggering popularity, especially in the Arab world.

I emphasize that Dan Brown never intended to foment bigotry. Yet to the cause of conspiracy theorizing, he has done a wonderful favor, training his readers in the habits of paranoia and gullibility. For people committed to finding the truth through investigation and argumentation, that's depressing.

As for Jews, we haven't fared well when the culture we live in turns to entertaining fantasies and delusions at the expense of an unfashionable religion. The success of Brown's book, now transformed into a movie blockbuster, is bad news.

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