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The World of Media

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Modern Conspiracies and *The Da Vinci Code* Movie:

Two Thumbs Down

Paul McAuley, CSSp

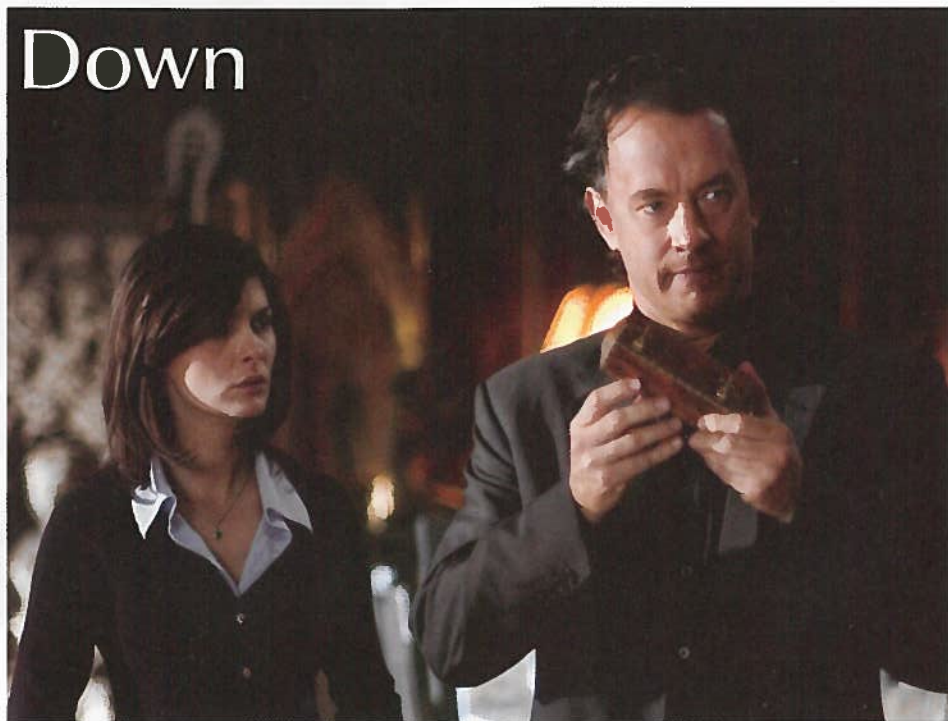
This past May, the FBI conducted yet another intensive search for Jimmy Hoffa, the former Teamsters boss who suddenly disappeared in 1975. After a couple of weeks of digging all over a Michigan horse farm (ironically called Hidden Dreams Farm) they found absolutely nothing.

In August 1977, Elvis Presley finally “left the building.” Yet there are countless thousands who claim he is alive: they have seen him. Some conspiracy theorists have suggested that it is the body of Jimmy Hoffa, not Elvis, in Elvis Presley’s grave in Graceland!

While it is beyond a shadow of a doubt that JFK is indeed dead, there is no end to the number of theories as to the motive and identity of the assassin(s) of the U.S. President on that shocking day in Dallas in November 1963.

Hoffa, Elvis, JFK, these are just a few of the favourite ingredients that can be found in the modern conspiracy theory. Why settle for the ordinary when one can have a really good conspiracy? Mystery sells, conspiracy sells and religious conspiracy sells more! So it should come as no surprise that *The Da Vinci Code* has been so popular. If you have not read the book or seen the movie, you probably are at least familiar with the plot. If you are not familiar with the story line, perhaps you have been on a deep space mission for the past few years?

Suffice to say, the story set out in the fictional *The Da Vinci Code* is that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene, that they had children, that Mary was the real leader of the early Christian community and that the early Church quashed this knowledge and for two thousand years has been engaged in



Audrey Tautou and Tom Hanks star in *The Da Vinci Code*.

the most fantastic cover-up and conspiracy to hide the “truth.”

I am reminded of the tag line *THE TRUTH IS OUT THERE* from the wildly popular 90s TV show, *The X Files*. I am also reminded of Pilate’s question to Jesus “What is truth?” (John 18:38). Yes, the truth is out there but it can take some work to get at it. We live in an age of instant information and instant misinformation. The Internet has proven to be the dream tool of conspiracy theorists and their disciples. In other media too, fact is fiction and fiction becomes fact. We live in the age of the “infomercial” and the “mocumentary.” Even the staid old “documentary” has become suspect of late as people question the motives and political leanings of the producer. Are truth and objectivity possible?

Our response

So with regards to the world of media, fact and fiction, what is our response as Christians, as Church? We can choose to shun the media and withdraw from the

world. Will that accomplish much? Can we continue to be the “leaven in the yeast” if we withdraw? On the other hand, do we embrace the media and modern secular culture so much so that it ends up dictating the Christian agenda? I think there is a middle path — critically engage modern media and culture, dialogue and debate with those who produce, write, create and fashion what we see on TV, at the movies, on our iPods, in our newspapers and magazines and on our computer screens. As Christians, if we desire to be a leaven of positive change in the world, we must become media savvy.

As for *The Da Vinci Code*, yes, I read the novel and saw the film, as I knew many people to whom I minister would be asking me about it. I enjoyed the novel as I enjoy similar spy thriller fiction. As for the film, well, save your cash! Most of the critics were right; the movie is a bloated, disjointed, poorly edited bore. Even if the truth were out there, one would probably fall asleep before finding it! ■