

CHRISTIANS AIM TO BREAK 'DA VINCI CODE'

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Different as they are, Matthew Thompson and D. James Kennedy count themselves as soldiers in an ecumenical army of the faithful massing against *The Da Vinci Code*, which opens Friday in thousands of U.S. theaters.

With coordinated premieres this month in Europe, Latin America, Asia and Australia, and with acclaimed director Ron Howard and popular Oscar-winning star Tom Hanks, the movie promises to reach millions worldwide, far more than even the best-selling book of the same name, which sold more than 40 million copies in 44 languages. Not since the Islamic world erupted in outcry against Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses* in 1989 has a work of fiction unleashed such a religious backlash. As enthusiastically as Christians flocked to see Mel Gibson's 2003 *The Passion of the Christ*, they are now protesting *The Da Vinci Code*.

"The whole secular world is behind this movie," said Thompson, 24, of Delray Beach, who works at a publishing house but hopes eventually to join a religious order. "Conscious or unconscious, Ron Howard and Tom Hanks are agents of the Devil."

Moved by nothing less than a message from on high, Thompson determined to protest the movie, with or without assistance. But during an Internet search, he quickly found others in Palm Beach County. Together, they have made placards and plan to focus their efforts in a peaceful demonstration on one theater, the Regal Cinema in Delray Beach.

No less alarmed, the Rev. D. James Kennedy raises his resonant voice in disgust against *The Da Vinci Code*, which he found ideologically repellent and historically inaccurate.

"We realized that, for good or evil, this book and movie have enormous impact on people's thinking," said Kennedy, a televangelist who heads megachurch Coral Ridge Presbyterian and Coral Ridge Ministries, its multimedia arm, in Fort Lauderdale. "It is a wholesale broadside attack on Christianity."

Kennedy decided to marshal his considerable multimedia powers in the controversy.

After reading the book, Kennedy first preached a sermon against *The Da Vinci Code* last year.

As news of the movie began to appear, he wrote a book and produced a one-hour television documentary.

Although Kennedy said his documentary cost a tiny fraction of the \$125 million Hollywood movie, it was filmed in almost as many European capitals as *The Da Vinci Code* movie and features a cast of leading historians.

The Da Vinci Delusion is airing on Kennedy's television program *The Coral Ridge Hour*, on 600 television stations today, according to a spokesman for Coral Ridge Ministries. The companion book and DVD are being distributed by the Rev. Donald Wildmon's American Family Association, which combats what it considers offensive images in the media. Catholic and Protestant churches also are playing the DVD during lectures and workshops to combat *The Da Vinci Code*'s ideas.

Inspired by the Gospel message that God turns all things to good, other Christian clergy of every stripe are using the movie as an opportunity to educate and warn members, particularly the young.

"It plants seeds of doubt and threatens to undermine the faith of millions," said the Rev. Andrew Hagen of Advent Lutheran in Boca Raton. His church is sponsoring a month-long series of sermons and lectures under the title, The Da Vinci Code Is Cracked. Advent mailed 5,000 postcards promoting the series to nearby residents.

The book and movie propound three pernicious ideas, Kennedy said:

- That the Bible is just a book, like any other book.
- That Christ was a man, just like any other man.
- And that early Christian fathers, including the Apostles, manipulated the Gospels and suppressed Christ's wish to have Mary Magdalene lead the church.

"It is the most blasphemous book I have ever read," Kennedy said.

His greatest concern is for the young and impressionable. A number of high school students at Westminster Academy, the private religious school connected to Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, told Kennedy they plan to see the movie, if only to find out what all the fuss is about. Kennedy said he has not forbidden any of his large congregation from seeing the film.

Across the country, offended Christians are calling the ideas in the film blasphemous and planning protests, including boycotts and petitions. A Vatican official and a representative of Opus Dei, a religious organization featured prominently in The Da Vinci Code, both requested that the movie's rating be changed from PG-13 to R. Broadcast and cable television offer a steady stream of historical and other programs.

Bishop Gerald Barbarito, head of the five-county Diocese of Palm Beach, last week reminded Catholics that The Da Vinci Code is fictional entertainment, not meant to be confused with historic fact or religious dogma.

"People of faith are rightly concerned that the Holy Gospels and the teaching of the Church are so frivolously distorted," Barbarito wrote.

As offended as Kennedy is and as motivated as he is to combat the ideas in the movie, he recalls similar controversies in the past and how they turned out.

First published in 1965, The Passover Plot suggested that Jesus choreographed the myth of his divinity, crucifixion and disappearance from the tomb.

In 1988 another film, The Last Temptation of Christ, also suggested a sexual liaison with Mary Magdalene. It aggravated many religious people to picket the few theaters where it was shown.

"They made something of a splash, relatively small compared to this," Kennedy said. "I'd be amazed if anyone remembers them now."

Experiencing 'The Da Vinci Code' in South Florida

INTERNET

www.davincidelusion.tv

www.diocesepb.org contains a link, Jesus Decoded, created by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

LECTURES

The Da Vinci Code is Cracked at Advent Lutheran Church, Boca Raton. Lectures at 10 a.m. Sundays, repeated 11:15 Sundays and 7 p.m. Wednesdays, through May. Fellowship hall, Advent Lutheran, 5001 N.E. Fourth Ave., Boca Raton. Call (561) 395-3632, Ext. 10.

'Da Vinci Code' discussion, 6:30 p.m., Wednesday, Holy Spirit Lutheran Church, 13301 Ellison Wilson Road, Juno Beach. Call (561) 624-9663.

The Inaccuracies of the Da Vinci Code, with Sandy Romeu, 7-8:30 p.m., Wednesday, St. Therese de Lisieux Catholic Church, 11800 Lake Worth Road, Wellington. Call (561) 784-0689. Free-will offering.

'Da Vinci Code': Fact or Fiction,

The Rev. John D'Mello, St. Vincent De Paul Seminary, 7-8:30 p.m., Thursday, art room, St. Joan of Arc Catholic Church, 370 S.W. Third St., Boca Raton. Phone (561) 392-0007.

The Da Vinci and Other Codes: A Fair-Minded Analysis, led by Richard T. Nolan, author of Living Issues in Philosophy, 6:30-7:30 p.m., Saturday, St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, 100 N. Palmway, Lake Worth. For information, call (561) 582-6609.

Truth vs. Myth of 'The Da Vinci Code,' 4 p.m. May 21, Palm Beach Community Church office, 3970 RCA Blvd., Suite 7009, Palm Beach Gardens. Call (561) 626-5683.

Kabbalah and 'The Da Vinci Code,' 3:30 p.m. June 4, educator and author Bob Waxman discusses history of the Kabbalah teaching of the 'divine feminine' and related topics. Free. Temple Beth Tikvah, 4550 Jog Road, Greenacres. Half-mile south of Lake Worth Road. Call (561) 967-3600.

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Illustration: PHOTO (2 B&W & C)

1. (B&W) BOB SHANLEY/Staff Photographer

'The whole secular world is behind this movie. Conscious or unconscious, Ron Howard and Tom Hanks are agents of the Devil.'

2. (B&W) 'We realized that, for good or evil, this book and movie have enormous impact on people's thinking. It is a wholesale broadside attack on Christianity.'

D. JAMES KENNEDY (Above)

Coral Ridge Presbyterian,

Coral Ridge Ministries,

Fort Lauderdale