

Introduction

The Da Vinci Code written by Dan Brown is a novel in which the Roman Catholic Church is misinterpreted and is portrayed from a negative perspective. The Roman Catholic Church and the Catholic supporters in the novel are a part of evil thoughts and have bad attitudes which is in contradiction with the religious and respected organization. This situation has led not only to a controversy but also into a political, historical, and theological debate. The novel is criticized despite Dan Brown asserts that all the art, architecture, secret rituals, and secret societies are all a historical fact.

The important organizations and societies that have a remarkable impact on the story that I first encountered in this book are the Priory of Sion, Templar Knights and Roman Catholic Church. The first two are kind of secret and esoteric societies where there are many unofficial information around but no real and factual knowledge about them is available. There is usually theoretical information about them with different explanations of their origin organization and main involvements.

On the contrary, the Roman Catholic Church seems to be a publicly known organization with millions of followers and publicly disclosed agenda and way of doing things. In fact, they seem to have a background agenda and enormous conflict of interests and power games between the higher ranks within the organization. This book raised my attention to this organization and with further investigation it can also be seen from independent resources that throughout history, the Roman Catholic Church has always had a dark side and brought many people sadness and pain while collecting a huge wealth. They have even changed the course of history in favor of their supporting kings, countries and societies and stood against science and educational knowledge especially at medieval age with practices like the inquisition.

As I read this novel, I have questioned its history and how much of it is true. This has triggered the debate of “fact vs fiction” which led to the focus on the negative depiction of the church. Therefore, this essay will focus on exploring the negative perspectives of the church, in terms of power, science, secrets and politics. As a result, I have generated my research question as “From which aspects is the Roman Catholic Church depicted negatively in the novel Da Vinci Code by Dan Brown?”

Abuse of Power

The negative aspects of Roman Catholic Church that affected people’s daily lives and changed the flow of history in the eyes of many people can be analyzed in four areas. The first area that the effects of the church over European people were agonizing is to seize “power” and use it in favor of the controllers of the church. Even the document that appoints the Pope and Roman Catholic Church as the leaders and top authority to Christian religion was “Constantine’s legacy” was proved to be fake. This shows that the power is too important for greedy people to gain control of, at any cost. Some quotes from the book about the power of the Church are good examples about this aspect:

“His Holiness had secured the papacy through one of the most controversial and unusual conclaves in Vatican history. Now, rather than being humbled by his unexpected rise to power, the Holy Father had wasted no time flexing all the muscle associated with the highest office in Christendom. Drawing on an unsettling tide of liberal support within the College of Cardinals, the

Pope was now declaring his papal mission to be "rejuvenation of Vatican doctrine and updating Catholicism into the third millennium." The translation, Aringarosa feared, was that the man was actually arrogant enough to think he could rewrite God's laws and win back the hearts of those who felt the demands of true Catholicism had become too inconvenient in a modern world. "

This quote from the novel is a good example how the Christian Catholic Church has abused its influence to achieve power and the power of Pope to increase their supporters. In order to avoid some of the historical facts that may be a threat to their image they usually hid them and prevented them from being open to public. Especially Bishop Aringarosa is reflected as the evil face of the church who used Opus Dei as a crime organization on his way to being the Pope and gain limitless power.

The power of Roman Catholic Church over the supporters of the religion is symbolized in the role of the Pope. That's why bishop Aringarosa planned his way through achieving the maximum power being the Pope. He not only used Silas and Opus Dei as means to avoid obstacles but deceived other cardinals and religious leaders seeming an innocent and devoted person as well. Vatican's power was also emphasized in the book both in the armed forces and the wealth and secrets kept under their possession. Langdon was very impressed with the belongings in the Vatican library but he could not find enough time to go through the majority of them because his life was in danger. It was also stated in the book that throughout the history the Church took many measures to avoid the truth that might spoil the Christian story to be heard and understood by public. Only well-educated and knowledgeable people like Jacques Sauniere and Langdon were aware of the truth but not the Christian community.

It is not always fair to accuse the generic and whole organizations for the unfortunate and unethical implementations applied by evil minded people or groups within the organizations. There are many cults and extremists in nearly all the religions. When these groups gain control or be very influential within religions many disastrous results can be seen and usually referred and related to main bodies of the religion. However, this is not usually the fault of religions and religious people but mostly are caused by evil minded people trying to use religions for their own benefits. In the novel Opus Dei supporters were given as an example of this kind of a behavior.

In the novel Aringarosa was introduced as the main controller of the bad effects of the religion among the society. His background agenda was to gain control by achieving the most powerful status in the religion: being the Pope. He was fascinated by the power of Pope among the Christian society and formed a long-lasting plan to achieve his goal. He did not hesitate to use Opus Dei as a terror organization and used Silas as a weapon to support his agenda. Those two characters were carefully emphasized as the main two evil faces among religious society that used religion to achieve power and control. This approach is a covered criticism of high-level religious people who used religion to gain power and control.

Negative Approach to Science

The second negative aspect that the Roman Catholic Church affected the world history and avoided the improvement of mankind is their negative approach to science and technology. Science and progression of societies have always been seen as enemies by religions.

In the novel the parts about the Vatican library are a proof that the Church kept many scientific evidence, findings, and precious documents away from public eyes which might contradict the stories and arguments they have injected through religion. The library is always close to public access and the gathered pieces were hidden from most supporters. The reason for that is to keep every single possible threat to religion from being disclosed. Science and progression have always been the pain points for religions as they might bring vision and intellectual thinking to common people. That is why religions always stood against science and improvements throughout history. Professor Langdon tried to use scientific methods to gather information to reveal the secrets and avoid the religious threats.

The Roman Catholic Church and Bishop Aringarosa was always after Langdon's efforts to bring out a scientifically approved theory which is not against human logic about the history of Christian Religion. They used power and evil plans to avoid Langdon to prove that some pieces of the religious history were against science and human facts. In Vatican library Langdon found out many other evidence about scientific facts that the Church kept away from the access of common people that would have falsified some of the accepted stories of Christian Religion. Langdon and Sophie didn't find time to collect evidence from many other undisclosed scientific evidences because the followers of the Church have planned a vicious trap to make them suffocated inside the library. This was shown as a symbol that the Church collected and hid many scientific evidences that might one day prove that many stories accepted by the believers are in fact fake and against science and human logic.

Especially in early stages of Christianity the church always stood against positive sciences and knowledge which became a barrier for scientific improvements, new inventions, and discoveries. The main reason for this was to avoid sharing knowledge among people, to keep the education

level of the majority at low level and maintain their power supported by uneducated believers. The reason for me is that the more people are educated and knowledgeable the less they are likely to believe in religions, myths and ancient stories that controllers of Church usually used to influence people and gain control. The worst example how the church used its power against science knowledge and technology was the infamous process of "Inquisition". Throughout this application many lives were brutally taken, many people were tortured and scientists were in horror and suspense that they could not disclose their scientific findings and works nor they could share their ideas and knowledge among their colleagues and people. therefore, revolution of mankind was delayed by the hands of Roman Catholic Church.

In the book Sir Leigh Teabing talked about the history of Christianity and mentioned that it was a human creation and had nothing to do with the God. At early parts of the book, he seemed to be a person who values scientific facts and historic evidences above religious stories but at the end of the day he turned out to be a traitor and tried to stop Langdon and Sophie to learn about the truth.

The Christian society and European countries could only prevent the effects of Catholic Church on their progress by accepting "Reform" in religion and implying "Renaissance" simultaneously. Secularism was adopted in all over Europe and the power church was almost disappeared over societies. This led great accomplishments in all areas of science and "Industrial Revolution" afterwards. From then on, the church could not stand in front of science and technology.

It is not always true that religion is against science and technology but because of the behaviors and actions of especially Roman Catholic Church leaders, people usually think that way. There are so many doubtful points and mysterious and suspicious stories bundled in every religion that; keeping the education and knowledge level very low was the easiest method that religious leaders implied in order to maintain the number of believers.

In the novel the concept of renaissance was covered in the preliminary stages, especially in the section taking place in the Louvre Museum. Leonardo Da Vinci was always emphasized as the symbolic figure of renaissance and improvements in art and science after the medieval ages. He was also introduced as the leader of scientific and artistic genius whom many people followed his footsteps to enable renaissance which broke the effort of Church to avoid human progress through science and arts.

Some quotes from the book itself support these ideas as below:

"Symbols are very resilient, but the pentacle was altered by the early Roman Catholic Church. As part of the Vatican's campaign to eradicate pagan religions and convert the masses to Christianity, the Church launched a smear campaign against the pagan gods and goddesses, recasting their divine symbols as evil."

"This is very common in times of turmoil," Langdon continued. "A newly emerging power will take over the existing symbols and degrade them over time in an attempt to erase their meaning. In the battle between the pagan symbols and Christian symbols, the pagans lost; Poseidon's trident became the devil's pitchfork, the wise crone's pointed hat became the symbol of a witch, and Venus's pentacle became a sign of the devil."

Langdon was a professor and expert in symbolism and reflected his thoughts throughout the book that Christian Catholic Church always tried to hide ancient symbols and their meanings. They usually converted the original meanings of the symbols of pagan cultures and used them as symbols of their religion. Langdon, knowing the real meanings of these symbols states that Christian Catholic Church was in fact changing history to their favor by changing the real symbols and meanings of the ancient cultures. It was easy for him to discover this because he

was one of the top experts in symbolism. The Church was against him because he seemed to be a threat to disclose their fake and unethical conversion of ancient symbols into religious myths.

Secrets

Sophie Neveu:

Maybe there is something about this Priory of Sion.

Robert Langdon:

I hope not. Any Priory story ends in bloodshed. They were butchered by the Church. It all started over a thousand years ago when a French king conquered the holy city of Jerusalem. This crusade, one of the most massive and sweeping in history was actually orchestrated by a secret brotherhood: the Priory of Sion and their military arm, the Knights Templar.

Sophie Neveu:

But the Templars were created to protect the Holy Land.

Robert Langdon:

That was a cover to hide their true goal, according to this myth. Supposedly the invasion was to find an artefact lost since the time of Christ. An artifact, it was said, the Church would kill to possess.

Robert Langdon:

Yes, you have. Almost everyone on earth has. You just know it as the Holy Grail.

Above quotes from the novel are good examples how the author connected the two secret societies “Templar Knights” and “Order of Sion” to the “Holy Grail” myth. He informed the

readers that those organizations although connected to early rulers and supporters of Christian Religion; indeed, are secret societies whom we do not actually have true evidence and information about. Dan Brown brought an alternative approach to the origins, purpose, and continuation of two societies that they had always been keeping and preserving an important secret: “Holy Grail”.

The Roman Catholic Church had always kept some parts of the truth and hidden secrets to themselves. Even the formation of the church organization and the huge power of the Pope among all Christians in the world is a matter of controversy. The Vatican and the Church always controlled immense wealth and power through the history and supported this control with the myths, stories and ideas implemented over the Christian society through the organization of religious personnel like Cardinals and all types of priests.

The Roman Catholic Church sometimes used unacceptable and inhuman methods to avoid some of their secrets to be revealed. The “Opus Dei” member Silas was a good example from the book that some church leaders used uneducated believers as a weapon to protect the secrets from being revealed. Many people have been executed for this reason and the author emphasized this with the character Silas. Also, the hidden treasures and many valuable belongings as well as priceless books and documents are said to be kept in Vatican library and collections which are closed to public access and mentioned in the book.

Keeping secrets, disguising and hiding the truth from the community can also be given as a negative aspect of Christian Catholic Church over believers. The main point behind this argument is that religions usually base their effective and sensational stories to myths and fictitious events. If the truth behind those imaginary and suspicious stories have been released

and told to the believers, they would have lost a great majority of their supporters and they would lose a considerable amount of wealth and power. In the novel the most important alternative theory to this kind of a hypothesis is a different approach to the history of Christianity and the myth of “Holy Grail”. While bringing out a new theory to the famous “Holy Grail” myth and delivering messages about religion and beliefs; the author Dan Brown always kept the attention of the readers using action packed story full of puzzles, scenes from different European cities and intelligently built storyline to make the novel as interesting as it can get.

The author approached to the “Holy Grail” myth through another half revealed secret and famous but rather unclearly defined set of organizations called “Templar Knights” and “Order of Sion”. The “Knights Templar” is a historic organization going through early 1300’s which initially had been formed and grew for the purpose of serving Christian Religion. The “Order of Sion”, which no historic evidence and proof about its origins and structure have ever been released set to be the following authority of “Knights Templar”. For both organizations there has been lots of rumors, unofficial and uncertain remarks, and evaluations all through the history.

Politics

One of the most important and basic concepts that religions used to achieve power and wealth is politics. Roman Catholic Church always used politics to maintain influence over societies. The leaders of the Church from the beginning were always side by side with powerful kings to control and lead countries. The kings also used the power of the church to strengthen their position against their citizens. This was a method to protect mutual interests and continue their reign. In some cases,

kings controlled the Popes and religious leaders in others the Church controlled the kings and countries but all the time the struggle was to maintain more power and wealth. It is self-evident how the church used politics to continue its influence and how in fact some of the religious references may be creations of man not God.

In the novel bishop Aringarosa was introduced as the evil character who did many awful things which are unethical, against the religion and unlawful to achieve power by being the Pope. It can be observed from the general messages that the book presents that Christian Catholic Church was always an important part of politics throughout the history. Aringarosa made some political moves hiding his secret agenda and seeming to be a devoted Christian making innocent efforts for the believers. But at the end of the day it was understood that he in fact was using politics and abusing the goodwill and respect of true believers as means to gain support and achieve his goals. His ultimate goal was to become The Pope, leader of the religion. He used politics as the main resource to gain power and control.

“History is always written by the winners. When two cultures clash, the loser is obliterated, and the winner writes the history books-books which glorify their own cause and disparage the conquered foe. As Napoleon once said, ‘What is history, but a fable agreed upon?’”

“The Grail story is everywhere, but it is hidden. When the Church outlawed speaking of the shunned Mary Magdalene, her story and importance had to be passed on through more discreet channels...channels that supported metaphor and symbolism...The arts...Once you open your

eyes to the Holy Grail you see her everywhere. Paintings. Music. Books. Even in cartoons, theme parks, and popular movies.”

Sir Teabing's above quotes were good examples how many people in history tried to apply desperate measures to unveil the secrets coming from ancient stories supported by religions. He also acted desperately and foolishly to reach his goal to acquire “the holy grail”. In fact, “the holy grail” was not an object that would bring immortality but it was secretly protected heir of Jesus family. This was the strongest and most important message the book delivered.

The most interesting if not shocking message given in the book was the “Holy Grail” was in fact the holy blood line preserved by protecting the family members and heir of Jesus through generations. This was the authors highlighting idea that presents an alternative approach to history and alternative story to Catholic Church's declarations. Sophie turned out to be the only living member of the family of Jesus and Maria Magdalena. The Templars and Order of Sion have dedicated themselves to protect this blood line from fanatic supporters of the Catholic Church.

“Knights Templar” is a good example of an esoteric organization which the rules, regulations, methods, and applications are only open to group members. The esoteric organizations like the Templars took a lot of attention, however, the term esoteric means closed to public but open only to inside of the organization and all the publicly available information about templars and other esoteric organizations are suspicious and subject to verification. Order of Sion is even more difficult to make comments on since there is no evidence that this society has ever occurred or not.

The author used this uncertainty very well in the book and brought out an alternative approach to historical myths by creating an untold story that can fit the unknown pieces of religious and historical puzzle.

The Knights Templar and Order of Sion were organizations who seemed to support religion and Church but in fact they were formed to protect Jesus bloodline from fanatic Church organizations. They were targeting them because the Christian part of the story was against the truth and the Church wouldn't let anyone to reveal the truth. This would have disgraced the Church's authority and effect the believers negatively.

In modern era the only country that Roman Catholic Church holds political power on is Vatican. This small country inside the city of Rome still contains the valuable belongings, collections, documents that Church has gathered throughout the years but still kept as a secret. According to rumors their unknown wealth is huge and controlled by the Church. Despite all the wealth and resources, the number of believers is decreasing because free thinking supported by education and knowledge do not give way to ancient myths and stories to be followed as a religion at this era.

The Vatican library and soldiers of Vatican were symbolizing the secrets of religion as well as power and wealth of the Church. Langdon and Sophie were targeted by Vatican and Church because they were the symbols of science and truth who have the potential to prove that in fact religions were based on untrue stories and myths from earlier cultures.

In the novel the most important character that used politics as a negative aspect for religion is Bishop Aringarosa. He not only used Silas as a threat but also destroyed the obstacles in front of him to become the Pope as his ultimate ambition. Although taking lives and making evil plans to achieve power and wealth is against the religion, he did not hesitate to take those measures. He

used Opus Dei as a weapon to finally become the Pope. His plans and tactics were good examples on how to make evil plans and use politics to become the number one leader of the religion. His supporters from the church were not aware of his total plan but they also are guilty because they acted upon his will, not the right behavior.

Conclusion

The four important points and negative aspects of Roman Catholic Church can be observed in the novel and beautifully hidden behind the events, action, interesting story full of puzzles and strong characters. The flow of the exciting story is so charming that the negative aspects of the church were perceived even more sensational and uglier than they originally are.

Neither the story in the book, nor the story and messages of Church can be verified or falsified now. People can believe which version of stories they may choose. Perhaps everybody tends to choose the story closer to their hearts and according to their vision, knowledge, and beliefs. Anyhow, books like “Da Vinci Code” usually bring a new way of thinking to people and encourages people to think differently. This is one the most valuable addition to our intellectual capacity.

Apendix

Background Information

The Roman Catholic Church is one of the world's largest religious communities which has been established in Vatican City. Catholic means 'universal' and 'worldwide' and from the earliest days following the Church's founding, it has pressed to be the universal faith of humanity. Often, this has caused conflicts with other religions that wish to be the universal faith, both within and outside of the Christian tradition. In addition to beliefs held by most Christians about the divinity of Christ, Catholics have several specific beliefs that set them apart from other Christians.

Unlike many Protestant traditions, especially Evangelical ones, the Catholic Church is highly liturgical, meaning they practice ceremonial worship. As a result, recitation is vital to the Catholic worship service, or mass. The Catholic Church has a strict hierarchy, or ranking according to authority, from parish priests to bishops and archbishops to the Pope himself. Catholics also hold the Virgin Mary in high regard, giving her the title 'Mother of God.' Catholics also believe in transubstantiation, which holds that the elements of the Eucharist, namely the bread and wine, become the actual body and blood of Christ now of consecration by a priest. According to this theory the holy grail is not a solid but sacred material but the extension of the breed of Jesus Christ. This is the most important message that the book delivers.

Brief Information About the Book

The main character of the book is a Harvard symbologist, Robert Langdon who is an expert of ancient symbols and has extensive knowledge about history. The story starts with Langdon

receiving a late-night call from the French police while on a trip in Paris to give a conference on symbolism. The call was about a mysterious murder of a curator of the Louvre Museum.

The supporting character is Sophie Neveu, a French cryptologist who becomes the focus of attention more and more throughout the novel. Being the granddaughter of Robert's friend Jacques Sauniere, Sophie is introduced to the story and starts to work together with Robert to solve the mystery about the murder. During the flow of events, they always come against interesting puzzles and solving one puzzle usually led them to another puzzle.

In the book the negative image of the Christian Catholic Church is represented through two main characters: Bishop Aringarosa and Silas, the priest of Opus Dei. While Silas was the usual suspect and the evil face of the church; Aringarosa was the planner and evil mind behind the chaos. He used Silas as a weapon to reach his goals and did not actually take part in any of the murders or evil acts. He somehow convinced Silas that he was performing a valuable effort for the sake of church and the religion. As Silas was a lower-level member of the organization with low education level and low IQ, he accepted the mission willingly. This is a dramatic example where in all religions the evil masterminds generally use less educated true believers as a pawn to achieve their targets.

<https://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-catholicism-definition-beliefs-history.html>