

**The Real Da Vinci Code. A film review by Rev Dr Steve Taylor
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“It’s not real you know.” So my two year daughter told me one day, pointing at a movie on our television. Such is the art of film. Real character and realistic emotion draw us into unreality. You need to believe to make believe. As pop band, Hot House Flowers sing (“Movie,” from their 1990 *Home* album)

“Do you go to the movies
Find a friend in a film
Holding hands with the hero
Fall in love with the heroine.”

Sadly, The Da Vinci Code movie failed in its effort to “make believe.”

The movie plot follows Harvard professor, Robert Langdon (Tom Hanks), and a Parisian code breaker, Sophie Neveu (Audrey Tatou), who, in seeking to resolve a brutal murder, decode a series of cryptic clues. Pursued by a daggered monk (Paul Bettany as Silas) and cloaked religious societies, they puzzle their way from France to England. They discover a 2,000 year old secret; that Jesus married Mary Magdalene and had a daughter named Sarah.

Such stuff can turn a book into a best-seller. Sex and scandal are artfully combined with a fast-paced who-dun-it murder mystery. Throw in promotion given so freely by religious protestors around the globe and you have a money making blockbuster.

But once you have a book read by 40 million people, what do you do with a movie? Do you follow the script and you run the danger of dragging toward a predictable ending? Or do you innovate and risk alienating devoted fans? Such was the weight of expectation given to director Ron Howard.

Burdened with this weight of expectation, *The Da Vinci Code* movie failed in the basic art of film. It failed to “make believe.” I could not “find a friend” in the wooden acting of Robert Langdon. Neither could I “fall in love” with the spotless Sophie Neveu. The limited acting was compounded by the setting. Esoteric codes, high-tech bank vaults and wealthy French villas are an alien world.

My lack of “belief” was enhanced by a flawed plot-line. How did Langdon and Neveu escape the guarded Louvre? Why did the driver of the money van suddenly pull a gun? Why should pigeons suddenly fly through a church?

And while my belief is suspended, permit me a further ironic muttering. Why is the grave of Mary Magdalene so important? If it is because she is married to Jesus, then her identity is sourced in marriage. So we have a woman famous only because of whom she married. It sounds an old-fashioned and sexist way of honouring the “sacred feminine” so central to *The Da Vinci Code*.

The movie gained my applause for some of the visual effects. The use of shadows to show people arriving for the funeral of Isaac Newton was a masterful reminder of the historical layers that cling to all places.

Yet ironically, Robert Langdon’s search is driven by the quest to separate truth from belief and penetrate historical fabrication and distortion. Which adds a further touch of “make believe” to the sense of history offered by the visual effects.

Perhaps this is the real Da Vinci Code. Blur careful fact and sensationalist fiction and make a fortune from the Code of “make belief.”

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