

# The Da Vinci Code

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

I really wanted to carry on talking serious stuff this week, but the hooha over *The Da Vinci Code* won.

Apparently intelligent people seem incapable of learning from history. Various Jewish groups got all worked up about Mel Gibson's film about Jesus. They argued that it was anti-Semitic and would fuel hatred and ought to be modified. As a result, they got no modifications, they added to the publicity, and only increased the number of people who went to see it. It became a huge success.

Did the film increase anti-Semitism? Probably not, because anyway it said no more about the nasty Jews and how they wanted Jesus dead than the New Testament, that Christians read regularly, already says. Muslim anti-Semitism doesn't need Christianity for fuel and Fascist thugs or Marxist fellow travelers don't do religion anyway.

Besides it's Christianity's problem if its religion, instead of spreading love, encourages hatred of the other. It is for them to sort out. We Jews have enough on our hands coping with our own problems. Besides in this day and age telling anyone they can't or mustn't see something is only an open invitation to do so. The Catholic Church once had a list of forbidden books, called "the Index". Some Catholics made a great business out of making sure all the books on the list were available to other Catholics. Britain once tried to ban novels and plays and things that might frighten old ladies and horses in Hyde Park. When that failed it tried banning pornography and smut, but it has no more succeeded in keeping them out than it has drugs and criminals.

Nevertheless, some sections of the Christian world are up in arms about the dangers, the blasphemy of this best-selling book, *The Da Vinci Code*. I believe a new Catholic pamphlet counteracting all its claims is now a bestseller in its own right. Bishops and Cardinals have been warning their faithful not to attend, and much to my amazement the BBC news carried a feature in which some Jews lined up with their Catholic colleagues in condemning the book, too, and calling it blasphemous.

[Jiminy Cricket](#)!! Did you ever? What's blasphemous to a Jew about any story to do with Jesus? What's going on here? Is this perhaps a show of solidarity in the hope that there will be reciprocation with regard to anti-Semitism, anti-Zionism or anti-Israelism? Or perhaps are these Jewish leaders trying to show solidarity with Herzl's initial scheme to solve the Jewish problem by getting all the Jews to line up before Vienna Cathedral and convert in a massive public ceremony? (Thank goodness the Dreyfus trial brought home to him the futility of this cockamamie idea and he started to focus instead on a Jewish homeland.) Or have they decided that "reformation" has failed and rather than go back to tradition they'd be on a winning ticket by merging with

Christianity? It is all so laughable and sad. After all it's a novel. Hello, it's fiction. It's entertainment; it's not history or theology.

But here of course lies the rub. Nowadays who goes to Church, who reads serious literature, who reads history? A good history book will be read by thousands, if the author is lucky. An airport quick read or a beach pot-boiler will sell in the millions. A few hundred will go to serious concerts of classical music, but thousands will go to rock concerts, and billions will buy CD's, and Matisyahu will reach millions who never, ever, ever have set foot inside a synagogue. No wonder, according to the BBC, most Britons think the Da Vinci Code is true and the Bible is wrong. More people read "the Astrological Stars" in the newspapers, more people read magazines that display photographs of "personalities", than watch the news or read an editorial. And if you want to see worship in the raw, go to a football match rather than a half-empty house of prayer.

Of course, hardly anyone has time for serious study, to go into the historical background of a political issue, to examine ideas from different perspectives. Instead we have religion lite, politics lite, life lite, all packaged by quick-fix gurus, marketing whiz kids, PR spin doctors and agents. It's all Superman comics instead of Shakespeare. But, of course, it has always been thus. When the Victorians were producing Eliot, Darwin and Huxley, the most popular societies numerically were the Rosicrucians, who believed in fairies, and Madame Blavatsky and her mediums.

I guess I'm silly to think that religion should be in a higher league. Nowadays everyone has to sell himself and so marketing values and attitudes have permeated religion too. If you can't beat them, join them. It's all in the appearance, smoke and mirrors.

I suppose it's also true that if your religion is based predominantly in myth, on a persona who in reality may well have been just a Roman marketing man's concoction of an idealized popular teacher, then of course the facts will matter a great deal, perhaps more than the message. Sure we Jews have our narratives, but it's the actual Torah rather than Moses that is the foundation.

The great contributions of the monotheistic traditions are their great ethical, spiritual messages, be they simple and popular or complex and sophisticated. But if they rely on fairy stories then of course there'll be panic if a better fairy story appears on the scene.

When one loses sight of humanity one is left with husks and I am sorry to say that the failure of religion to reach into the lives of most of humanity is a sign to me that they have lost the plot. It's a great plot—not the story of course, but the message. If religious leaders have no sense of humor or proportion, and if they think that censorship will ensure their survival, then they all ought to go and see [Life of Brian](#) or [The Frisco Kid](#) and have a good laugh and a reality check. Believe me, in a few years no one will remember the film but there still might be people living good, caring spiritual lives.

Meanwhile guys, leave them to sort out themselves and stop being such sycophants. And above all stop speaking as though you represent the Jews. No one represents the Jews. We all represent ourselves.

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