Da Vinci film gets attention from Christian critics: Fiction or religious tract?

The best-selling novel by Dan Brown upset an international and predominantly lay Catholic organization as well as conservative Protestants, but with the movie version of *The Da Vinci Code* slated for mid-May, both offended groups are exhibiting mixed feelings.

Evangelical figures such as Fuller Seminary president Richard Mouw and pollster George Barna have written unpaid critical articles for a studio-sponsored Web site—in effect providing further publicity for the film. The writers feel their critiques will also have some impact.

In a similar fashion, spokespersons for Opus Dei in Rome and New York early this year put a good face on the situation, saying that the Ron Howard–directed movie will give the traditionalist and low-profile organization an opportunity to tell the world about its good works and benevolence.

On February 15, Opus Dei declared that its officials still hope that Sony Pictures will make changes to the film that Catholics would appreciate, "particularly in these days in which everyone has noted the painful consequences of intolerance."

The novel portrays Opus Dei as a murderous, power-hungry group that, with the Vatican's help, sought to cover up knowledge that Jesus had married Mary Magdalene and that they still had living descendents. Many conservative evangelicals have objected in books, sermons and talk shows to the novel's speculation about Jesus and his most prominent woman follower.

The studio-sponsored Web site (thedavincichallenge.com) was the idea of Jonathan Bock at Grace Hill Media, a group in Los Angeles that helps studios market movies to religious audiences, according to the *New York Times*. Mouw said his essay, "Why

Christians Ought to See the Movie," tries to educate Christians on how best to answer questions about why there is no biblical or historical evidence that Jesus married.

Spokespersons for the film said that it is "fiction" and "not a religious tract."