

A Soft War Against the Church: Reading Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* as a Didactic Novel

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ABSTRACT

Many works of literature are devoted to giving readers explicit or implicit instructions or teachings about a philosophy, an ideology, a craft, a lifestyle, or other ends. These works are supposed to entertain and teach and, accordingly, they are labeled as didactic literature. Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* (*DVC*) is a highly controversial novel that has been largely debated and discussed because of its content and intended message. In this novel, Brown intentionally presents an alternative understanding to Christianity which is received mostly as heretic and blasphemous. In many occasions, Brown avers that the visions he gave in his *DVC* are the findings of his research on Christian doctrines and institutions. Thus, they are accurate facts though they are written in a piece of fiction. He also emphasizes that he aims to share newly acquired knowledge with his audience through the pages of his work. This paper is an attempt to study Brown's *DVC* as a didactic novel. It ultimately aims to show how Brown manipulated the didactic theory of sugar-coated pill in his *DVC* to teach Christians about the theology and history of their religion. Adopting a descriptive-analytic method, the study first tackles Brown's Christian ideology. Then, it analyzes his *DVC* showing how he used different devices and techniques of didactic novels for the purpose of instructing his readers. The study concludes that *DVC* is not a mere piece of fiction but a didactic novel that used fiction as a cover to pass historical and theological teachings.

Keywords: Bible, Christianity, church, didactic, Da Vinci, Jesus, Magdalene

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INTRODUCTION

Didactic literature includes works of literature that are intended to instruct about the procedures and principles of a craft or a branch of knowledge or to embody a

moral, philosophical or religious doctrine or theme in a fictional or imaginative form using examples and proofs. These works are generally distinguished from fundamentally imaginative works in which the materials are arranged and rendered, not to reveal and enhance the appeal of the doctrine they represent, but to enhance the inherent importance of the materials themselves and their ability to touch an audience and give it artistic enjoyment (Abrams & Harpham, 2012).

Unlike Aestheticism, which advocates that literature should be aesthetically pleasing and literary texts are ends in themselves, Didacticism legislates that literature is didactically useful and literary texts can be used as a vehicle to pass teachings of different kinds to the audience (Nisbet & Rawson, 2005). Etymologically speaking, the adjective “didactic” is derived from a Greek stem which means “used for teaching” or “instructive” (Klein, 1971, p. 211).

In the eighth century BC, the Greek poet Hesiod wrote *Works and Days* which combines moral precepts with a farming manual and *Theogony* which is an account of creation and the gods (Cuddon, 2013). In the first century BC, the Roman poet and philosopher Titus Lucretius Carus wrote his didactic poem “On the Nature of Things” to elucidate and popularize his ethics and naturalistic philosophy. In the same epoch, the Roman poet Virgil wrote his *Georgics*, in which the poetic components add aesthetic value to an appreciation of rustic life and the instructions of a practical management of a farm (Abrams & Harpham, 2012).

The Middle Ages provided the majority of Europe’s didactic literature and much of it was in verse and expounded doctrines of the Church in works like guides of holy living, manuals to the good life, gnomic verses, charms and proverbs (Cuddon, 2013). As for the Renaissance, much of its literature was didactic in intent. The eighteenth century witnessed the revival of didactic literature when a group of poets, imitating Virgil, wrote georgics, describing in verse practical arts such as making cider, running a sugar farm and shepherding. Alexander Pope’s poems *Essay on Criticism* (1711) and *Essay on Man* (1733-4) are didactic works intended to instruct poets on the subjects of moral philosophy, literary criticism and verse craft (Abrams & Harpham, 2012).

Although didactic novel flourished in the late eighteenth century, works of fiction written before had long embraced didactic themes. The most well-known of these is Miguel de Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615) which bizarrely warns against the perils of reading. Many eighteenth-century novels, such as Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Henry Fielding’s *Amelia* (1751), Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740), *Clarissa* (1747-8), *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753-4), contain didactic ingredients (Havens, 2017).

After the dominance of Romanticism and Aestheticism in the nineteenth century, Didacticism was disapprovingly regarded as alien to real art (Baldick, 2001). However, some prominent didactic novels were well-known. Prominent examples are Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* (1817), which teaches female readers how to act like a

good young lady, and *Emma* (1815), which teaches about social issues (Abrams & Harpham, 2012).

During late modern and post-modern periods, didactic literature has undergone some change. On one hand, the limitations of didactic literature have been open to argument because both the prominence and presence of doctrinal material or content are typically subject to various interpretations. Most satires and allegories, broadly, implying a political or moral viewpoint may be reckoned as didactic, along with a variety of works in which the theme incarnates certain philosophies or beliefs of the author (Baldick, 2001). On the other hand, literature with explicit Didacticism has not been very much appealing to readers and critics respectively. Therefore, some writers, like Albert Camus, D.H. Lawrence, Ernest Hemingway, and Dan Brown, started to disguise Didacticism through a number of devices and techniques to make it more digestible and more appealing (Hunter, 1990).

Works of literature in which Didacticism is exaggerated or heavy-handed are regarded as works which sacrifice art in favour of form. However, didactic literature is usually artistically pleasing (Galens, 2009). In fact, Brown (1964-) presents *DVC* (2003) as a didactic novel intended to impact the readers with its intellectual components. Yet, he never sacrifices the literary qualities of genuine literature (Nuaimi & Abu-Jaber, 2013). It is not surprising at all that *DVC* is thought-provoking, enlightening and entertaining simultaneously (Zhu & Zhang, 2016).

Brown was raised in an artistic, religious and scientific environment. His father was a distinguished mathematician and his mother was a professional church organist. The two parents were ecclesiastical choirmasters and members of a Symphony Chorus that had many tours worldwide (Thomas, 2011).

To people who questioned his Christian upbringing, Brown responds, "I was raised Christian, I sang in the choir, I went to Sunday School and I spent summers at church camp. To this day I try to live my life following the basic tenets of the teachings of Christ" (Thomas, 2011, p. 160). Brown is actually a religious man, Christian, but in his own terms. When Stephen Sackur the host of a BBC show entitled *HARDtalk*, asks him whether he was antireligious or not, his response is as follows: "Not antireligious in that way. Religion does an enormous good to the world." He adds, "What I become uncomfortable with, I realized later, is not religion. What I become uncomfortable with is the banner of religion being waved as some kind of immunity for having to endure rational scrutiny" (Van, 2017).

Before writing *DVC*, Brown conducted much research about Christianity (Haag, 2009). *DVC* is essentially a detective-mystery thriller which follows its American protagonist, a symbologist, historian, and university professor, Robert Langdon and his friend, a French National Police cryptographer, Sophie Neveu while they do an investigation on the murder of Jacques Saunière, the curator of the Louvre museum in Paris who is also Sophie's grandfather and the Grand Master of the Priory of Sion. They

uncover two secret societies, Opus Dei and the Priory of Sion, engaged in a life-and-death brawl over the probability that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and their descendants are still living to the present day (Thomas, 2011).

DVC mixes fact with fiction in a brilliant and intentional manner as it comes to history and religion. Brown wants his readers, after reading *DVC*, to launch a quest for knowledge about the essential beliefs of Christianity and its organizations (Silvey, 2006). Brown affirms that he looks for topics in non-fiction books hoping to learn new things and *transfer* knowledge he acquires to his readers in an appealing manner. He says to Ashwin Sanghi (2014) in an interview, “I read almost no fiction. I read non-stop but I read almost exclusively non-fiction. I am always reading, whether it is science, or philosophy, or religion, or history. I am always looking for new ideas and trying to formulate my ideas.” He adds, “The reason I choose topics that require research is because I like to learn and you can’t learn without changing your mind. That’s almost the definition of learning.” When Sanghi asks him whether he has an objective in his mind when he writes or it is simply he wants the reader to get to turn the page, Brown answers, “well, that’s certainly a part of it. you want the reader to turn the page. I absolutely have an objective which is *to share ideas and information that are fascinating to me, but do it in a way that you don’t feel it happening.*” He adds, “A woman said to me, ‘*your books are like eating my vegetables but it tastes as ice-cream*’” (emphasis added).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brown’s *DVC* is one of the best-selling thrillers known to the world. This novel, though controversial, is largely praised and applauded. Simultaneously, it is angrily dispraised and condemned. Much of the anger comes from Christians, authors and readers, who consider it a blasphemous treatment to the tenets of Christianity and its organizations.

Some authors value the cultural significance of *DVC*. They agree to some extent with Brown and consider the “facts” that *DVC* gives as facts that entail actual reconsideration (Eburne, 2018; Gandolfo, 2007; Jafarli, 2020; Persaud, 2010). In between are the authors who admit the artistic value of *DVC*. However, they gently disagree about the “facts” that Brown propounds (Bock, 2004; Ehrman, 2004; Gumbel, 2006; Zane, 2015). Some of them attempt to “rectify” the theological and historical “errors” that Brown “committed” (Dunn & Bubeck, 2006; Easley & Ankerberg, 2006; Garlow, 2006; Hanegraaff & Maier, 2004; Paull & Culwell, 2006; Williams, 2006). While others lay the errand of sorting fact from fiction in *DVC* upon their shoulders leaving the choice for the reader to decide the historical and theological value of Brown’s “claims” (De Flon & Vidmar, 2006; Gunn et al., 2006; Kirkwood, 2006). Authors of Arthurian interests are more concerned, though negatively, with the Holy Grail legend and its relationship with King Arthur legend (Giannini, 2008; Lacy, 2004). Brown’s representation of Mary Magdalene as a sacred feminine has also captivated

some authors (Kennedy, 2012; Knight, 2005; Propp, 2013).

However, some authors stand against *DVC* considering it as a punch of heresies and fallacies that historians and theologians previously refuted (Beverley, 2005; Burke, 2013; Palmer & Dunn, 2006; Solomon, 2006). Olson and Miesel (2004) suggest that *DVC* is a novel with anti-Christian agenda behind it.

This study hypothesizes that there has not been a properly comprehensive and focused study which tackled Brown's *DVC* as a didactic novel. Therefore, it tries to fill up this gap.

METHODS

Using a descriptive-analytic method to describe Brown's Christian views and analyze them in his *DVC*, this study attempts to show how Brown manipulated sugar-coated pill theory in his *DVC* to make Christians "correct" their understanding in Christian theology and history. Simply put, sugar-coated pill theory is a methodology by which an author sweetens a bitter moral to make it more digestible to hoodwink the readers and make them learn (Nisbet & Rawson, 2005). Some authors (Hunter, 1990; Morris, 1994; Newsom, 2003; Nuaimi & Abu-Jaber, 2013) theorize that if a novel has a number of specific qualities of didactic narratives, it is no longer a mere fiction. Rather, it is a vehicle to convey a message under the cover of its artistic charm, and this is actually the essence of the didactic theory of sugar-coated pill.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In *DVC*, Brown delineates his images of two Christian categories. The first category represents the fundamental premises of Christianity; Christianity itself, the Bible, Jesus Christ and Mary Magdalene. The second category represents Christian institutions such as the Vatican, the Knights Templar and Opus Dei. In many occasions, Brown confirms that his ideas about Christian beliefs and institutions mentioned in the novel are the findings of backbreaking researches and studies he conducted, and he wants to transfer them to his audience in a piece of art. This study manifests that *DVC* is a didactic novel whose writer wants his readers to learn new knowledge about their Christianity both theologically and historically.

Brown uses his two main characters, Robert Langdon and British Grail historian Sir Leigh Teabing, while conversing with Sophie Neveu, as focalizers for his own opinions on themes which pertain to Christianity. He also uses Sophie as a replica for readers. One useful technique for a didactic novel is the use of focalization (Morris, 1994). To put it simply, focalization is a modern term in narratology used to refer to the point of view or the perspective from which readers witness the events of a story which could be done through the perspective of a character within the narrative (Baldick, 2001). One significant advantage of focalization is to increase sympathy inside readers who are intended to be taught or instructed (Morris, 1994). It also provides an epistemic ground for

them to stand on (Lahey, 2016). Thus, they put themselves in Sophie's shoes and *listen* carefully to teachings. "What I try very hard to do," Brown says to Sackur on HARDtalk, "is to take real documents, real art, real history and interweave fictional characters discussing it and have their own ideas and they debate these topics" (Van, 2017). Confirming this tenet, Brown says, while lecturing Sharjah International Book Fair on November 6, 2014, "I have a very strong message for mankind. *I am always trying to say something through my fiction*" (emphasis added). He adds, "In that novel [*DVC*], fictional characters debate a very simple question. The question is this: What it would mean to Christianity if Jesus was not literally the son of God? What if He's simply a man? A mortal prophet?" (Taryam, 2014). In fact, the didactic role that Brown plays, through Teabing and Langland, and his authorial interventions and presence throughout *DVC* affirm that he questions Christian theology and history subjectively (Howard-Laity, 2011).

Lectures and speeches are another significant device for a didactic novel (Nuaimi & Abu-Jaber, 2013). Most of the information that Brown presents in his *DVC* is given in the form of lectures and speeches delivered by a university professor, Langdon, and a historian, Teabing, to a hearer, Sophie.

Three centuries after Jesus' crucifixion, Teabing commences lecturing Sophie, Christians grew in number and warring started between them and the Roman sun-worshippers, which divided Rome into two

camp. The pagan Emperor Constantine, being a man of brilliance, realized the high heel of Christianity; therefore, he sided with Christians. Then, in 325 A.D, he managed to fuse true Christianity with the Roman religion of sun-worshiping and the result was a type of hybrid religion which was accepted by both Christians and sun-worshippers. Many pagan aspects were fused in Christianity; symbols such as the halos of saints and the pictogram of the Virgin Lady nursing Baby Jesus, holidays such as Christmas and Sundays, and rituals such the altar, the miter, communion and the doxology, and the act of 'God-eating' (Brown, 2003). To make new Christianity solid and strong, Constantine holds an ecumenical assembly known as the Council of Nicaea and in this gathering "many aspects of Christianity were debated and voted upon—the date of Easter, the role of the bishops, the administration of sacraments, and, of course, the *divinity* of Jesus" (Brown, 2003, p. 312). Brown, here, vividly asserts through his mouthpiece, Teabing, that the roots of today's Christianity did not begin with the crucifixion, burial, resurrection and ascension of Jesus in 33 A.D., as believed by Christians nowadays. However, they really began with the Roman Emperor Constantine and his Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. (Ramsay, 2006).

An old device used in didactic novels is the use of hagiographies (Howard-Laity, 2011). Hagiographies are the sacred writings of the lives of saints and holy men (Cuddon, 2013). Brown follows this tradition but in his own way. He first starts with the

hagiography of Jesus and he then gives the hagiography of Mary Magdalene.

Before Constantine, Teabing explains to Sophie, Jesus was regarded by Christians as “a mortal prophet” and “not the Son of God.” It is Constantine and his assembly that made Jesus a deity (Brown, 2003). Jesus was “a historical figure of staggering influence, perhaps the most enigmatic and inspirational leader the world has ever seen. As the prophesied Messiah, Jesus toppled kings, inspired millions, and founded new philosophies” (p. 310). Constantine “took advantage of Christ’s substantial influence and importance. And in doing so, he shaped the face of Christianity as we know it today.” Jesus as a Messiah, Teabing clarifies, was necessary for the Catholic Church and the Roman state because it gave them power. Thus, “the early Church literally *stole* Jesus from His original followers, hijacking His human message, shrouding it in an impenetrable cloak of divinity, and using it to expand their own power” (p. 313). Brown, here, avers, again throughout his mouthpiece Teabing, that Jesus’ divinity is the result of a conspiracy that Constantine originated and the early Church supported. Ironically, both wanted power and earthly benefits (Eskola, 2011).

Teabing points out, while Sophie is listening, that there were gospels which chronicle Jesus as “a *mortal* man.” Since Constantine “upgraded Jesus’ status”, he decided to omit those gospels from the Bible (Brown, 2003, p. 313). Thus, they “were outlawed, gathered up, and burned” (p. 314). He, then, collated gospels which portray

Jesus as a deity to be “the fundamental irony of Christianity! The Bible, as we know it today.” These gospels are actually what Jesus’ followers, like Matthew, Mark, Luke and others, wrote about Him. Mockingly, Teabing propounds that “the Bible did not arrive by fax from heaven” and “did not fall magically from the clouds.” It is “a product of *man* ... not God. Man created it as a historical record of tumultuous times, and it has evolved through countless translations, additions, and revisions. History has never had a definitive version of the book” (pp. 309-310). Brown, here, clearly declares, again throughout Teabing, that the Bible is a human book with no divine value or significance (Burstein, 2004).

Fortunately, as Teabing reflects to Sophie, some gospels survived Constantine’s and the Church’s frenzy and they were found in the twentieth century; they were the Dead Sea Scrolls found in Jordon and the Coptic Scrolls found in the town of Nag Hammadi in Egypt. Since they spoke of Jesus as a human, they confirmed that “the modern Bible was compiled and edited by men who possessed a political agenda—to promote the divinity of the man Jesus Christ and use His influence to solidify their own power base” (Brown, 2003, p. 314). Now, Langland stops nodding and explains to Sophie that the Vatican tried to suppress these gospels and regarded them “false testimony.” Teabing concludes that “almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is *false*” (p. 315). “A spiritual storm,” say Dunn and Bubeck (2006), addressing the readers and referring to Brown’s didactic

theories, “is coming your way and it is inevitable. At the eye of this storm is the message: What the church has taught you about Jesus is wrong” (p. 12). It is worth mentioning that *DVC* mentions passingly Jesus’ crucifixion and says nothing about His resurrection because Brown himself, seemingly, has no doubts about them.

Using the device of hagiographies and turning to the Holy Grail, Brown explains, throughout Teabing and Langland, that the Grail is a metaphor used to protect Jesus’ wife, Mary Magdalene who “carried with her a secret so powerful that, if revealed, it threatened to devastate the very foundation of Christianity!” (Brown, 2003, pp. 319-320). While Sophie is listening, Teabing explains that the Church reputed Mary as a prostitute to cover up her relationship with Jesus. Gospels that speak of their marriage were eradicated because a deity cannot marry, only humans do. Fortunately, as Brown reflects, some gospels which spoke of Mary and Jesus as a married couple survived; such as The Gospel of Philip and The Gospel of Mary Magdalene which are parts of the Coptic Scrolls (Brown, 2003). Brown, here, puts forth a new claim that Jesus and Magdalene were related in holy matrimony which re-asserts Jesus’ human nature with all its implications (Jones, 2012).

According to The Gospel of Philip and The Gospel of Mary Magdalene, the Church was also against Mary Magdalene because Jesus ordered Mary, not Peter, to establish the Christian Church. Langdon speaks of a threatening gesture Peter made targeting

Mary that Leonardo Da Vinci (1452–1519) embedded in his painting *The Last Supper* where Mary sits next to Jesus’ right. The threatening gesture is repeated in Da Vinci’s *Madonna of Rocks* (Brown, 2003). In fact, Brown took the whole idea of embedding a message in a work of art from the works of Da Vinci. He was instigated by Da Vinci’s theory that Christian history has a radical alternative version (Olson & Miesel, 2004). Brown mentions the suppressed Gospels and Da Vinci’s paintings to add more depth to his didactic message because using examples and proofs is an intrinsic device in didactic literature.

The stand of Catholic Church against Mary Magdalene, as Langdon tells Sophie, is an episode of brutality against women in general. The Church’s notorious arm known as the Spanish Inquisition burnt five million women under the accusations of their being witches. After exposing this horrifying information, Teabing explains that Jesus was married to a woman of royal descent. He himself was a descendent of King Solomon. Mary was a descendant of the powerful House of Benjamin (Brown, 2003). They represent “a potent political union with the potential of making a legitimate claim to the throne and restoring the line of kings as it was under Solomon” (p. 332).

Continuing Mary Magdalene’s hagiography, Teabing points out that Mary Magdalene was pregnant at the time of Jesus’ crucifixion. To protect her child, she fled to France and gave birth to a daughter which she named Sarah. They lived safe as royals among the Jewish community

(Brown, 2003). In the fifth century, Christ’s and Mary’s descendants came to be known as “the Merovingian bloodline” (p. 342).

Teabing affirms that the royal bloodline of Jesus was chronicled in detail by historians. Then, throughout Teabing, Brown, following the device of proofs in didactic novels, lists four actual sources that he himself has read and adopted as sources in *DVC*:

THE TEMPLAR REVELATION:

Secret Guardians of the True Identity of Christ

THE WOMAN WITH THE ALABASTER JAR:

Mary Magdalene and the Holy Grail

THE GODDESS IN THE GOSPELS

Reclaiming the Sacred Feminine

.....

HOLY BLOOD, HOLY GRAIL

The Acclaimed International Bestseller

(Brown, 2003, pp. 336-337).

“I began as a skeptic,” Brown says to Liz Hayes, the host of ‘60 Minutes Australia’ (2019), “as I started researching *The Da Vinci Code*, I really thought I disprove a lot of theories about Mary Magdalene and the holy blood, all of that, I became a *believer*” (emphasis added).

The Merovingian, *children of Christ*, as Teabing narrates to Sophie, increased in number and founded Paris. However, the Vatican issued an non-negotiable resolution to erase them from existence and many killings happened such as the assassinations

of the Merovingian French Kings Dagobert and Godefroi de Bouillon, the founder of Priory of Sion. King Godefroi’s son, Sigisbert, managed to survive the massacre and fled with some of the Knights Templar with the Sangreal documents (Brown, 2003).

The Holy Grail, as Teabing and Langdon theorize, is actually Mary Magdalene, her tomb, her bloodline from Jesus and the Sangreal documents (Brown, 2003). Relaying of the technique of proofs, Teabing explains that the Sangreal documents are four categories of tens of thousands of documents. The first category is a “*family tree*” which consists of “a complete genealogy of the early descendants of Christ.” The second category is the *Purist Documents* which are “thousands of pages of unaltered, pre-Constantine documents, written by the early followers of Jesus, revering Him as a wholly human teacher and prophet.” The third category is the “*Q*” *Document* which is “a manuscript that even the Vatican admits they believe exists. Allegedly, it is a book of Jesus’ teachings, possibly written in His own hand.” The fourth category is a manuscript entitled *The Magdalene Diaries* that is “Mary Magdalene’s personal account of her relationship with Christ, His crucifixion, and her time in France” (Brown, 2003, pp. 340-341).

So far, Brown presents the Catholic Church as an evil entity which devastates whatever and whoever threatens its presence. The powerful presence of good and evil is a substantial device for a didactic novel. It leads the readers to binary choices

between them there is no gray area (Hunter, 1990). Brown uses this good-evil binary on different levels. He uses it in the fierce wars the Church launched against Jesus' heritage, "true" Christianity, "true" Bible and Mary Magdalene, or women in general, and those who oppose its ideology. He also uses it in the non-stop killings that the Church and its arm named Opus Dei inflicted upon the Priory of Sion and its arm, the Knights Templar, or upon the descendants of Jesus.

Langdon presents members of the Priory of Sion as a good entity. They are *the keepers of The Holy Grail*. Their Priory is a secret society which suffered all kinds of agonies and torture on the hands of the Church. After originating it in Jerusalem in 1099 after he conquered the city, the French king Godefroi de Bouillon ordered the Priory to pass the Sangreal documents, which were in his family's possession since the days of Jesus, from one generation to another. Therefore, they formulated the Knights Templar who, disguised as guardians of the pilgrims of the Holy Land, were ordered to retrieve the documents from under Herod's temple. They found the documents and travelled to Europe to be declared by Pope Innocent II as an independent army for reasons which are not clear. Then, they grew in number, wealth and power. Saint Clement was after the Sangraal documents which the Knights, seemingly, refused to relinquish even under severe torture. Accordingly, he liquidized them under accusations of debauchery and blasphemy. However, some Knights, fortunately, managed to escape and they put the documents in the hands of the Priory of

Sion. Up to this day, the Vatican conducts onslaughts looking for these documents to destroy them (Brown, 2003).

The modern Priory of Sion, as Langdon clarifies to Sophie, has three jobs to do: The brotherhood must protect the Sangreal documents. They must protect the tomb of Mary Magdalene. And, of course, they must nurture and protect the bloodline of Christ those few members of the royal Merovingian bloodline who have survived into modern times (Brown, 2003, p. 343).

On the other hand, there is Opus Dei, literally "God's Work." Brown defines it in the preface of *DVC* as a "Vatican prelature" and "a deeply devout Catholic sect that has been the topic of recent controversy due to reports of brainwashing, coercion, and a dangerous practice known as 'corporal mortification'" (Brown, 2003, p. 11). It is, as the narrator explains, a congregation founded in 1928 to promote "a return to conservative Catholic values and encouraged its members to make sweeping sacrifices in their own lives in order to do the Work of God" (Brown, 2003, p.46). The headquarter of Opus Dei is a gigantic luxurious tower in New York City whose cost is \$47 million. Its headmaster is Bishop Manuel Aringarosa, a huge man with diamond-gold rings and big belly. Though it is fully blessed and endorsed by the Vatican and the Pope himself, this powerful and wealthy Catholic organization is highly suspicious and scandalous. Some of its members are matched to scandals such as sexual deviance and drugs. A media agency described it as "God's mafia" (pp. 45-48). As it is shown

throughout the whole novel, *Opus Dei*, though breached by a non-religious Teacher, wants eagerly to possess the Holy Grail, not the chalice but the Sangreal documents, to liquidize the descendants of Christ, to erase Mary Magdalene's tomb and, eventually, to eradicate the documents. Thus, it assigned its lethal assassin the albino monk Silas, who failed later, to retrieve the Holy Grail (Johnsrud, 2014).

Most, *if not all*, of the information Brown provides in *DVC* about Christian beliefs and institutions does not match with common Christian knowledge. Much anger is poured upon Brown from the Catholic Church which went so far as a call for banning the novel issued by the archbishop of Genoa (Thomas, 2011). The Vatican officially expressed its anger against *DVC* and consider it as a satanic work filled with manipulations and lies (Taylor, 2005).

Brown (2003) closes *DVC* with the affirmation that death of Sophie's parents in a car accident is one of the ongoing killings that the Vatican committed against the descendants of Jesus and Mary Magdalene. While doing his job as the Master of the Priory, Sophie's grandfather saves no efforts for protecting *Princess* Sophie and her brother. As it turns out, Mary's tomb and the Sangreal lay in peace under the Louvre Pyramid in Paris. Sophie, just like the readers, receives new information about Christianity and the Church and this results in new understanding on her side. The voices of authority within the didactic texts usually attempt to establish authority over the reader (Newsom, 2003). The tones of

authority are very much beneficial because they provide an air of certainty on the part of the readers (Hunter, 1990). Such authority in *DVC* is exerted by Teabing and Langdon on Sophie.

The plot in a didactic novel has an apprenticeship paradigm in which a character moves from the area of error to the area of truth (Newsom, 2003). Throughout *DVC*, Sophie listens to Teabing and Langdon's lectures and speeches, and the readers behind her, and corrects her knowledge about her family and all the topics she listens to. The novel closes with Sophie standing in the area of truth and clarity. As it comes to Sophie and the readers, it is almost a convention in didactic literature that it targets readers who have an insatiable hunger for knowledge (Newsom, 2003). Sophie appears as a complaint reader who is never rebellious not indifferent, but interrogative. She listens and receives knowledge insatiably.

Didactic novels are actually guides for readers who need knowledge. They take the hands of the readers and guide them to the route of enlightenment (Hunter, 1990). As a matter of fact, *DVC* brings into light some controversies that raise questions, *if not suspicions*, about the history of Christianity; among them the absence of any gospels in the Bible which could tell about the first thirty years of Jesus' life, the ruthlessness with which "heretic" sects of Christianity were uprooted in the Middle Ages, and the discovery of hidden gospels that were expatriated by the early Church, namely, Dead Sea and the Coptic Scrolls.

However, Brown presents his own version of Christianity and wishes his readers to comprehend his didactic message. He feels that his readers need this knowledge. If they decide to digest the message behind *DVC*, then, they have to reconsider the knowledge they have about the last two millenniums of European history as far as Christianity is concerned. If this reconsideration is done, the novel scores an ultimate success (Ferris, 2005).

An essential feature in a didactic novel is that it presents information that is neither elusive nor contestable, but it is unambiguous and unitary (Newsom, 2003). The information that Teabing and Langdon contend is both crystal clear and coherent. "The reason the book was so controversial," Brown tells Sackur on HARDtalk, "is because for a lot of people the story I told in that novel made more rational sense than the story they heard on Sunday school. And certainly for me, the story I told in *The Da Vinci Code* makes more logical sense to me than the story I learned in Sunday school." He adds, "I'm talking about my beliefs of the story of Jesus Christ. How I tell the story, it's a creative art" (Van, 2017, emphasis added).

Didactic novels usually take the form of treatises (Hunter, 1990). Brown intends his *DVC* to appear like a historical and theological treatise rather than a piece of fiction because his aim is to educate readers about the history and theology of Christianity. "I knew that the book itself was fictional, of course," says Ehrman (2004), "but as I read it ... I realized that Dan Brown's characters were actually making

historical claims about Jesus, Mary, and the Gospels." He concludes, "*the fiction was being built on a historical foundation that the reader was to accept as factual, not fictitious* (pp. xii-xiii, emphasis added). "No longer," says Bock (2004), "is *The Da Vinci Code* a mere piece of fiction. It is a novel clothed in claims of historical truth, critical of institutions and beliefs held by millions of people around the world" (p. 9).

Newsom (2003) believes that didactic novels have a character who "serves as the correct interpreter of meaning and whose judgments are authoritative" (p. 43). He adds, "didactic fiction tends to be 'talkative' genre in which actions are doubled by interpretive commentary" (p. 43). Throughout *DVC*, Teabing and Landon play the role of interpreter of meaning for each other. When Teabing elucidates, Langdon adds explanatory comments or sometimes *consenting* nods. The same procedure happens with Teabing when Langdon explains.

Another device for the didactic novel to be taken into consideration is the tendency "to eliminate superfluous details that are not relevant to the thesis of the work" because "the presence of such details would both distract from the message and might provide a foothold for readings in opposition to the authority structure of the didactic story" (Newsom, 2003, p. 43). All the details presented in *DVC* are relevant to the message that Brown intends to deliver. There is no redundant information nor subplots.

Finally, the rhetoric in didactic novels is usually plain and straightforward because such novels are instruments of persuasion which aim, through the directness and faith of language, to affect the behaviour of the readers (Hunter, 1990). While conversing with Sophie, Teabing and Langdon use plain and direct rhetoric because they want Sophie, and the reader, to easily understand their didactic messages. On his interview with Ashwin Sanghi (2014), Brown states, “what I try very hard to do is *give readers just enough story and just enough research in every moment*. Such that you feel like the plot is always sort of moving forward. But, in the same time, on every page, you maybe *learn* something or had to *think* about something in slightly new way” (emphasis added).

CONCLUSION

Brown, though raised as a “typical” Christian, manages to change his mind about Christianity, the deity of Jesus and the infallibility of the Bible. The change of mind reaches to the supposed chastity of Christian institutions such as the Vatican and Opus Dei. This change comes as a result to painstaking studying and hectic research as Brown himself confirms in many occasions. Since he possesses new information which “fills some gaps” in Christian history and “straightens” some religious fundamentals, he feels that his duty is to make people aware of it.

Christian readers, in particular, will not digest *DVC*'s theories about Christian tenets and institutions easily since they are against

their doctrines, and here is *the twist!* For Brown, this theological indisposition must be healed. Therefore, he uses his novel as a pill coated with the sugar of artistic creativity and brilliance to pass a theological medicine to the minds of his readers. The outcome is magnificent. Christians worldwide bought millions of copies of *DVC* and questions began to be asked.

To present *DVC* as a didactic novel in which the message is clear yet not heavy-handed, Brown depends on a number of old and modern techniques and devices which pertain to Didacticism such as focalization, lectures, speeches, authority over readers, hagiographies, proofs, examples, binary of good-and-evil, clarity, rhetoric, a special kind of plots, intellectual guides, and others.

Brown uses Teabing and Langdon as focalizers for himself and uses Sophie as the reader who receives the focalization. Teabing and Langdon exert intellectual authority over Sophie who shows readiness to receive the new knowledge. Brown also centrally uses hagiographies. However, the hagiographies that Brown presents of Jesus and Mary and their supposed bloodline known as the Merovingian radically contradict with those that Christian literature and the Church popularized throughout ages.

Depending on lectures and speeches delivered by a historian and university professor, Brown presents *DVC* as a clear and coherent historical and theological treatise in which the rhetoric is clear and powerful. He also relies heavily on proofs and examples. He mentions, among others,

names of actual books and Gospels and cites quotations from some books. In so doing, he strengthens his persuasive arguments, solidifies his visions, and instructs readers to do research in these areas and sources. Hence, he presents *DVC* as a guide which takes the readers to the land of gaps in the world of Christianity.

As to the plot of *DVC*, Brown presents two paradigms; the binary of good-and-evil and the apprenticeship model. He foregrounds the paradigm of good-and-evil in the novel and brings to the back the apprenticeship paradigm of narratology expecting his readers, just like Sophie, to move from error to truth. He embeds no redundant details or subplots to keep his readers focused on his didactic messages.

Limitation and Study Forward

This study is limited to Brown's dealings with Christian tenets and originations in his *DVC* and his declared intentions to transfer his opinions about them to his readers throughout an entertaining novel. In the future, scholars may analyze the characterization that Brown uses to delineate monks. For example, he tends to describe Silas as a man with long fingers who speaks in whispers to confirm his Satanic nature. Scholars may also study the resemblance between *DVC* and its sources especially *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*. Accusations of plagiarizing the themes and components of *DVC* could be a good topic which may exculpate or condemn Brown depending on the finding of a non-biased academic investigation.

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