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## Christians brace for 'Da Vinci' film release

**In Utah: Some plan to boycott, while others will watch and discuss**

By Peggy Fletcher Stack  
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Salt Lake Tribune

Christians everywhere are taking up shields, if not arms in anticipation of this week's release of the movie "The Da Vinci Code."

When Dan Brown's best-selling novel of the same title came out in 2003, it enraged believers with its conspiratorial tale about Jesus that is radically different from what they learned in Sunday school. This Jesus was human, not divine and he was married to Mary Magdalene. The Catholic Church covered up the union, as well as demonizing all the women Jesus had honored during his life. And so the book goes on through the Middle Ages exploring legends about the Holy Grail and Leonard Da Vinci's "Last Supper."

Da Vinci Code may be little more than a breathless thriller, but the novel opens with the claim that all the book's history, art and architecture are real. Those are fighting words to Christians who have a particular claim on their history.

Now comes the film - starring the ever-popular Tom Hanks and directed by Ron Howard - that Hollywood hopes will cash in on the controversy.

A Vatican official has called for a boycott of the film. The American Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family and Property, a Catholic group, announced plans to hold 1,000 peaceful prayer vigils outside theaters nationwide beginning Friday.

Utah's Catholics are taking a different approach, said Molly Dumas, director of development at Juan Diego High School in Draper. "We're telling our students - 'Go see it, do your homework and think about it.' "

The school isn't planning any formal discussion of the film, Dumas said, but will answer questions as the students raise them.

For the same reason, a Juan Diego humanities teacher took students to "Brokeback Mountain," a love story about two gay men, she said. "It is important for kids to explore their faith."

As for Evangelicals, some will join the boycott of "Da Vinci," others are planning an "other-cott" (going to a different movie on the day DaVinci opens) and still others

are planning to use it as a tool of evangelism - take 'em straight from the theater to the church for a discussion of "true" Christian history.

Of course, everyone is trying to get a piece of the action. The book has sold 46 millions copies and now there are scores of other volumes critiquing it, debunking it, analyzing it, celebrating it. Plug in "Da Vinci Code" in Amazon.com's search engine and you get 230 hits - everything from an unauthorized biography of Brown to a coffee table book about Da Vinci Code art and mythology to a travel journal and a "cracking the Code" calendar.

For the most part, the battle seems to have passed by the Beehive State. Salt Lake Theological Seminary and several local churches are hosting discussions of the book.

"This isn't about evangelism in a Billy Graham sense," said the Rev. Brian North of Mt. Olympus Presbyterian in Salt Lake City. "In the past, Christians have been more cloistered from the world. Now we are getting back to what St. Paul did - engaging with the culture."

As evidence of that engagement, North points to recent Bible study guides exploring Christian themes in such movies as "Crash," "Spider Man II," "Munich," "Syriana" and "V for Vendetta."

"People are asking: What is the movie saying that either lines up with or contradicts my faith?" North said.

For his part, the Rev. Gregory Johnson hasn't seen much collective opposition to "Da Vinci Code" from Utah churches.

Johnson, president of Standing Together, a group of Christian clergy in Utah, organized groups to see Mel Gibson's "Passion of the Christ," and promoted study sessions and sermons on "Chronicles of Narnia."

"This time around we have not instigated any special focus on it," he said. "So many of our national scholars have already about the book, you can read the Christian response in many places."

As far as the movie goes, Johnson said, "we may have over-responded."

[pstack@sltrib.com](mailto:pstack@sltrib.com)