

The Da Vinci Code by Dan Brown.

Review by the Worthy Preceptor, Wor. Bro. J.A.J. Lynd.

I shall start this review by saying that this is the first work of fiction I have read for a number of years, as my usual reading material consists of, what is generally described as esoteric non-fiction of Masonic interest. Some might argue though, that these types of books also have a strong fictional component!

The Da Vinci Code has been a number one best-seller all over the world and has been described as "unputdownable", a dreadful word coined by previous reviewers. However it put me to sleep every night for almost three weeks, so that word certainly didn't become part of my vocabulary.

Without giving too much away (for those few who haven't read the book), the plot commences with the murder of an elderly curator at the Louvre museum in Paris. Into the intrigue surrounding this murder are drawn the American Robert Langdon, a Professor of Religious Symbolology at Harvard University and the Frenchwoman Sophie Neveu, who is a cryptologist attached to the Judicial Police, the French equivalent of the FBI.

These two, who could be regarded as the "good guys", set out on a series of adventures to decode and track down the answer to the ancient secret of the Holy Grail via the paintings of Leonardo Da Vinci. This so-called secret would be known to most of the readers of this review, who normally read the sort of books that I do! Also the organization that guards this secret would equally be as well known to Lectern readers. It is the Order known as the Priory of Sion, which Dan Brown also portrays as "good guys".

The "bad guys" of this story, at least for most of the book, is a Vatican sanctioned religious Order called Opus Dei (God's Work). Interestingly, a former colleague of mine, who obtained his Microbiology degree from Sydney University and had lived in an Opus Dei college residence while an undergraduate, had also told me a fair bit about this organization. Without being defamatory, all I will say is that my colleague's opinion of the workings of this Order was less than flattering.

Although there is a lot in this book that is of interest to the Freemason, all of it has been garnered from other books, which have been around for years and most of which I have already read. So I certainly learned nothing new. Examples of these source books are "The Templar Revelation" by Lynn Picknett and Chris Prince; "Rex Deus" by Marilyn Hopkins, Graham Simmons and Tim Wallace-Murphy and of course "The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail" by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln.

Craft Masonry gets a few mentions in "The Da Vinci Code" as does Royal Arch Freemasonry. Rosslyn Chapel, near Edinburgh, which has both Templar and Masonic associations, is the scene of part of the action in Brown's novel. Most readers of the Lectern would be aware of the suggestion that the Knights Templar were formed in the Holy Land as the military arm of the earlier Priory of Sion and that Freemasonry in turn evolved from the Knights Templar.

Indeed there is even a theory that the Priory of Sion was formed by descendants of the Jewish priestly class who became somewhat redundant after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by the Romans in AD 70. Therefore the aim of the Priory of Sion, through its offshoot, the Poor Fellow Soldiers of Christ and the Temple of Solomon or Knights Templar, was the restoration of Solomon's Temple!

One thing that did please me in the book was the list of Grand Masters of the Priory of Sion, which of course, included Leonardo Da Vinci (from 1510 to 1519). The reason for my pleasure was something I knew already, that is, that an Irishman had been Grand Master between 1654 and 1691. His name was Robert Boyle and I have visited his ancestral home in County Roscommon. Some of you may remember the name from schoolboy chemistry as he formulated Boyle's Law which relates volume and pressure in gases. He was a contemporary of another alleged Grand Master of the Priory of Sion, Isaac Newton (from 1691 to 1727) and both were founding members of the Royal Society. The Royal Society may have been financed and organized by another body Boyle called "the Invisible College" and which some modern historians, such as Robert Lomas, claim was a progenitor of modern Freemasonry.

One coincidence in the book that struck me (am I the only one!) is that the name of the murdered Louvre curator is Sauniere which is the same name as the priest at the centre of the mystery of Rennes Le Chateau.

This famous mystery also involves the Knights Templar as well as the same hidden secret of the Holy Grail. Most curious of all is that this mystery is also concealed in a painting. In this case the painting is by Nicholas Poussin and is entitled "The Arcadian Shepherds", sometimes called "Et in Arcadia Ego" ("And Also in Arcadia" - a reference to death). is Dan Brown just playing with us or is he leaving the door open for a future book down this mysterious path?

The Da Vinci Code is, at the end of the day, a work of fiction which contains some factual material and is a reasonably good read. Is it worth all the hype - I think not!