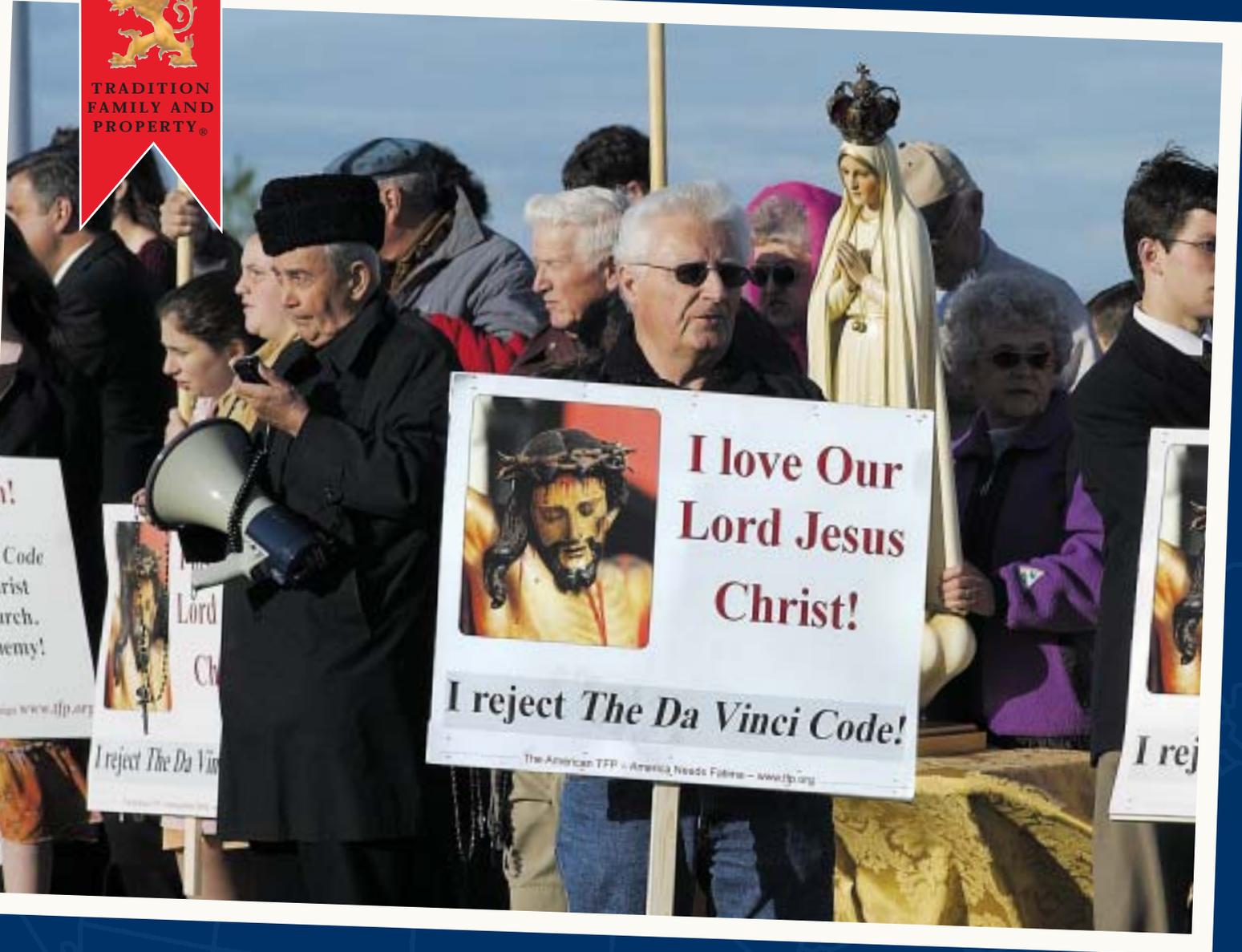
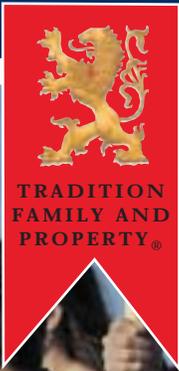


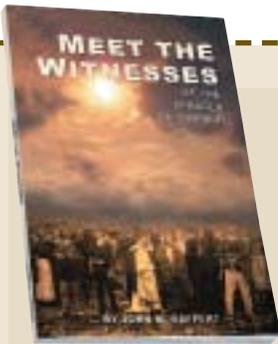
July/August 2006

# CRUSADE<sup>®</sup>

MAGAZINE



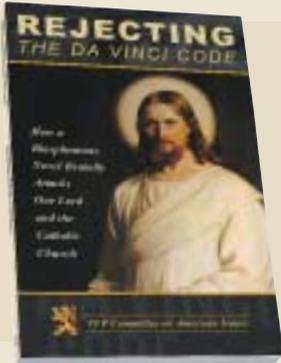
FROM COAST TO COAST:  
*Catholics Come Forward to Defend the  
Honor of Our Lord Jesus Christ*



### **Meet the Witnesses**

Recently republished with original photographs, *Meet the Witnesses* by John M. Haffert contains stunning eyewitness accounts of what happened at the Cova da Iria when 100,000 people saw the Miracle of the Sun. *Meet the Witnesses* reinforces Our Lady's great warning, and challenges us to strengthen our faith and proclaim our unshakable certainty in Mary's promise, "Finally, My Immaculate Heart will triumph!"

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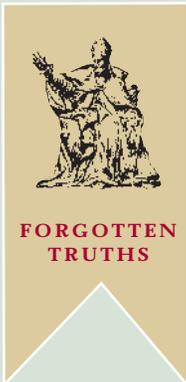
### **Rejecting The Da Vinci Code**

Of late the Church's enemies have employed a new tactic to attack Our Divine Savior and His Church by making use of blasphemous "novels" and "fiction." The role of novels should be to inspire people to live good and upright lives. Blasphemous "novels" can only influence the loss of Faith, and consequently produce lives devoid of virtue and morals.

*Rejecting The Da Vinci Code: How a Blasphemous Novel Brutally Attacks Our Lord and the Catholic Church*, written by the TFP Committee on American Issues, is a fitting response to Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*.

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## **We Cannot Be Spectators of Actions Offensive to God**

*The great Pope Pius IX was beatified in September 2000. His reign, the Church's longest, encompassed an extraordinarily trying period for the Church and Christian civilization, as both were beset by the liberal revolutions of the nineteenth century. Standing uncompromisingly against liberalism, Pope Pius IX was reviled and feared, but often respected as well, by the Church's numerous*

*secular and religious adversaries.*

*His writings and pronouncements, ranging from his splendid definition of the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and Papal Infallibility to his resounding denunciations of liberalism's errors in his Syllabus of Errors, made friends and foes take notice. They are well worth considering still today. We present here a mere sample of his wisdom.<sup>1</sup>*

"Imbue our youth and children with Christian doctrine; give them regular doses of that medicine for souls which is the constant and courageous explanation of the Gospel. Furthermore, never tire of saying '*Non licet*'—It is not permitted. It is not permitted to attend those theatrical performances in which the most sacred rites are insulted and in which licentious actions are presented. It is not permitted to frequent schools with atheistic professors, materials, or even worse."

"Fathers of families must not risk their children's frequenting theaters having programs that disparage morality and religion, and that idealize blasphemy and immorality. Such places are forbidden to

the Christian family, which cannot stand as a spectator of actions that constitute an affront to God and the Faith, to the Church, and to every sacred law."

"Our Lord Jesus Christ continues His battle with His Cross. We will use that same weapon. We will pray for our enemies, but will never accept their principles. We will condemn the cowards who do nothing save repeat, 'What are you hoping to accomplish? What can we do anyway?' These questions are ridiculous, worthy not of men but of worms."

"Governments have their politics, but We also have ours. Our politics is 'Our Father, Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will

be done, on earth as it is in Heaven . . ."

"Let us place ourselves in Mary's heart. There we will be in the safety of Noah's Ark, so to speak, even though surrounded by the deluge of evils."

"O Mother of God and my mother, by the great supplication of thy heart, beg for me a strong and solid devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus."

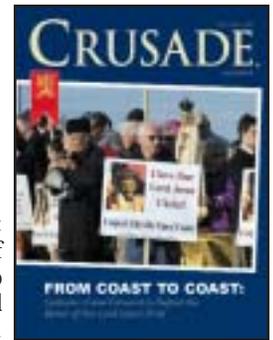
"Let us thank God that He has given us life by the death of His Son and called us to participate in the miracle of His Resurrection." ■

**Note:**

1. Quotations adapted from Regis Barwig, *More Than a Prophet: Day-by-Day with Pius IX* (Altadena, Calif., Benziger Sisters Publishers, 1978).

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July/August 2006



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publicly to defend  
Our Lord's honor.

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*Crusade Magazine* is a publication of The American Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family and Property (TFP). Direct all requests and inquiries to: *Crusade Magazine*, P.O. Box 341, Hanover, PA 17331 or e-mail to: [crusade@tfp.org](mailto:crusade@tfp.org). Web: [www.tfp.org](http://www.tfp.org). Tel.: 888-317-5571, Fax: (570) 450-6352. © 2006 by The Foundation for a Christian Civilization, Inc. This publication includes images from Dynamic Graphics, Corel, and Art Today which are protected by Copyright laws of the U.S. and elsewhere. ISSN 1096-3782 LCCN 98-641433 M-82

## CRUSADE

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### The American TFP

The American Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family and Property (TFP) was founded in 1973 to confront the profound crisis shaking the modern world. It is a civic, cultural and nonpartisan organization which, inspired by the traditional teachings of the Supreme Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church, works in a legal and peaceful manner in the realm of ideas to defend and promote the principles of private ownership, family and perennial Christian values with their

twofold function: individual and social. The TFP's words and efforts have always been faithfully at the service of Christian civilization. The first TFP was founded in Brazil by the famous intellectual and Catholic leader Prof. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira in 1960. His work inspired the formation of other autonomous, TFP sister organizations across the globe, thus constituting the world's largest anticommunist and antisocialist network of Catholic inspiration.



# FROM COAST

## *Catholics Come Forward to Defend the*

BY JOHN HORVAT II

On May 19, 2006, *The Da Vinci Code* was released nationwide, and a polarized America was stirred up all the more with this latest example of blasphemy against the Faith.

For months, the media and the film's promoters have highlighted the various nonfictional issues raised in this "fictional" work. Many Catholics saw Dan Brown's affirmations on the divinity of Christ, the establishment of the Papacy and true origins of the Church as a veiled blasphemous attack.

At first, the Catholic response was a systematic and massive refutation of Dan Brown's errors. Dozens of books and documentaries "decoded," "cracked" or "broke" the pseudo-cryptic code that so many, including the author, have mistaken for the truth.

By May 19, 2006, the time for refutation was over. It was time to reject, and on opening night, Catholics did just that by gathering in front of

over 1,000 theaters nationwide to protest against blasphemy.

### The Story of a Massive Protest

When Sony Pictures announced last year its intention of putting *The Da Vinci Code* on film, the American Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family and Property (TFP) and its America Needs Fatima campaign started organizing grassroots protests.

Blasphemy has always touched a raw nerve with Americans, and *The Da Vinci Code* went beyond that. Never before have Church teachings and history been so grossly distorted in a major motion picture. Never before has the Divinity of Jesus Christ been denied so brutally before such a vast audience. Yet the overwhelming media hype surrounding the film made any reaction seem impossible.

Yet the idea of protest caught on, and Catholics everywhere were energized. What began as a small effort to find a few local organizers soon exploded into a massive grassroots network that has led to over 2,000 protests across the nation.

### A Cross Section of America

The protest network enjoyed an impressive outpouring of support from Americans from all walks of life—an authentic America united to denounce and repudiate blasphemy. *Everyone wanted to get involved.* Housewives, students and teachers suddenly found themselves on the front-line in today's Culture War. One 87-year-old grandmother in a wheelchair took it upon herself to be an organizer. Professionals, doctors and lawyers offered to lead protests; musicians and artists put their talents to work; university students took advantage of the summer vacation to put together protests. Church and pro-life youth groups also joined in. Some people located area theaters showing the film and organized the vigils. Others planned meetings and barbecues to

A rally of reparation at the Krikorian Theatre in Monrovia, Calif. Catholics were joyful in standing up for Our Lord Jesus Christ and the Church.



Courtesy of Rita Crismon

# TO COAST:

## *Honor of Our Lord Jesus Christ*

*The idea of protest caught on, and Catholics everywhere were energized. What began as a small effort to find a few local organizers soon exploded into a massive grassroots network that has led to over 2,000 protests across the nation.*

discuss strategy, and set up Web sites especially for their protests.

Organizers used innovation and initiative to recruit others. One organizer went door-to-door asking for help. Others took their protest posters to church and restaurants, enlisting help wherever they went. Still others posted signs on their lawns or put them visibly in their cars. The TFP Web site listing of organizers put protesters in touch with each other.

Reparation for blasphemy became the cause that united Catholics and overwhelmed the phone banks at TFP's *Da Vinci Code* Protest Central near Topeka, Kan. People who never thought about publicly defending Our Lord and the Blessed Mother suddenly were leading the charge and making a stand.

### **Incredible Obstacles**

Organizers reported all sorts of tactics to discourage them in their endeavor while they answered enthusiastically the call to reject blasphemy.

*The Da Vinci Code* advocates/fans/supporters played both sides of the controversy. On one hand, they would minimize the film's reli-

gious impact, portraying it as a mere work of fiction. On the other hand, they would parrot the central theses of the "fictional" book, saying it was telling the truth about Jesus and the Catholic Church.

Peer pressure was another obstacle. Friends and neighbors told protesters not to get involved. Others said that everyone would laugh at them. *Fellow Catholics said the best thing was to do nothing!* Shamefully, there were parish priests who said they read the book and saw no problem in its blatant disregard for Church teachings.

Despite evidence that negative publicity does hurt companies, many repeated the mantra that protests give free publicity to the film. Many even cited *The Passion of the Christ* as an example, though there were no massive protests in front of theaters for that blockbuster film.

Others were told to go to another movie—do

**Catholics declared their rejection of *The Da Vinci Code* loud and clear at a Tinseltown USA theater in Rochester, N.Y.**



Courtesy of Vincent Gore

Over eighty Catholics protested the blasphemous *Da Vinci Code* movie at a theater in Frackville, Penn.



Courtesy of Jennifer Shiber

*Blasphemy has always touched a raw nerve with Americans, and The Da Vinci Code went beyond that. Never before have Church teachings and history been so grossly distorted in a major motion picture.*

anything but protest. However, such obstacles only strengthened the organizers' resolve. Many of them were more determined than ever to go ahead.

### Support from Bishops

Midway through the recruitment effort, protest

organizers received the precious support of Vatican officials and American bishops who encouraged organized protests. On April 28, 2006, while speaking at a Catholic conference in Rome, Archbishop Angelo Amato, Secretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, criticized *The Da Vinci Code* book and film, and urged Catholics to organize protests worldwide.

Eleven American bishops joined in encouraging such protests in front of theaters. Numerous priests denounced the film from the pulpit.

In a letter to American TFP President Raymond Drake, Bishop Raymond J. Peña of Brownsville, Texas, wrote, "I am encouraged to know that people of good will such as the members of the Society [TFP] will exercise their legal right to peacefully protest a film that serves no objective other than to ridicule Catholic doctrine and incite the masses to error."

Bishop Robert W. Finn of Kansas City-St. Joseph, wrote, "Thank you for your prayerful and peaceful efforts to give public witness to the



TFP members held a prayer vigil/protest in front of Regal Theaters in Bethesda, Md. ANF Director Robert Ritchie (left) rouses reaction from motorists while his younger brother John speaks to a passerby about the lies in *The Da Vinci Code*.

# Bishops' Support for TFP Protests Against *The Da Vinci Code*



"I encourage all those who are using the release of *The Da Vinci Code* as an opportunity to teach the truth of the Gospel about the life of the Lord Jesus. I offer my support as you gather in prayerful vigils today to publicly proclaim your faith in Jesus Christ and to voice your disapproval of the erroneous information about Jesus presented as fact in *The Da Vinci Code*."

— *Justin Cardinal Rigali*,  
Archbishop of Philadelphia, Pa.



"Your campaign of prayer and lawful protest is sincerely appreciated. It is a meaningful exercise of Catholic outrage at the callous rejection of things we hold sacred."

— *Most Reverend Robert W. Finn*,  
Bishop of St. Joseph, Kansas City, Mo.



"Be assured of my prayers for the work of the American Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family and Property and its America Needs Fatima Campaign, as it seeks to support the Catholic Church and uphold its traditional beliefs."

— *Most Reverend Raymond L. Burke*,  
Archbishop of St. Louis, Mo.



"The current media should be ashamed of themselves! They will do anything to discredit the Catholic Church! Our Lord Jesus Christ, Himself said 'having eyes they do not see; having ears they do not hear!'"

— *Most Reverend Robert M. Moskal*,  
Bishop of St. Josaphat in Parma, Ohio



"On Sunday, Mother's Day, I mentioned in my homily: If your mother is being attacked with vicious lies and someone comes to you and says, 'Hey, I got this fantastic movie about your mother and the bad deeds she has done, would you pay to see that

movie? Or, if her son, Jesus, was being pelted with stones, would you provide the throwers with more stones to throw at Jesus? If you love your mother, the Church, will you stand idly by and allow her to be degraded?"

— *Most Reverend Anthony Apuron*,  
Archbishop of Agana, Guam



"From the bottom of my heart I reject all the errors and blasphemies contained in the despicable novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, which unfortunately will be presented on a movie version very soon. I wish to remind all Catholics of the words of Our Lord that the gates of Hell shall not prevail over His Church."

— *Luis Cardinal Aponte*,  
Archbishop Emeritus of San Juan,  
Puerto Rico



"I commend your efforts for a grassroots peaceful but distinctly assertive of the truth to the contrary of this presentation in theaters where it might be shown shortly. If the presence of such public witness causes at least one individual to have second thoughts about the ideological propaganda to which he or she is being subject, your effort will have been well worthwhile."

— *Most Reverend Oscar H. Lipscomb*,  
Archbishop of Mobile, Ala.



"The Church remains and grows and thrives. So, my dear friends, as you stand in defense of our Lord and His Church—fear not. Know that our Holy Faith has prevailed for two thousand years precisely because it is TRUE. There is no book or movie or TV program or website or fiction-disguised-as-history that can prevail against Christ and His truth. Our Church is built upon the rock-solid certainty of eye-witnesses who were willing to suffer torture and

death for what they knew to be true. Indeed, 'the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.' (Mt. 16:18)"

— *Archbishop Cyril S. Bustros*,  
Eparch of Newton, Roslindale, Mass.



"I am very pleased to know that so many faithful people will be giving peaceful and prayerful demonstration of their faith as this film opens in theaters around the country."

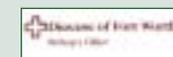
— *Most Reverend Michael J. Sheridan*,  
Bishop of Colorado Springs, Colo.



"I am encouraged to know that people of good will such as the members of the Society [TFP] will exercise their legal right to peacefully protest a film that serves no objective other than to ridicule Catholic doctrine and incite the masses to error.

"It is my fervent hope that, through the prayers of the Immaculate Virgin Mary and the witness of Christ's disciples, the wavering faith of many moviegoers will be strengthened against the falsehoods depicted in this film."

— *Most Reverend Raymond J. Peña*,  
Bishop of Brownsville, Texas



"So much of the current milieu (*The Da Vinci Code* and related books which are very evident in our book stores) are nothing other than a resurgence of Gnostic heresies of the early Church. A peaceful public witness to the love and truth of Christ is necessary in many areas of our life and culture these days. I plan on writing on this in our Diocesan paper, and with the help and encouragement of our Catholic Center staff we are planning several teaching events about *The Da Vinci Code*. Please know of my prayer for you and all involved."

— *Most Reverend Kevin W. Vann*,  
Bishop of Fort Worth, Texas

# Our Readers Write...



☒ Thank you for your ongoing spiritual leadership and information connection. We will be prayerfully protesting *The Da Vinci Code* movie. You arm all of us with the kind of information that is invaluable to action and participation by individuals scattered all over the country.

*P.H., e-mail*

☒ God bless America Needs Fatima for its relentless efforts to combat heresies, blasphemies and everything else that is evil. Our Lord and His Blessed Mother will bestow upon you abundant graces.

*C.H., Coral Springs, Fla.*

☒ It's really hard to understand how anyone would balk at fighting this degradation [*The Da Vinci Code*] to our Savior and our Faith! But, notwithstanding, I shall do all I can, even if it's in a limited capacity, to stand by America Needs Fatima, in whatever you and all our members stand against in our fight against oppression of our Faith, our Church and Our Savior and His Holy Mother!

*R.A., Dubuque, Iowa*

☒ I saw a lady praying fervently at the adoration chapel. As she finished her prayers, I approached her with a flier against *The Da Vinci Code*. She eagerly consented to take it saying that she goes to the adoration chapel to pray in particular for her daughter-in-law. She said that her daughter-in-law completely lost her Faith after reading *The Da Vinci Code* book and that is the chief reason she prays each week in front of the Blessed Sacrament.

*M.K., Hudson, Ohio*

☒ I am brokenhearted to think of what man has made of God's creation in *The Da Vinci Code*.

*G.M., Harahan, La.*



Under a large cross and led by three priests, over one hundred fifty Catholics voiced their prayers of reparation and protest against *The Da Vinci Code* at The Grand Theatre in Lafayette, La. Protests continued every day at this location for more than two weeks.

truth of Jesus Christ and His Church, and the belief of Christians, even as they are belittled and blasphemed in *The Da Vinci Code*.”

### Breaking the Consensus

The promotional hype by the media created the impression that those who opposed the film would be a tiny, unimportant minority. Organizers nationwide prepared themselves to receive negative reactions and to be the focus of scorn and laughter.

However, few were prepared to be so well received and accepted by the public. Across the country, reports indicated that a

majority of the passersby supported the protests. Protesters received honks of approval from drivers or a thumbs-up. People came up to thank them for being there. Many were relieved to see

them at the theaters. Others stopped what they were doing and even joined the protests. Finally, many decided not to see the movie after hearing why it was so offensive.

The protests helped to break the consensus that everyone is behind *The Da Vinci Code*. The protesters were living proof that dissenters were not alone.



Media coverage drew much attention to the acts of reparation and rejection of blasphemy.

### From the Front Lines

One lady stayed outside her local theater the entire time the movie was running. At times she was joined by

*“Thank you for your prayerful and peaceful efforts to give public witness to the truth of Jesus Christ and His Church, and the belief of Christians, even as they are belittled and blasphemed in The Da Vinci Code.”*

—Most Reverend Robert W. Finn, Bishop of Kansas City, Mo.



**Left:** A rally of reparation and protest by TFP members in front of Regal Gallery Place Stadium 14 in Washington, D.C. **Right:** Washington, D.C. protest organizer, Rommel Bandeira, educates the public about the blasphemies in *The Da Vinci Code*.

her three teenage children and others. She reported that there were “about five quite nasty responses, but many, many acts of kindness, and many opportunities to [talk].”

In Richmond, Va., eighteen protesters found widespread support. In particular, they were impressed by a group of children. As the children approached and read the protesters’ signs, one of them said, “I love Jesus, too!” and they all started singing and supporting the protest.

Another protest organizer reported on a similar enthusiasm from sixth graders who saw their protest and started asking questions. Several young boys became very excited about the idea of protesting and even offered to pray a Rosary of reparation. “It was such a blessing to see these young children get excited about their faith!” said a protest organizer.

An eight-year-old boy at a protest in Hud-

son, N.Y., approached a reporter and asked him to print his story. The reporter listened intently as the boy stated, “Tell people I hate *The Da Vinci Code*. Don’t go see it.”

One lady who saw a prayer vigil protest said seeing Catholics witnessing for the Faith encouraged her to persevere in the Faith. In tears, she continued, “The Catholic Church is still alive.”

Many organizers reported cooperation from security officers and mall managers who were against the film. At times, protesters were asked to move to other locations, and these new locations provided better visibility for the protests. In fact, there were twenty-two people protesting on the public sidewalk outside a shopping center when security came and said they had to move. When asked where they might move, the security officer said, “Well, since AMC Theater is showing this, and the other merchants have no part, we are arranging to have you protest in front of the theater!”

There were cases where a brave parish pastor would lead his parish into protests. Such occasions were always successful events and proved to be a source of blessing for the whole parish. Admiringly, one Catholic recounts the story of a parish priest who, with an injured foot and using a cane, walked back and forth during the protest in front of the



**Eight-year-old Anthony Slobodnik holds his sign high at a protest in Merriam, Kan.**



## A Protest Invitation in USA Today

Urging all to join the nationwide protests against *The Da Vinci Code* film, the American TFP published a full-page advertisement in *USA Today*, which has a circulation of 2.2 million, on May 17, 2006.



Students from St. Louis de Montfort Academy participated in several protests. Here, the boys carry a statue of Our Lady of Fatima while they prayed and protested.

*Protesters received honks of approval from drivers or a thumbs-up. People came up to thank them for being there. Many were relieved to see them at the theaters. Others stopped what they were doing and even joined the protests.*

crowd saying the Rosary, slowly, loudly and clearly. She described the experience as “powerful.”

Of course, the protests were not without oppositions. Some protesters found people holding up hastily drawn signs, sneering and jeering, and parodying the prayerful stance of the protesters. Others preferred not to face the protesters and would

“courageously” scream “it’s only fiction” or some other slogan as they drove by in their cars. In St. Louis, two individuals came to the theater dressed up as “bishops,” dancing and gesturing before awaiting cameras.

### **The Honor of Protest**

Most organizers felt honored by being at the protests. They felt it a

## Ready, Set—Protest!

BY JOHN RITCHIE



*Above left:* TFP members work on fixing the stubborn printer. *Above middle:* Peter Shibley places six grommets each banner. *Near right:* Just a few of the packaged banners, programs and fliers ready to go to Protest Organizers. *Far right:* The banners are cut and prepared for the next step.

TFP member Peter Shibley is one of the many volunteers who worked behind the scenes preparing large anti-blaspemy banners. Over 420 large banners were shipped out to protest groups across the country.

Impressive numbers for the record:

- **Number of posters printed:** 8,000
- **Number of banners made:** 420
- **Total number of brass grommets used:** 2,520
- **Length of banner vinyl printed:** 5,250 feet (30 feet short of a mile!)

- **Weight:** 1,680 pounds
- **Days of printing:** 17
- **Man-hours worked:** 438 hours on banners alone

Shortly before May 19, 2006, the printer was running day and night when, suddenly, it simply shut down. With a broken printer, many protest organizers would not receive their banners on time for their prayer vigils. So, computer technicians went to work to solve the problem. After inspecting the printer, however, they could not explain

why it had stopped running, nor were they able to fix it.

Raymond Drake, president of the American TFP, decided to tape a Miraculous Medal of Our Lady to the side of the printer. After he did so, the printer started working again. Everyone was amazed with Our Lady’s intervention and all the banners were sent out on time. ■



Contrary to what protesters expected, the signs of support from the general public were numerous. Horns honked approval and many a thumbs-up flashed at prayer vigil participants nationwide.

privilege to publicly witness for the Faith. Others said it was a rewarding experience. One protester from Sugar Land, Texas, reported that their group of twenty considered the protest and some hecklers “a blessing from the Lord because He let us share His suffering.”

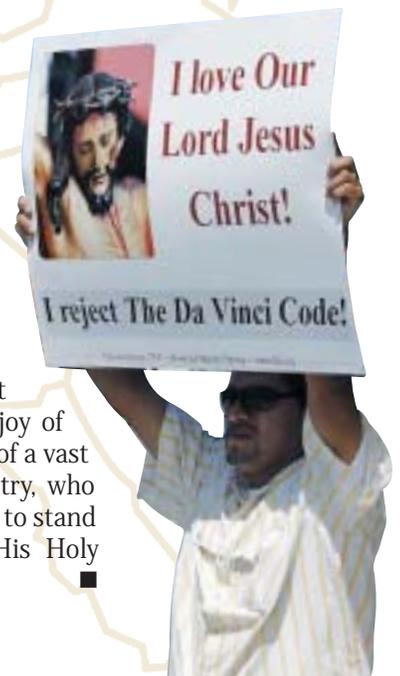
“Catholics need to do more of this kind of public display rather than sitting inside our churches while our Creator is vilified,” wrote a woman from New York. “While God the Father and His Son are driven out of our country, we sit by waiting for *someone else* to do something. Well, our little group did something today in the hot blazing sun. We stood up for Jesus on public domain in a dignified, respectful way, and God-willing we and others will do so again.”

“What a joy to be a real Catholic today!” wrote

one lady returning from a protest.

Over 2,000 prayer vigils and protests were held nationwide. The most important accomplishment was that these prayer vigils were acts of reparation in atonement for the blasphemies contained in *The Da Vinci Code* book and film.

However, an added effect of this effort was that so many overcame the obstacles and answered the call to reject *The Da Vinci Code*. Catholics felt the joy of being Catholic. Moreover, they felt part of a vast family of souls from all over the country, who radiated like a thousands points of light to stand up for Our Lord Jesus Christ and His Holy Church.



For some, it was a perpetual protest—showing their rejection of *The Da Vinci Code* wherever they went.





# Why Does Sony Fear Free Publicity?

BY JOHN HORVAT II

## “Don’t protest, you’re just giving them free publicity!”

That is the advice that the anti-blasphemy protester often endures when organizing protests in front of theaters. The conventional wisdom is that controversy generates interest, and interest will in turn only fuel ticket sales. The best thing a Catholic can do in face of a blasphemous movie is to “ignore it, don’t go, do nothing.”

Thus, according to conventional wisdom, the TFP massive protests in front of theaters, and especially the over 1,000 protests against *The Da Vinci Code* movie on May 19, 2006, were at best well-intentioned but counterproductive. Indeed if the free publicity mantra were true, then film producers should have been fanning controversy, welcoming protests and laughing all the way to the bank. However, as the release date for *The Da Vinci Code* grew near, no one seemed to be laughing.

## Reputation Management

As one of the nation’s leading public relations firms, Sitrick & Co. is best known for its communications work in “sensitive situations” and for “reputation management.”

“The old saw of no publicity is bad publicity no longer applies,” warned Allan Mayer of Sitrick & Co., one of the leading Hollywood damage-control experts. He should know. As head of the firm’s entertainment division, he has seen plenty of cases where controversy has ruined the careers of many a star.<sup>1</sup>

Described by *Variety* as “Hollywood’s most prominent crisis specialists,” it is no coincidence that Sony Pictures hired Sitrick & Co. to handle the controversy surrounding *The Da Vinci Code* movie. Films perceived as blas-

phemous are serious business.

As the *Wall Street Journal* article “Da Vinci Damage Control” noted, Sony Pictures did everything possible to avert backlash from religious groups. “Sony is particularly concerned about appearing insensitive to religious beliefs,” the *Wall Street Journal’s* Hollywood Report observed.<sup>2</sup>

As the May 19 release date approached, Sony Pictures pulled out the stops in its public relations offensive, hoping to deflect critics protesting the film’s central premise that Christ married Mary Magdalene, its rewriting of early Church history and its Machiavellian depiction of the Catholic Church. In this case, “free publicity” generated by potential protesters is a crisis, not an opportunity. Hired specialists were on the scene to avoid a false move that could jeopardize the filmmaker’s reputation.

## Trying to “Dialogue”

Not only did Sony Pictures contract Hollywood’s most able spinmeisters, but it also hired a second firm, Grace Hill Media, a media firm that specializes in courting Christian audiences.

Grace Hill Media, a Hollywood firm headed by Jonathan Bock, was given the unenviable task of dealing with those Christians who oppose the book’s thesis. The firm employed methods that some opponents believed would blunt protesters’ opposition.

Dialogue is the key word. In fact, Grace Hill Media even went to the point of having Sony Pictures set up its own opposition Web site where protesters

can vent their opinions. The site, the *davincialogue.com*, is hardly convincing, though its developers certainly spent a lot of time and resources to find a panel of religious “experts” to discuss *The Da Vinci Code*. However, with essay titles like “Why Christians Ought to See the Movie,” it is not difficult to perceive a not-so-hidden agenda.

For a Web site that offers to “dialogue” with Christians, it curiously offers no mechanisms whereby offended Christians can send their concerns directly to Sony Pictures. Instead, there is a discussion forum that takes one to a distastefully named HollywoodJesus.com site where a few Christians have taken up the challenge to fence with non-believers.

In a patronizing tone, protesters are also invited to put down their signs and pray to gain new insights into the film.

A protester gives free but negative publicity to *The Da Vinci Code* movie at the Sony Pictures Entertainment office in Culver City, Calif.



*When art attaches itself to blasphemy, no amount of publicity, free or otherwise, can remove the stigma of the offense.*



Catholics brought protests to the very door of Sony Pictures Entertainment offices in Culver City, Calif.

“Praying about *The Da Vinci Code* is less about the book’s brouhaha and the film’s frenzy,” the site’s “Hollywood Prayer Network” section claims, “and more about those doing the praying. It’s about us. Through prayer, we gain wisdom, grace, strength and insight.”<sup>3</sup>

### Avoiding the B Word

Throughout the controversy, Sony Pictures has steered clear of the term “blasphemy,” preferring to turn the matter into a kind of cultural event, a fictional thriller or an historic commentary.

Indeed, up until the showing of the film, it had become increasingly difficult to determine what the film was all about. At the same time that Sony Pictures downplayed the movie as a fictional thriller, it put up a Web site to “educate people” about the theological and historical issues connected to the film.

In a case of having your cake and eating it, film promoters proclaimed it is all just fiction, while its author, Dan Brown, insists all the louder that the novel has historical sources. On an opening page of the bestseller, Mr. Brown unabashedly writes, “all descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents and secret rituals in this novel are accurate.”

In a confusing atmosphere of “dialogue” and pseudo-scholarly opinions, the debate is being sidetracked. Promoters are staying away from the very serious charge of blasphemy and asking protesters to do likewise. This is a strange dialogue where one side is being asked to give in on everything and the other side gives up nothing at all.

### Effective Protest

*Blasphemy!* That is the word that the

filmmakers fear. It is the only word that describes the brutal and callous insensitivity to religious beliefs Christians perceive, and it is the only word that addresses the central issue of how the massive promotion of a work can be seen as both insulting and offending to God Himself.

Blasphemy is the gravest sin committed against religion because it expresses the implication that God is contemptible. In publicly portraying God falsely there is the implication of attributing to God that which does not belong to Him or denying to Him that which is His.

In a work that so blatantly denies to Christ His very Divinity, it is no wonder there are protests against *The Da Vinci Code*, which is why anti-blasphemy protests are so effective. It returns the debate to where it belongs. It reveals before the public just how onerous the offense being committed is, and that is why promoters must use “reputation management,” damage-control specialists and spinmeisters to shift the terms of the debate. Indeed, when art attaches itself to blasphemy, no amount of publicity, free or otherwise, can remove the stigma of the offense.

### Making a Moral Decision

Those who claim protests are free publicity cannot point to any case where blasphemy protests have helped a film, play or exhibit. Such protests turn what would normally be for moviegoers a night of entertainment into a moral decision. More often than not, blasphemous works experience an initial notoriety and die ignominiously.

At the 96th Annual Meeting of the

American Association of Museums (AAM) in Dallas, museum professionals held a special workshop about dealing with protests. Journalist and panel member Hollis Walker bluntly told the audience to consider blasphemy protests “no-win situations.” Their best policy is defense and damage control. “At the very beginning, if you see something like this erupting, my best advice to you is to go hire the best public relations crisis consultant you can find,” she stressed, “because the internal public relations and marketing people at museums are not equipped to deal with this kind of issue.”<sup>4</sup>

It appears Sony Pictures followed such advice.

Anti-blasphemy protests were held at theaters all over the country.

Protesters proclaimed blasphemy is not entertainment and they asked each moviegoer to make a moral decision.

If protesting is free publicity, then Sony Pictures paid for it dearly. ■

### Notes:

1. Chris Jones, “When is bad publicity a bad career move?” *Chicago Tribune*, February 8, 2004 in <http://www.sitrick.com/pdfs/ChicagoTribune.pdf#search='When%20is%20bad%20publicity%20a%20bad%20career%20move'>.

2. John Lippman, “Da Vinci Damage Control,” *The Wall Street Journal*, March 17, 2006, page W4.

3. Karen Covell, “A Message from the Hollywood Prayer Network,” <http://www.thedavinciadiologue.com/pray.cfm>.

4. Tapes 02446-0901 and 02446-0902, “Our Lady of Controversy: The Cyber Arte Exhibition at the Museum of International Folk Art,” recorded at the Association of American Museum’s Annual Meeting & Museum Expo 2002 (Chesapeake Audio/Video Communications, Inc., Elkridge, Md., 2002).



ONLY IN AMERICA

# Heroism

*American soldiers face the prospect of injury and death with unflinching courage. In a nation dominated by a self-centered “me culture,” their existence is yet another paradox that can be found “only in America.”*

BY NORMAN FULKERSON

When Todd Beamer boarded United Flight 93 on September 11, 2001, he never dreamed that terrorists intended to fly that very plane into the Capitol or the White House. Such an act would have been an even greater psychological blow to an already devastated nation. He could have sat quietly in his seat and done nothing, but instead courageously chose to lead fellow passengers against hardened terrorists with the words, “Let’s roll.” His actions have earned him the title of hero and are considered by some to be the first strike against terrorism.

Heroes are a rare commodity in the “me culture” of modern-day America. Everything seems to be centered on self. Issues like homosexual marriage, abortion and stem-cell research are debated on the basis of individual rights, and the idea of a higher law or the common good are cast aside.

Yet from the day Todd Beamer fought the terrorists aboard Flight 93 until now, American soldiers have continued to roll. They risk their lives fighting for a higher cause, alongside others who are concerned solely about themselves. The existence of such heroes in the midst of

*“He had everything money could buy, but was not happy.”*

the modern day “me culture” is yet another paradox that can be found “Only in America.”

Such a thesis would appear questionable since we hardly ever hear about such men. Pat Tillman, the former professional football player for the Arizona Cardinals, changed all that.

Neither the glow of stardom nor the comforts of a million-dollar bank account were obstacles in his quest to serve a higher ideal. His death in Afghanistan in April 2004 captured the imagination of a nation and the enthusiasm for such a man continues, even with the growing awareness that his death was the result of friendly fire.

The reason for this is simple: heroism is contagious. Regardless of where and when it takes place, those who witness it are mesmerized. Those who hear about it are compelled to follow. *No one forgets.* The heroic early Christians, killed by the Romans, were ignorant of this fact and did not realize the blood they shed was the seed of new faith. Likewise the heroism of our American soldiers should inspire the nation that produced such brave men.

Equally important is the fact that



Courtesy of Mrs. Janet Staat

Jeremy Staat takes the oath to serve his country.

*“It didn’t seem right that we pay entertainers millions to catch a football,” the fresh new Marine was quoted as saying, “when we pay our Marines pennies to catch a bullet.”*



Courtesy of Mrs. Janet Staat

A beaming Private First Class Jeremy Staat after becoming a U.S. Marine.



Sgt. Paul Brondhaver (left) with friend Pfc. Samuel Bowen, who was killed in combat in Iraq shortly after this photograph was taken.

*“My heart is still there with my men. I need to get back to Iraq ... and finish what I started.”*



Although badly wounded, Sgt. Brondhaver continued fighting and helping his men.

heroism is timeless. When a person does something truly heroic he becomes mythical or larger than life. Once a person earns such a status it remains forever as a testimony to that individual's accomplishment. To forget General Douglas MacArthur's promise to the Filipino people, "I shall return" is therefore as hard as overlooking Winston Churchill's capacity of rallying a nation with the counsel to "Never give up." Such men looked toward a higher ideal, faced the odds and will forever be remembered for doing so.

### **Catching Bullets Rather than Footballs**

This was the very reason that Jeremy Staat, a former defensive lineman of the Pittsburgh Steelers, decided to join the military. He was a personal friend of Pat Tillman at Arizona State University and, like the rest of the nation, he grieved Tillman's death. His mother, Janet Staat, of Bakersfield, Calif., was not surprised by her son's decision.

"At first it takes your breath away," she said. "I watched him make a decision to go from being an elite [in the NFL] to possibly not having a blanket to sleep with." "He had everything money could buy," she continued, "but was not happy." He played a sport he loved and was paid dearly to do so, yet like Tillman, he yearned for more.

With his graduation from the Marine Corps in March 2006, satellite trucks from major news networks descended upon the Staat home. They all wanted an inter-

view with the man whose life was a carbon copy of Pat Tillman's. "It didn't seem right that we pay entertainers millions to catch a football," the fresh new Marine was quoted as saying, "when we pay our Marines pennies to catch a bullet."

It could be argued that the examples given represent naïve individuals ignorant of what is involved in the service of one's country. The idea of sacrifice and personal risk would appear a romantic dream of young men who are unaware of the reality of armed conflict.

*“I watched him make a decision to go from being an elite [in the NFL] to possibly not having a blanket to sleep with.”*

### **“I Was Just Doing My Job”**

No one would know of such a reality better than Capt. Brian Chontosh of Rochester, N.Y. In March 2003, he found himself in a life-threatening situation when the platoon he was leading came under attack from a "coordinated ambush of mortars, rocket-propelled grenades and automatic weapons fire."<sup>1</sup>

Caught in a kill zone, with tanks blocking the road ahead, he did the unthinkable and ordered his driver to advance directly toward a .50 caliber

machine gun. He then exited his vehicle and began to clear the trench with his rifle and pistol. Running out of ammunition, he grabbed discarded weapons from stunned Iraqis and continued his virtual one-man assault. Spotting an abandoned enemy rocket-propelled grenade launcher close by, he used it to inflict yet more damage. When the sand settled, he had cleared 200 yards of trench and killed twenty enemy soldiers in the process.

After receiving the Navy Cross—the Navy's second highest award—he downplayed his exploits. "I was just doing my job." Although he came away virtually unscathed that day, others are not so fortunate.

### **“300 Holes in His Body, Courage in His Heart”<sup>2</sup>**

In July 2004, a Humvee in Sgt. Paul Brondhaver's convoy broke down in a city north of Baghdad. He ordered a box formation around the vehicle while mechanics went to work. Moments later a rocket-propelled grenade struck nearby sending him twelve feet in the air and killing his friend Private First Class Samuel Bowen who was standing next to him.

What happened next defies belief. Although suffering over 300 wounds, inflicted by hot pieces of shrapnel, he refused help and ordered medics to look after those more "seriously wounded." Weakened by the loss of blood yet full of determination, he crawled to a nearby Humvee where he radioed for a helicopter



Lt. Col. Tim Maxwell (far left) with fellow soldiers.

*One of his biggest struggles was overcoming depression caused not from the rigors of war but the separation from fellow heroes still fighting in Iraq.*



After serious injury from a mortar attack in Iraq, Lt. Col. Maxwell now helps fellow wounded Marines.

to evacuate the wounded and dead. Leaning out the window he then fired upon enemy soldiers and ordered a machine gunner to lay down more suppressive fire.

Sgt. Brondhaver survived that harrowing day yet admitted, "My heart is still there with my men. I need to get back to Iraq," he said, "and finish what I started."

### "Wounded Warriors"

Lt. Col. Tim Maxwell, a twenty-year veteran in the Marine Corps, also knows what war is like. While stationed in central Iraq in October 2004, he laid down for what he hoped would be a ten-minute nap. His brief respite from battle was rudely interrupted when a mortar round exploded nearby and knocked him unconscious. He would later wake up in Bethesda Naval Hospital with tunnel vision, broken bones and severe brain damage. As an officer who for years had led men in battle with a compass, he would now have to re-learn what it is.

Learning to read again with children's books was difficult but thanks to military discipline and the help of a speech pathologist he improved rapidly. The effort however was so grueling that he ended some sessions drenched in perspiration.

One of his biggest struggles was overcoming depression caused not from the rigors of war but the separation from fellow heroes still fighting in Iraq. Like Sgt.

Brondhaver, he would like to return but his injuries will not allow it. He now devotes his time to helping fellow Marines through a pilot program called "Wounded Warriors."

The most notable recipient of Lt. Col.

pleted the twenty-six-mile New York City Marathon<sup>3</sup> and is now back in Iraq. He recounts his moving story in his memoir, *Back in Action: An American Soldier's Story of Courage, Faith, and Fortitude*.

### Re-enlistments Are Up

It has been five years since Todd Beamer's "let's roll." What began with flag waving and yellow ribbons, however, some have reduced to body-bag counts and prison abuse scandals.

In the midst of negative news, however, there is one striking piece of information that goes unreported. In the last six months, the Army has recorded a fifteen percent increase in re-enlistments; an upward trend that began in 2001. More significant still is the fact that sixty-nine percent of those killed in Iraq come from this branch of the Armed Forces.

Why do so many soldiers re-enlist? It is because heroism is truly timeless, contagious and another Only in America paradox. ■



Members of the "Wounded Warriors," injured Marines, some of whom seek to return to combat.

Maxwell's kindness is Sgt. James Sturla, a twenty-six-year-old tank commander who was "degloved" during an attack in western Iraq. Although he had the skin and muscle ripped right off his hand he is now preparing for re-deployment. Col. Maxwell's wounded warriors are not the only injured soldiers wishing to return to combat.

David Rozelle of Fort Carson, Colo., lost his right leg in June 2003 when the Humvee he was riding in detonated an anti-tank mine. Rehabilitation was difficult but with the help of a prosthetic he was soon running a ten-minute mile on a treadmill. In November 2004, he com-

### Notes:

1. Cpl. Jeremy Vought, "3/5 Marines awarded for heroism," [http://www.marines.mil/marinelink/\\_nsf/lookupstoryref/\\_2004514112222](http://www.marines.mil/marinelink/_nsf/lookupstoryref/_2004514112222).
2. Reid Forgrave, "300 holes in his body, courage in his heart—Wounded Guardsman tells of grenade attack," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, July 12, 2004, [http://www.enquirer.com/editions/2004/07/12/loc\\_loc1asoldier.html](http://www.enquirer.com/editions/2004/07/12/loc_loc1asoldier.html).
3. Sgt. Lorie Jewell, "Missing Limbs Don't Stop Soldiers From Finishing NYC Marathon," November 10, 2004, [http://www.operationhomefront.net//nyc\\_marathon.htm](http://www.operationhomefront.net//nyc_marathon.htm).



# America Needs Fatima<sup>®</sup>

July/August 2006

PROGRESS REPORT

## Spreading the Sacred Heart Badge

BY GARY ISBELL

On June 2, 2006, America Needs Fatima launched the Sacred Heart Badge campaign with the intent of flooding homes across America with these blessed badges. The mailing, which was sent to 80,000 people, includes three badges: one for the addressee, and two to distribute.

In 1676, Our Lord Jesus Himself introduced the devotion to His flaming Heart to Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque, a French nun of the Visitation. He promised, "I will bless every house in which an image of My Heart shall be exposed and honored." He also revealed His wish that

people not only have a picture to venerate in their homes, but also carry a small picture with them.

When the Sacred Heart Badge was first presented to Blessed Pope Pius IX in 1870, he exclaimed, "this is an inspiration from Heaven. Yes, from Heaven," and proceeded to grant the badge a blessing for all time so that subsequent badges need never be re-blessed by a priest. He then added, "and I want Satan to be unable to cause any harm to those who wear this badge."

The badge was adopted by the great



The front and back of the Sacred Heart badges mailed to 80,000 Americans this June.

Catholic resistance movements, such as that of the Chouans against the French Revolution, Andreas Hoffer's Tyroleans against Napoleon, the Cristeros against the anti-Catholic Mexican government in the beginning of the twentieth century, and the Carlists against the Communist Revolution of 1936-1939 in Spain. The Cuban Catholics facing Castro's firing squads also had a great devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and died crying, "Long live Christ the King!"

With a history such as that of the Sacred Heart Badge, ANF's Director Robert Ritchie could not help but be enthusiastic about spreading this devotion in America today, so in need of divine aid. Indeed, what better token of Faith and Divine protection could we wish for America? ■

To order more Sacred Heart Badges, call (888) 317-5571.

Father C. Anthony Miller blesses the Sacred Heart badges just before they are mailed to homes across America.





# An Audience With the Queen

BY BENJAMIN HIEGERT



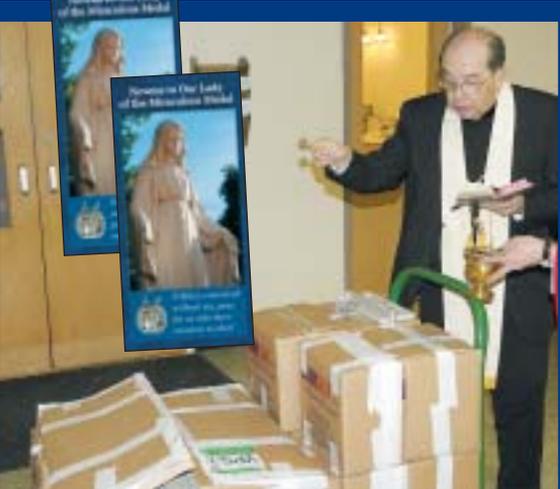
TFP members and supporters held an eight-day prayer vigil before the miraculous Pilgrim Virgin at TFP and ANF headquarters in Spring Grove, Pa.

From April 26 to May 3, 2006, the famous International Pilgrim Virgin Statue made an unexpected and blessed visit to the national headquarters of the American Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family and Property (TFP) and to the site of its America Needs Fatima campaign in Spring Grove, Pa.

The statue had just returned from visiting the new TFP youth center near Strasbourg, France, where TFP members from all over Europe came to spend Holy Week with the International Pilgrim Virgin. From France, the statue traveled to Brazil to visit TFP members in Brasilia, Londrina, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.

As part of the statue's Pennsylvania program, TFP members and supporters

held a constant prayer vigil throughout the eight-day stay. The high point of the statue's visit was a ceremony on April 26, the feast of Our Lady of Good Counsel of Genazzano, where several young men renewed their consecration to Mary according to the method of Saint Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort and then received the TFP cape. Others received the TFP ceremonial habit. Dr. Caio Xavier da Silveira, a founding member of the Brazilian TFP, was the guest of honor at the ceremony. ■



One of the many apostolates of America Needs Fatima since the '80s is the mass distribution of Miraculous Medals and Novenas. Above: Msgr. Henry Otero blesses a new batch of 140,000 medals recently arrived from Spain for distribution for the remainder of 2006. Inset: The cover of the novena and the Miraculous Medal.

## CORNER CUSTODIAN

# A New "Grace" in El Paso

BY MARC LASCELLE

Something has changed in El Paso, Texas. There is a new "grace" in the wind.

Two years ago, scheduling Fatima visits was a slow task, and even then there were many cancellations. In contrast, the phone is ringing off the hook this year. The schedule is full and so are the visits, with many of these having more than thirty-five persons attending.

Such was a visit at the Silva's house. Since El Paso is predominantly Hispanic, Our Lady's statue was received warmly with many Spanish hymns. The altar was beautifully decorated with fresh flowers and lace.

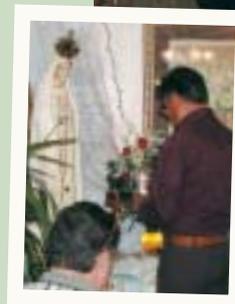
After the usual presentation of Our

Lady of Fatima's message, and the writing of intentions, we introduced a practice that was begun the day before at the Garcia's house. The participants were invited to come forward one by one and were handed a candle which was lit by the Custodian. Each person then offered a silent prayer to the Blessed Mother and placed the candle at her feet.

This gave the room a hushed atmosphere reminding everyone of the seriousness of the moment. After the Rosary, participants again came up to Our Lady individually and blew out their candle. This practice added some-



Above: A full house greeted the visit of Our Lady of Fatima at the Silva home in El Paso. Left: Presenting a lit candle, each participant paid homage to Our Lady.



thing special to the visit, and had the makings of a new tradition.

Needless to say, an abundant Hispanic repast and warm conviviality followed, and body and soul were satisfied. ■



# Notre Dame OKs Homosexual Film Festivals

BY JAMES BASCOM

So many students and parents had trusted University of Notre Dame's new president, Father John I. Jenkins, C.S.C., would restore moral order on campus by stopping "Queer Film Festival" and "V—— Monologues," two blatant, immoral, anti-Catholic events that have occurred annually.

However, hopes were shattered on April 5, 2006 when Father Jenkins issued a statement allowing these pro-homosexual events to continue at Our Lady's university. Father Jenkins said, "I see no reason to prohibit performances of *The V—— Monologues* on campus, and do not intend to do so."<sup>1</sup>

"This is a dark day in the history of Catholic higher education. The idea that explicit pro-homosexual events somehow fit in a Catholic setting is preposterous. Catholic doctrine clearly and consistently condemns homosexual vice," said TFP Student Action Director John Ritchie.

## Pray for Notre Dame

The mission of a Catholic University includes counseling students away from sin, and to provide them with the essential conditions favorable to the practice of virtue. As Blessed Jacinta warned, "The sins which lead most souls to Hell are sins of the flesh."

That is why TFP Student Action launched *Pray for Notre Dame* last April. Thousands of faithful Catholic students and parents pledged prayers for the complete restoration of Catholic higher education at the university.

The Most Rev. John D'Arcy, Bishop of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Ind., said,

Let us all turn to Mary, the patroness of Notre Dame and of our diocese, asking her to help Father Jenkins and her university through this difficult and historic moment, towards the light that is Jesus Christ who said, "I am the way, the truth and the life."

I regret the sponsorship of this play by Notre Dame again this year, and pray it will be the last time.<sup>2</sup>

Each entry on TFP Student Action's online prayer registry was sent to Father John Jenkins, urging him to uphold Catholic morality. Please continue to pray for the end of homosexual sin and for the perseverance of Catholic students. *Together, we shall stop this immoral travesty once and for all!* ■

## Notes:

1. Rev. John I. Jenkins, C.S.C., "Closing Statement on Academic Freedom and Catholic Character," April 5, 2006, <http://president.nd.edu/closingstatement/>.

2. "Concerning the 'V[——] Monologues'—Bishop John M. D'Arcy regrets Notre Dame sponsorship," February 2006, [www.diocesefwsb.org/COMMUNICATIONS/vm2006.htm](http://www.diocesefwsb.org/COMMUNICATIONS/vm2006.htm).



## Our Readers Write...

✉ It is with great sadness that I write this letter. My daughter went to Notre Dame. To tell you the truth I didn't talk about it much because I am ashamed. When she first went there I was so happy she chose a "Catholic" college. I never in my wildest dreams thought something as evil, repulsive and vile as the "V—— Monologues" could ever happen at a "Catholic" college. I learned about this in her senior year.

I wrote a letter to the previous president, Father Malloy, and obtained a response disavowing any participation in this or desire to take action owing to

a school policy not interfering with student freedom and their right to be exposed to "anything."

My first letter to the president was respectful and I pleaded a return to Catholic standards, respect for God and the Commandments, and for spiritual direction, which is why a "Catholic" university exists, and so forth.

I am on their mailing list. I have never given them a thin dime and never intend to after this shameful and hurtful act to our Faith.

Right now, after receiving [his] letter, I am hopping angry. Father Jenkins

speaks about "sacramental devotions," "dedication to the example of the Blessed Mother" and "moral radiance." *What is he talking about?!*

I read your recent *Crusade* article on Notre Dame. God must be so hurt that His sons have chosen this path. Our priests desperately need all our prayers and sacrifices.

God help our children. I'm praying and hope you will help me as I am not content to sit back and do nothing. I see this letter as an opportunity.

— J.G., Turnersville, N.J.



PROPHETS,  
MARTYRS,  
SAINTS AND  
HEROES

# The Marvellous Story of Saint Eustachius

## PATRON SAINT OF HUNTERS

BY FATHER A. J. O'REILLY, D.D.

From the beginning of the Roman dynasty, the Romans were a brave and warlike people. Nation after nation and culture after culture gave way to Caesar's armies. Under one scepter, the conquered regions comprised the Roman Empire.

Because the art of warfare was then rude and undeveloped, generals had to be men of consummate skill and intelligence. Soldiers thrived on the confidence they placed in their leaders who moved the great brutal machine of war at will. One Roman Emperor said that he feared a general without an army more than an army without a general.

Such a general was Placidus, who served under Emperor Trajan around A.D. 100. He was known for his virtues as well as his military skills. He treated his soldiers as sons, was charitable and generous to the needy, and though a pagan, was a chaste man, faithful to his wife and loving to his two young sons.

God looked upon him and loved him, and wished to reward his natural virtue by bringing him out of the darkness of paganism into the light of His friendship.

One day, as Placidus hunted in the Savine Hills with a company of officers, they suddenly spotted a herd of deer. As the men set off on the chase, Placidus singled out a magnificent buck and pursued it. He finally caught up with his prize in a ravine but, as he prepared to shoot, was amazed to see the stag turning to face him.

As the buck stood motionless on the ledge of a rock just above him, a dazzling light appeared between its antlers. In the midst of the the splendor Placidus beheld an image of the crucifixion and heard a voice, "Placidus, why do you follow Me? Behold I have taken this form to

speak to you. I am Christ, whom you serve without knowing. Your charity and good deeds to the poor have stood before Me and have made Me follow you with My mercy. The just man, dear to Me on account of his works, must not serve devils and false gods, who cannot give life or reward."

Dazzled, Placidus dismounted in confusion. Although he heard, he did not understand the voice that spoke to him. At last he said tremulously, "What voice

*God looked upon him  
and loved him, and  
wished to reward his  
natural virtue by  
bringing him out of the  
darkness of paganism  
into the light of His  
friendship.*

is this? Who speaks? Reveal Thyself that I may know Thee."

"I am Jesus Christ, who created heaven and earth out of nothing, who threw all matter into shape and made the light spring from the chaos of darkness. I am He who created the moon and the stars, and caused the day and the night; who created man from the slime of the earth, and for his redemption appeared in human flesh, was crucified, and rose the third day from the dead. Go, Placidus, to the city, and seek the chief pastor of the Christians and be baptized."

A last ray of the brilliant light pene-

trated the general's heart, and Placidus understood all. He remained for hours on his knees, in his first warm, grateful prayer to the true God.

On returning home, he told his wife Trajana (after baptism, Theopista), everything. She had also received a similar revelation and was one with him. After nightfall, with their two young sons, they found their way to one of the Roman catacombs, where they were received into the Catholic Church.

### Another Job

After his baptism, Placidus, now named Eustachius, returned to the spot of the vision. There, he received great spiritual consolation as well as a certain inkling that he was to be tried like Job, as God wished to sanctify this worthy general to the highest degree.

Shortly after his return home, tragedy struck. A terrible pestilence broke out in his household sickening his horses, cattle and servants. The unhealthy environment obliged him to take his wife and children away for a while. On returning, he found that thieves had robbed him of everything he owned. Overcome with grief, Eustachius decided to leave Rome with his family for another country.

They made their way to Ostia and boarded a vessel for Egypt. On landing in Africa, the captain, a wicked man, suddenly revealed his intentions. He had Eustachius and his two boys forcibly taken off the ship, and then set sail carrying away his wife.

Eustachius was left grief struck with his two sons on the beach. Kneeling on the shore, he wept bitterly. But the man of suffering was still bigger than the man of battles. Remembering the crucified

God who had appeared to him in the Appenines, he checked his grief, and taking his sons by the hand, moved inland.

He had not gone far when he came upon a river swollen by recent rain. Realizing he could not make it across with both boys, he left the oldest on the bank and entered the stream. Hardly had he reached the other side when, upon hearing a roar, he wheeled round to see a lion carrying off his child. He lunged across the river's current but had barely made it to shore when he saw a

huge wolf seizing the younger son.

The sight of this drained his courage and he fell to his knees in despair. He appealed to the great God who he knew had determined all this, and begged Him to boost his confidence. He prayed that no blasphemy ever escape his lips, and begged God to help his young faith to place all his trust in His Providence.

### **Solitude**

Several years had passed since Eustachius had lost his wife, his children, his position

and all he owned, and we now find him as a poor laborer in a farm called Bardyssa. He had spent this time in labor, prayer and solitude, climbing ever higher on the ladder of perfection and union with God.

### **Where Is Placidus?**

Meanwhile, news came from the east that the Persians and other nations had risen up against the Roman Empire, and were destroying everything in their path. As Rome prepared for the clash, Emperor Trajan still lacked the man who could guarantee victory.

"Where is Placidus?" he asked of his aides one day. "I have heard he is still alive."

No one knew for sure, but Caesar offered a huge reward to anyone who could bring news of his former general, while Caesar postponed the battle for as long as possible.

Meanwhile, two veterans, who had fought under Eustachius, had been dispatched to the Egyptian provinces. One morning, as they were about to give up their search, they came upon a worker in a field. As they exchanged words, the two were struck by his likeness to their old general. But though his speech and bearing were noble, they could not imagine their leader reduced to such obscurity and poverty. The man who stood there in a poor laborer's tattered garments had already recognized these men as two of his bravest soldiers and asked them why they sought Placidus.

On being told of the Empire's plight and how Caesar had sent soldiers in every direction looking for him, he couldn't suppress his feelings any longer and disclosed his identity. They immediately embraced him with tears of joy.

Meditating on this sudden turn of his life, Eustachius recognized God's providence, and prepared to mingle anew in the din and fatigue of war. On his return to Rome, Emperor Trajan received him joyfully and reinvested him with the golden belt of consular command.

### **God Is Never Outdone**

Let us leave Eustachius for a moment as he casts his rough army into shape, and retrace our steps to poor Theopista, fifteen years earlier as she clung to the

*"Placidus, why do you follow Me? Behold I have taken this form to speak to you. I am Christ, whom you serve without knowing."*



Andrea F. Phillips



**Above:** Façade of the church dedicated to Saint Eustachius. The church is located in the eighth *riione* or district of Rome, named Sant'Eustachio in honor of the saint. **Right:** The cross-bearing stag adorns the very top of the church.



sent for the two heroes who had saved his army. He raised them to the rank of captain and honored them with his friendship. Through subsequent triumphs, Eustachius grew to love these two as sons. A strong affinity bound them and lead them to seek each other's company.

One day as the two young men walked along a stream, the younger man noticed that the older one was pensive with an air of gloom about him. On inquiring as to what ailed him, his companion confided, "Yes, mine is a strange story. Rivers always bring it back. I will tell you but

you must promise me not to give away my secret. I'm a Roman citizen and a Christian. My father was a Roman general, and a man of great reputation. I remember one day, I was about five, when he came back from a hunting expedition, and spoke to my mother of things that made her weep. The following night they brought my little brother and I to an underground cave where an elderly man spoke to us of the true God. My parents were deeply moved. Then the elderly man poured water on our heads and gave us new names. He called me Agapitus."

He went on to relate how they had lost everything, then traveled to Egypt, where their mother was kidnapped. Then he went on to speak of his apprehension by a lion as his father attempted to cross a river with them.

The younger man stood as frozen missing no detail of the narrative.

"Fortunately," Agapitus continued, "some passing shepherds set their dogs on the beast. The lion dropped me to fight the hounds, and these good people took me home with them and raised me. But I never saw my parents and brother again."

As he looked up at his companion, he saw the latter's eyes fixed wide on him. Clapping Agapitus fiercely by the shoulders, the young man said in a hoarse voice, "Agapitus, I believe you are my brother!"

Agapitus was astonished, "What do you mean? Speak!"

"I too lost my parents in childhood. The people who raised me told me they had saved me from a wolf near the stream of Chobar. They knew I was from a noble Roman family as I wore this golden ornament around my neck," and he showed him. As Agapitus recognized the identical pendant his mother had given him on the day of his baptism, they clasped each other exclaiming, "Brothers! Brothers!"

Their first thought after the initial excitement was to tell their general. To their astonishment he began to weep, and lifting up his eyes to heaven, exclaimed, "This was the will of Him who reigns above! He gave, and He took away. Blessed be His holy name!" Then turning to them, he said, "My sons! God has given you back to me!" As the two young men stared in disbelief, Eustachius related his own story.

The reader's imagination can picture the moment.

### Recalled to Rome

There was just then a great commotion in the camp. A courier had just arrived with news of Emperor Trajan's death and of Adrian's election. Eustachius had orders to return to Rome with his army for the celebrations.

After setting in motion the dismantling of the camps and preparations for return, Eustachius was left alone in his tent where he knelt to thank God for the joys of the day.

A servant interrupted him saying, "Sir, a woman who owns the field behind our encampment begs to speak with you."

Eustachius signaled to the servant to bring her in.

He now turned to face a woman, advancing in years and deeply marked by sorrow. Despite her impoverished appearance, her bearing was noble.

She fell to her knees, saying, "Great leader of the armies of Rome, I am a Roman citizen. Years ago I was separated from my husband and children, and was brought here by force for unlawful purposes. But I commit my word in the

sight of Heaven that I was never unfaithful to my husband and my children. I have spent these many years in exile and misery. I pray you, for the love you bear your own spouse and children to take me back to Rome to my friends, my . . .”

Eustachius had raised her from the floor, and as she looked at him she froze.

“Sir,” she cried, “I pray you, tell me, are you Placidus, the master of the Roman horse, to whom the true God spoke in the mountains of Italy, who was baptized Eustachius, and who was separated from his wife?”

“Yes! Yes!” interrupted Eustachius, “do you know of her, is she still alive?”

“Eustachius, I am Theopista!”

As she crumpled to the ground, Eustachius was besides her gathering her in his arms.

Within the hour the small tent had become the scene of a joy seldom experienced on this side of the grave, as the family was reunited. One such moment

Eustachius’ army had arrived, popular rejoicing gained new momentum.

The city, already “dressed” for the celebration of Adrian’s election, now received the victor with trumpet blasts and shrill enthusiasm in the grand victor’s parade.

Eustachius had prepared himself and his family for this moment. Even while rejoicing in their reunion, he foresaw that God had brought them together not merely for a life of earthly leisure and happiness, but to walk together into eternity.

Years of suffering had shown him how passing the joys of the world are, and had opened for him the eternal dimension of happiness.

If life could have granted him a few more years with his wife and sons, he would certainly have taken it and enjoyed them gratefully. But he knew what a Roman triumph entailed. He knew that as part of the festivities, he and his family would be required to offer public incense to the pagan gods. As a Christian, he could and would not.

Now, as they approached the Temple of Jupiter, they saw the high priests waiting in ceremonial garb. Eustachius, his wife and sons knew their hour had come. As Rome watched, the Christian family descended from the chariots and stood before the temple but made no move to enter. The crowd began to murmur not understanding the delay. Then, suddenly, Eustachius stood aside, and refused to offer incense. His wife refused as well. His sons followed suit.

In the moment of astounded silence that followed, one voice seared the air: “Death to the Christians!” Thousands of throats picked up the cry.

They were brought before the Emperor, who tried to make them see their “folly,” and when asked why he would not sacrifice to the gods, Eustachius answered proudly and fiercely, “I am a Christian and adore only the true God.” His wife and sons answered likewise. They chided the Emperor for his folly in worshipping senseless pieces of marble and wood. In vain did Adrian try promises, threats and empty arguments in defense of paganism. The family was

inflexible. There was only one penalty for remaining Christian—death.

The next morning, September 20, 188, the people hastened to the Coliseum for yet another spectacle. Now the trumpets blasted calling forth the victims. The noble family stepped out into the arena. They were calm, and prayed. The hinges grated as the iron gates of the subterranean keeps swung open. Two lions and four bears leapt onto the arena.

Rushing toward the victims, the beasts suddenly began acting as pets. One lion endeavored to place his head under Eustachius’ foot, which he allowed.

Furious, Adrian shouted, “Goad the animals!” But these only turned on their keepers, driving them out. In his impotent rage, the Emperor commanded the martyrs to be placed in the bronze bull. This was an instrument of torture made in the shape of a bull, and could hold several persons in its hollow body. When fire was lit underneath, it became an oven.

This is the way Eustachius and his family received their glorious crown. However, God showed that it was His will and not Caesar’s commands or instruments of torture that had taken their lives. After three days, when the bodies of the saints were brought out in the Emperor’s presence, there was no trace of burning upon them. They exhaled a delightful odor, and seemed to be lying in sweet sleep. Their relics remained above ground for several days as the whole city rushed to see the wonder. As none of God’s works are barren, many were converted.

The Christians buried the holy bodies together with the bronze bull in the same spot where they suffered martyrdom. Later, a beautiful church was built in this place, dedicated to Eustachius and his family. Today their remains rest in the church of Saint Eustachius in Thermis, in the heart of modern Rome awaiting the trumpet call of the Angel of the Last Day. ■

\* The preceding article is an adaptation from the *History of the Coliseum and Its Martyrs* by Reverend A.J. O’Reilly (D. & J. Sadlier & Co., New York, 1885).



Kenneth Drake

Interior of the Church of Saint Eustachius, built in the eighth century. Saint Philip Neri used to pray in this church in the sixteenth century.

can outweigh years of sorrow.

### Final Triumph

To return to Rome victorious warranted the greatest celebration next to that of an Emperor’s election. At the news that

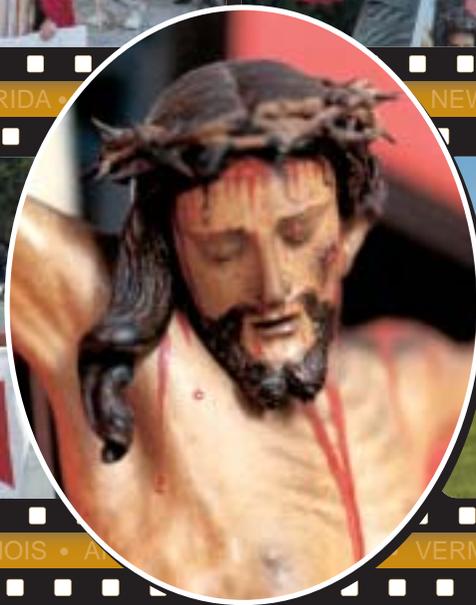
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