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Sony's Other Code

Press Release from the Communications Office of Opus Dei, Rome, on the screening of *The Da Vinci Code*. Has Sony followed its own corporate "Code of Conduct" concerning respect for religious belief?

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Today Sony Pictures lifted its veil of secrecy from *The Da Vinci Code*. The novel's offensive caricatures of Jesus Christ, Christian history, the Catholic Church and Opus Dei have all been retained in the film. Indeed the

offensiveness of the caricatures has been magnified by the power of visual imagery.

Moreover, Sony has announced that the film will not include a fiction disclaimer stating that any resemblance to reality is purely coincidental.

Catholics, other Christians, Jews, Muslims, and other persons of good will have repeatedly asked Sony to respect religious belief. In so doing, we were not asking for a special favor. Nor have we wished to limit anyone's freedom of expression. From the beginning we have appealed to Sony's own sense of common decency. Unfortunately, this appeal has failed.

In addition, this request for respect is in line with the commitments to society that Sony Corporation has made publicly. The Sony Group "Code of Conduct," approved by the

highest authorities of the corporation on May 28, 2003, contains the following:

- “Recognizing that conduct that is socially acceptable in one culture or region may be viewed differently in another, Personnel (of Sony) are required to give careful consideration to cultural and regional differences in performing their duties” (section 1.3);
- “No Personnel may make racial or religious slurs, jokes or any other comments or conduct in the workplace, that create a hostile work environment” (section 2.4);
- With respect to publicity, Sony commits itself not to engage in false publicity that misleads or slanders others (section 3.4).

In a recent business publication, a high executive of Sony acknowledged that “its businesses have direct or

indirect impact on the societies in which it operates.” Another affirmed that “ethics and integrity have to be in the company’s DNA”. And a third stated that “there can be no prosperity for a company that does not consider the environment and society.”

In appealing to Sony in recent months, no one has asked Sony to do any more than live up to its own public commitments. Unfortunately, Sony’s actions have not matched its words and have offended the religious beliefs of hundreds of millions of Christians. The end, in this case financial, does not justify the means. It is the aggressor that loses dignity, not the victim.

We do not mean by this to judge the intentions of any individuals. The question is whether this film respects the Sony Group Code of Conduct, or whether that code is yet one more

“Fictional Code,” in which any resemblance to reality is purely coincidental.

As he was 20 centuries ago, Jesus Christ is for many today “a scandal and a folly.” But many still receive the gift of faith, and firmly believe that he is the Son of God, the Redeemer of every man and woman, and the source of charity for the world. God can bring good out of bad and the events of recent months will lead many believers to rediscover the depth and beauty of their Christian faith.

Soon this regrettable but fleeting episode will be forgotten. Let us hope that its lessons about mutual respect and understanding are not.

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