

Faith and Fiction

CHRISTIAN LITERATURE IN AMERICA TODAY

ANITA GANDOLFO

The phenomenon surrounding Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* has led to a cottage industry of interpretations, attacks, and commentaries, but one thing is certain: the book has had an enormous impact on American society, culture, and religious understanding, not to mention the publishing industry, which scrambles to find similar "religious" books to feed to an eager public. But, *The Da Vinci Code* is not the only book of its type on the market today. In recent years, there has been an explosion in the market for fiction on religious topics and themes, with an entire series devoted to the impending Rapture as described in the *Left Behind* series. Some fiction does not take an explicitly religious theme as these books do. Instead, writers like Andre Dubus and Ron Hansen imbue their creative work with spiritual and religious themes embedded in the everyday lives and concerns of their characters. Regardless of the specific approach, what is not in doubt is that American readers have made the authors of these works wealthy as bookstores cannot stock their shelves with enough copies. Why the recent surge of interest in Christian fiction? How does it reflect trends in our culture and our lives? How has it changed our society and our understanding of spirituality and religion? How accurate are these books in terms of the theology they espouse?

The variety of contemporary religious fiction and the publishing phenomenon surrounding it indicate that this literature transcends any overt religious meaning and is significant in its political and social implications: it is emblematic of the contemporary American Zeitgeist. Traditionally, literature is both "mirror" and "lamp," reflecting the society that produces it and illuminating the values and interests of that society. Recognizing both of those perspectives, *Faith and Fiction* examines Christian literature's place in American culture today and explores the cultural meaning and significance of the wildly popular Christian fiction now available.

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