

Da Vinci Code follow-up takes on the Illuminati

Arthur J Pais | May 01, 2009 | 15:29 IST

Harvard symbologist Robert Langdon works to solve a murder and prevent a terrorist act against the Vatican in the adaptation of *Angels & Demons*, a prequel to the 2006 smash hit *Da Vinci Code*.

That film, condemned by many churches including the Catholic one for its depiction of the working of the church and the relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene, was also panned by leading critics. Nevertheless, it made over \$680 million worldwide, making it one of the biggest hits in the 10 years before its release.

The new film, which comes out May 15, reunites the two-time Oscar winner Tom Hanks with director Ron Howard who made *Da Vinci Code*.

Both need a big hit. Hanks could not make Charlie Wilson's War into a smash, and though Howard got praise for his Frost/Nixon, the film was a box-office dud.

In the new film, which, like *Da Vinci Code*, is based on a bestseller by Dan Brown, Langdon (Hanks) stumbles on the Illuminati, which plans to destroy the Catholic Church. The organisation did not become violent until the 17th Century, per the novel. Their name means 'The Enlightened Ones.' They were physicists, mathematicians, astronomers. In the 1500's they started meeting in secret, because they were concerned about the church's inaccurate teachings. Brown argues. They were dedicated to scientific truth. And the Vatican didn't like that.

In the novel and the movie, the Church also becomes a victim, and recently Howard fought back the charge that the film is anti-Church in an article in *The Huffington Post*:

"Let me be clear: neither I nor *Angels & Demons* are anti-Catholic," he wrote. "And let me be a little controversial: I believe Catholics, including most in the hierarchy of the Church, will enjoy the movie for what it is: an exciting mystery, set in the awe-inspiring beauty of Rome. After all, in *Angels & Demons*, Professor Robert Langdon teams up with the Catholic Church to thwart a vicious attack against the Vatican. What, exactly, is anti-Catholic about that?"

Though Hanks monopolises the film, relatively newcomer Ayelet Zurer who plays a doctor in search of the killers of her physicist father, is getting plenty of attention. The Israeli actor who starred as Eric Bana's lovely but troubled wife in Steven Spielberg's *Munich*, apparently beat out Naomi Watts for the role in the new movie.



The book *Angels & Demons* published 2000 is reissued by Simon & Schuster with a bonus interview with writer Dan Brown.

The interviewer asked the novelist: 'The characters in *Angels & Demons* battle with some tough moral issues... primarily regarding the battle between science or religion? Which do you think will ultimately win the war?'

Brown said: 'That's a difficult question because in many ways I see science and religion as the same thing. Both are manifestations of man's quest to understand the divine. Religion savours the questions while science savors the quest for answers. Science and religion seem to be two different languages attempting to tell the same story, and yet the battle between them has been raging for centuries and continues today.'

The war in our schools over whether to teach Creationism or Darwinism is a perfect example. We live in an exciting era, though, because for the first time in human history, the line between science and religion is starting to blur. Particle physicists exploring the subatomic level are suddenly witnessing an interconnectivity of all things and having religious experiences ...Buddhist monks are reading physics books and learning about experiments that confirm what they have believed in their hearts for centuries and have been unable to quantify.'

He has been also asked how it stumbled on the idea to write the novel. He was beneath Vatican City touring a tunnel called il passetto -- a concealed passageway used by the early Popes to escape in event of enemy attack, he recollected.



According to the scholar giving the tour, one of the Vatican's most feared ancient enemies was a secret brotherhood known as the Illuminati who had vowed revenge against the Vatican for crimes against scientists like Galileo and Copernicus.

'I was fascinated by images of this cloaked, anti-religious brotherhood lurking in the catacombs of Rome,' he added. 'Then, when the scholar added that many modern historians believe the Illuminati is still active today and is one of most powerful unseen forces in global politics, I knew I was hooked...I had to write an Illuminati thriller'

It was no secret why Hanks, who is also one of the producers on the film, and Howard were drawn into it. It has adrenaline-raising moments but it also asks sharp questions about the world around us, Hanks said.

<http://movies.rediff.com/cms/print.jsp?docpath=//movies/2009/may/01what-angels-and-demons-has-to-offer.htm>