

# STORM BREWS OVER “ANGELS & DEMONS”

Over the past couple of months we have been on the frontlines addressing the controversy that surrounded the film “Angels & Demons.” Before the movie opened on May 15, we made frequent appearances on TV and radio, issued numerous news releases and published a booklet all exposing the lies and hypocrisy of the Ron Howard flick. Indeed, a storm was brewing.

In a piece on the *Huffington Post*, Howard attacked Bill Donohue. Referring to the Catholic League booklet, *Angels & Demons: More Demonic than Angelic*, the director wrote: “Mr. Donohue’s booklet accuses us of lying when our movie trailer says the Catholic Church ordered a brutal massacre to silence the Illuminati centuries ago. It would be a lie if we had ever suggested our movie is anything other than a work of fiction....” Howard also said that “most of the hierarchy of the Church” would enjoy the film; he also denied being anti-Catholic.

Immediately, we responded to Howard’s article. In the book version of the movie, author Dan Brown says that the Illuminati are “factual” and that they were “hunted ruthlessly by the Church.” In the film’s trailer, Tom Hanks, who plays protagonist Robert Langdon, says “The Catholic Church ordered a brutal massacre to silence them forever.” Howard concurs: “The Illuminati were formed in the 1600s. They were artists and scientists like Galileo and Bernini, whose progressive ideas threatened the Vatican.”

All of this is a lie. The Illuminati were founded in 1776 and were dissolved in 1787. It is obvious that Galileo and Bernini could not possibly have been members: Galileo died in 1647 and Bernini in 1680. More important, the Catholic Church never hunted, much less killed, a single member of the Illuminati.

But it hasn't stopped Brown from asserting that "It is a *historical fact* that the Illuminati vowed vengeance against the Vatican in the 1600s." (Our emphasis.)

Hypocrisy also marked "Angels & Demons." There was no Muslim assassin in the film as there was in the book, but of course, Howard had no problem culturally assassinating Catholicism. And it isn't just Howard who is the hypocrite: co-producer Brian Grazer, and the production studio, Sony, are guilty of giving Muslims a pass while sticking it to Catholics.

After 9/11, NBC toyed with the idea of doing a mini-series on the events of that tragic day. Grazer was in line to produce it, but it never materialized due to its controversial nature. More important, Grazer said it was his goal to "humanize" Muslims, specifically denouncing any attempt to "demonize" them. Evidently, it's just Catholics who are worthy of being demonized.

Last year, less than four days before the release of the video game LittleBigPlanet, it recalled every copy before it hit the stores. Why? One of the background songs contained two Arabic expressions found in the Koran, and that was considered a no-no. "We have taken immediate action to rectify this and we sincerely apologize for any offense this may have caused." But there was no action to rectify the propaganda against Catholicism in "Angels & Demons," and there certainly was no apology.

Even India's Censor Board asked that a disclaimer be put in the movie saying that the film is a work of fiction. It also asked that certain scenes be deleted. It explained its position by saying, "It has its guidelines and its duty, and if it thinks a film, any film, disparages a religious community or hurts religious feelings, it should take action under its code."

We also asked that a disclaimer be inserted everywhere the

film was shown. We noted that the disclaimer was needed because Ron Howard and Dan Brown alternate promoting their work as fact and fiction. Thus, to set the record straight we suggested they come clean and do in the rest of the world what they agreed to do in India—insert a disclaimer indicating its fictional nature; we did not ask that scenes be deleted because that would be an infringement on the artistic rights of those associated with the film.

If Sony, the film's producer, and Howard have no problem putting in a disclaimer in India—which is only two percent Christian—they surely should be prepared to do the same wherever the movie is shown. When Sony released "The Merchant of Venice" it opened with a disclaimer condemning anti-Semitism. Howard opened "A Beautiful Mind" with a disclaimer noting how the film contains fictional aspects not found in the book by that name. Catholics, obviously, expected the same degree of respect but we weren't given it.

The Vatican apparently had a three track strategy to deal with "Angels & Demons": ban Ron Howard from filming on its grounds; low ball any negative comments before the movie debuted; and slam it for its stereotypical portrayals while conceding its cinematic value.

Howard was denied access to the Vatican because of his previous exploitation of the Catholic Church in "The Da Vinci Code." The Vatican also decided that reticence was the best way to handle "Angels & Demons"; it did not want Howard to use any negative comments it might make to boost sales. *L'Osservatore Romano*—the semi-official Vatican daily—weighed in saying that although the movie is entertaining, it is also filled with historical inaccuracies and "stereotyped characters."

That was exactly our goal all along: issue a big FYI about this movie. Enjoy it for the fun of it, but don't be seduced by Brown-Howard into thinking it is based on historical facts.