



# ANGELS & DEMONS

ARE REASON & FAITH MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE?

Reviewed by Albert James Dager

**A**lthough billed as a sequel to *The Da Vinci Code*, the motion picture *Angels & Demons* has nothing to do with the prior film. In fact, it is a prequel that, according to author Dan Brown, “tells the story of symbologist Robert Langdon’s adventure in Vatican City one year before his fateful visit to the Louvre” (where according to the fictional *The Da Vinci Code* he discovers the tomb of Mary Magdalene). The only real connections between *The Da Vinci Code* and *Angels & Demons* are that both movies are based on books by Dan Brown and star Tom Hanks in the recurring role as Robert Langdon.

This time around Langdon isn’t concerned with trying to establish the truth of a myth that would challenge biblical faith in Jesus as the only-begotten Son of God. In *Angels & Demons* he is summoned by the Vatican to solve a mystery surrounding the disappearance of four cardinals who comprise the *Preferiti*, the prime candidates to replace the recently deceased pope. Tied to their disappearance is another mystery—the whereabouts of an explosive device that could destroy the entire Vatican City and bring down the Roman Catholic Church’s political and economic power. The timing for destruction is at its optimum because not only would the Vatican be destroyed, but all 250 cardinals locked in conclave behind the doors of the Sistine Chapel to elect the next pope would be killed. With all the heads of the Catholic Church eliminated, the church’s enemies would strike a blow that could take decades, perhaps centuries, for recovery.

The device is a unique time bomb that contains in a vacuum an extremely explosive substance known as antimatter. The antimatter is suspended in an airtight canister with electromagnets at each end. If the antimatter were to come out of suspension and contact any matter—even the container itself, it would result in a cataclysmic explosion. The two opposing forces would annihilate one another. The only thing keeping the antimatter in sus-

pension is the battery which, should it die, would cause the antimatter to fall out of suspension.

The suspense builds as the searchers have only six hours—until midnight—before the Vatican would be “consumed by light,” as Langdon puts it.

Langdon’s trail to the Vatican begins with an urgent summons to Geneva, Switzerland, where the antimatter cylinder had been stolen from a secret lab known as CERN. Initially reluctant to respond to the summons by a mysterious voice over his phone, Langdon is convinced to go when he receives from the same per-



son a fax containing a single ambigram:

Illuminati. An ancient sworn enemy of the Catholic Church and religion in general—particularly Christianity.

(An ambigram is a graphic representation of a word that reads the same forward, backward, and upside down. Although *Angels & Demons* suggests a sinister, ancient esoteric origin and use, to add to the intrigue, ambigrams are a relatively recent invention. The first known ambigram was created in 1893 by Peter Newell who was well known for his children’s books and illustrations for Mark Twain and Lewis Carroll. Ambigrams play a big part in *Angels & Demons* as different ones are branded on the chests of various victims of the conspirators.)

Arriving in Geneva, Langdon is met by the mysterious caller who turns out to be Maximilian Kohler, the director general of CERN. Kohler takes Langdon to view the body of Leonardo Vetra, a colleague gruesomely killed by the assassin who had stolen

the antimatter canister. Langdon is alarmed to find branded into the man's chest an ambigram similar to that which Kohler had faxed to him: "Illuminati."

Kohler explains the consequences should the device remain in the wrong hands. When Kohler receives a phone call from the *Comandante Principale* of the Swiss Guard, the elite sentinels consigned for the protection of the pope, he is startled at the request to come to Rome immediately. Unable for physical reasons to comply, he sends Langdon in his place along with Vetra's daughter Vittoria (Israeli actress Ayelet Zurer), a marine biologist who had been collaborating with her father to produce antimatter in a significant quantity while searching for what she calls "the God particle"—the substance that binds all matter together.

In Rome, Langdon and Vetra meet Commander Olivetti who shows them a live video feed from some unknown site within Vatican City. On the screen is the canister containing the antimatter. They are also shown a cryptic message that suggests how and where the four kidnapped cardinals would be killed.

To further the intrigue it appears as if the recently deceased pope had died under mysterious circumstances. Evidence suggests that he had been poisoned. Could his untimely death have been a calculated catalyst to bring about the circumstances that would bring the "princes" of the church into one place so that they could be annihilated?

Could the Illuminati, long believed to be a defunct institution, really be active today? According to *Angels & Demons*, they might well be.

Ron Howard, director of the movie, says, "In *Angels & Demons* it's the Illuminati we're talking about, and conjecture plays a huge role where you start looking back at the Illuminati. And it also stimulates you to understand the known history around the purported conspiracy"

In *Angels & Demons* it seems as if Illuminati conspirators are seeking revenge for the Catholic Church's past history of persecution against those who sought to instill reason and "enlightenment" to Europe during the Middle Ages. As Langdon says to the chief detective of the Vatican Police, "The Illuminati, they were dedicated to scientific truth, but the Vatican didn't like that, so the church began to—how did you say it?—oh, hunt them down and kill them. Drove them underground into a secret society."

Could modern elements of the Illuminati be the evil perpetrators of a diabolical plot to destroy the Roman Catholic Church? Or is it possible that they were merely dupes of a more sinister plot emanating from within the Vatican itself? Was this an inside job as Langdon comes to believe?

In arriving at the unexpected conclusion, Langdon and Vetra must decipher codes embedded in a cryptic message from the conspirators. His adventure takes him through the streets and underbelly of Vatican City where he finds one clue leading to another, often through the directions pointed out by angels depicted in statues and other artwork strategically located throughout the city.

Speculating that Giovanni Lorenzo Bernini (who contributed enormously to Vatican City's elaborate art and architecture) was a secret member of the Illuminati, the plot suggests that Bernini designed four altars dedicated to science. These altars comprise what the story calls, "the Path of Illumination," and are strategi-

cally placed in the form of a cross within Vatican City. Each is dedicated to one of the four basic elements that make up the world as we know it: earth, air (or wind), fire, and water. At each of these altars, starting at 8:00 P.M., one of the four cardinals would be sacrificed on the hour. At midnight Vatican City would be destroyed by the light (illumination) of the antimatter bomb.

Pooling their knowledge of history and symbology, Langdon and Vetra theorize that the canister must be at what is called "the Church of Illumination," the alleged meeting place of the Illuminati, which will be found at the end of the Path of Illumination. But to find it they must first find each of the churches, then trace out the Path. This theory is met with skepticism from the Vatican's chief of police who reluctantly grants Langdon and Vetra access to the Vatican's archives. In the archives they find in Galileo's writings a verse that could direct them to the first church on the Path of Illumination. Thus begins the frantic pace



Robert Langdon, Vittoria Vetra, and Vatican detectives peer into the "Devil's Hole" in one of the churches while searching for clues to solve the sinister plot to destroy Vatican City and the Roman Catholic Church.

to find each of the markers that would point from each church to the next. But can they get to each in time to save the cardinals and retrieve the antimatter?

Like *The Da Vinci Code* before it, *Angels & Demons* cleverly melds truth with conjecture to present a compelling fiction that entertains while instilling philosophical viewpoints held by the author. Often it is difficult to determine where truth and conjecture divide. Conjecture may be fine in many stories, but where philosophical and religious ideas are being perpetrated conjecture can have a devastating effect upon unsuspecting viewers, particularly when conjecture is presented with great conviction.

Let's look at some important ideas promoted in *Angels & Demons*.

## **ANTIMATTER**

The existence of antimatter produced at a real laboratory named CERN in Geneva, Switzerland, is factual. CERN was established in 1954 by a coalition of twelve western European nations and was initially devoted to atomic research. However, its greatest achievement came when two of its scientists, Tim Berners-Lee and Robert Cailliau, working with student staff at CERN, invented the World Wide Web.

For some twenty years CERN has been attempting to harness and study antimatter, which is composed of anti-particles in the

same way that normal matter is composed of particles. The known universe is made up of what science calls “matter,” physical elements whose basic structure is the atom. Antimatter must be created in a laboratory, and is an illusive element.

It is also factual that antimatter can cause an explosion if coming in contact with matter—even air. However, in those twenty years, CERN has produced something like one ten-billionth of a gram. According to CERN physicist Rolf Ladau, Ph.D., that amount of antimatter would produce an explosion equivalent to a firecracker. But the mystery surrounding antimatter, and the fact that it has been created to a small degree, makes for compelling storytelling—a talent apparent in Dan Brown’s books.

### **THE GOD PARTICLE**

The God particle is the evidence science is seeking to explain how fundamental particles acquire mass. Although it has never been discovered, scientists call it the Higgs boson, named after Peter Ware Higgs, a British theoretical physicist. Presented in *Angels & Demons* as the element that binds the universe together, the God particle equates to the eastern religious concept of a universal life-force alleged to reside in all things, popularized by the *Star Wars* saga (see our special report: *The Force Behind the Force*).

Martin Bormann, head of the Nazi Party Organization, stated:

If we National Socialists [Nazis] speak about “faith in God” we do not mean the same God as the naïve Christians....The natural Force which maintains these innumerable planets in the universe we call the Almighty or God.

We can see how science is ignorantly attempting to discover something that would make it compatible with faith. But it is not faith in the true God. It is faith in the god of forces (Daniel 11:38).

This is one of many incongruities in *Angels & Demons*. Robert Langdon is a confessed agnostic, but that doesn’t prevent him from exclaiming “My god!” when faced with an incredible situation.

I’m reminded of a radio interview Michael Medved had with the late atheist activist Madelyn Murray O’Hare several years ago just after she had founded her Church of Atheism. Medved asked, “How many members does your church have?”

O’Hare, seemingly taken aback, pensively said, “My god...”

To which Medved replied, “That’s one.”

Atheists and agnostics don’t understand how ingrained into the human psyche is the concept of God, which is revealed in such exclamations as “My god” by professed unbelievers. It’s what many call “the God void.” Man tries to fill that void with any number of idols including self. But it can never be filled by anyone or anything other than the true God who created us, and created within us a need for Him.

### **THE ILLUMINATI**

Certain historical references to the Illuminati in *Angels & Demons* are also based in fact. The Illuminati was an actual organization founded in Bavaria by atheist Johann Adam Weishaupt on May 1, 1776. The original name of the Illuminati was “Order of Perfectibilists.” It was dedicated to the establishment of a New World Order through the destruction of all monarchical governments and religions. Weishaupt developed a form of Gnosticism with the intent of perfecting humanity in order to achieve a communal state with nature. Although Weishaupt was a confessed

atheist, his gnostic idea of bringing man into a communal state with nature is a pagan concept.

Weishaupt’s aim was the eventual elimination of government and organized religion. He was a philosophical forerunner to twentieth-century communism. Today’s May Day celebrations are inherited from Weishaupt through the Marxist ideology adopted by the communist parties of the world.

If one reviews history since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century one will see that Weishaupt’s goals have been largely achieved throughout Europe and Western Civilization. No major monarchy exists today outside of the impotent British Monarchy. The spiritual climate of Western Civilization is increasingly becoming secular, which will result in despair and lack of spiritual fortitude. But rather than look to its roots of faith in Jesus Christ, it will succumb to the spiritual seduction of Islam, with Roman Catholicism as the only major “Christian” influence. Western Civilization will have lost sufficient faith in Christ to keep it from being plucked by Islamic forces bent on conquest. A pact will be made to create a religio-political alliance that will usher in the Man of Sin and the False Prophet prophesied in Scripture.

It is speculated in *Angels & Demons* that as the Catholic Church and the governments under its domination felt threatened by the Illuminati its members went underground, joining with other societies that, though less radical, were considerably like-minded. Two of those societies were Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism. Both are humanistic yet offer forms of ritual and ceremony that are religious in nature. Much of the same esoteric symbolism can be found in the Illuminati, Freemasonry, and Rosicrucianism. In affirming these facts *Angels & Demons* is accurate.

The facts relating to present-day secularism, Communism, and their roots in the Illuminati are not presented in *Angels & Demons*, though it would be refreshing to see some real truths accompany the mere selected facts of history.

### **ROMAN CATHOLICISM**

The story’s elements concerning Roman Catholicism, the Vatican, and its art and architecture in *Angels & Demons* are also factual, as is much of the history presented.

The method by which the Catholic Church engages in selecting the pope is factually accurate. The various offices and duties of the Vatican personnel, both religious and secular, are carefully spelled out through dialogue among the characters. This tends to create a narrative without a voice-over, and impresses upon the audience a sense of being instructed so that we may place our trust in virtually everything said that even hints at literalness.

A running theme in the movie focuses on the past sins of the Roman Catholic Church, particularly the harsh manner in which it treated those it believed to be heretics both in faith and science.

What is said is accurate. The Catholic Church did persecute and even kill what it considered heretics, both religious and scientific. Galileo Galilei is perhaps the most notable scientist who, though not murdered by the Catholic Church, was compelled to recant his heliocentric idea that the earth revolves around the Sun, which challenged the church’s then accepted wisdom that the earth is the center of the universe. He lived the rest of his life in house arrest and could no longer openly espouse his ideas. Others met with far more horrific fates.

The fact that the Vatican continually opposes social programs such as abortion, homosexual marriage, and euthanasia, keep the fires of the leftist anti-Christ elements protesting that the church is still interfering with science. But this is “science falsely called,” according to God’s Word (1 Timothy 6:20). Science has nothing to do with abortion other than to provide the technical know-how to kill babies in the womb. Homosexual marriage is a social issue based on unproved theories of genetic predisposition. Despite frantic efforts to link genetic markers with homosexual tendencies there is no solid science to support the idea that homosexuals are born without a choice. Nor does euthanasia rest on science other than to find humane ways to kill. The argument that the Catholic Church or any right-thinking persons of any philosophical or religious persuasion are fighting science in these instances is without substance.

Of late, Roman Catholic universities are among the most proficient in scientific progress. But they are at odds with scientists who take an opposite position on certain social issues. So the debate is channelled into the area of “science” by agnostic and atheistic elements that have no solution to the more weighty issues of life.

The problem with Roman Catholicism is not that it opposes science but that it opposes Scripture, placing its own authority and traditions above the clear teaching of God’s Word. Jesus’ words to the Jewish leaders could well be said to the Catholic hierarchy:

Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect through your tradition. (Matthew 15:6).

The world is not about to forgive Roman Catholicism for its past sins against science, because the world hates what it thinks Roman Catholicism stands for: the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The problem with *Angels & Demons*, is the problem that is often at the center of media productions in general: the Catholic Church is equated with biblical faith. Thus every evil perpetrated by the Roman Catholic Church is de facto applied to those who believe in Scripture as the sole rule for one’s beliefs and actions.

### **REASON VS. FAITH**

The equating of Roman Catholicism with biblical faith is not overtly stated in *Angels & Demons*, but neither is biblical faith distinguished from Roman Catholic belief. On the surface it seems as if Brown tried to be impartial in presenting the conflict between the Catholic Church and its detractors. But while presenting the Catholic hierarchy as essentially flawed men with noble purposes, Brown takes every opportunity to challenge faith as incompatible with reason and science. Even Cardinal Strauss (Armin Mueller-Stahl) who heads the conclave in *Angels & Demons*, implies that faith and reason are exclusive to one another, but must find mutual ground to arrive at truth.

The idea that reason and faith are mutually exclusive but must be tolerant of one another is a fallacy perpetrated by humanism for centuries. The Catholic Church is the strawman erected to bolster the argument that faith and reason are incompatible. (See how “the Church” treated scientists in the Middle Ages.)

When *Angels & Demons* was first released in theaters, the History Channel aired a two-hour special entitled *Angels & Demons Decoded*, in which the issue of reason vs. faith was consistently addressed. The program presented various scholars who offered their ideas on the issue. Addressing the movie, the narrator tells us that the

treatment of Galileo by the Catholic Church was the chief motivation for many scientists, intellectuals, and philosophers to form the Illuminati. Further, the movie suggests that Galileo was a founding member of the Illuminati. Erick Wilberding, Ph.D., art historian at John Cabot University, applies the term “progressive” to those who allegedly championed reason in the face of an illogical but determined faith:

There were people who held progressive ideas, heterodox ideas, and so if you had progressive ideas you could hold those ideas; you could speak to like-minded people, and this is what Galileo did. Galileo did belong to a very public group of scientists—the Academia de Lincei—but he belonged to a sort of covert group, not a group with an identity.

The idea that Galileo may have been a founding member of the Illuminati flies in the face of facts. Galileo died in 1642. Weishaupt founded the Illuminati in 1776. Yet we’re to believe that those who offer such an illogical idea are on the side of reason.

The term “progressive” is one of the most abused when applied to political or philosophical ideas. It’s a form of doublespeak in leftist parlance that implies something is other than what it truly is. Communists called themselves “progressives” as opposed to “reactionaries” who resisted their propaganda. Today Democrats are the “progressives,” and conservatives of any political persuasion are the “reactionaries.” Can one see how the anti-Christ elements in society pass on their ideas from generation to generation?

In *Angels & Demons Decoded* “progressive” is equated with “heterodoxy,” or a departure from the accepted norm. Well, just because something departs from the accepted norm does not make it progressive. In many cases, particularly as it opposes faith in Jesus Christ, such heterodoxy is regressive.

What is not suggested in *Angels & Demons* is that true faith and reason are not only compatible, but exist in biblical faith. But biblical faith is in opposition to organized religion, and organized religion is all that the world sees as representative of faith in Jesus Christ. Thus we cannot expect any conclusion other than what we get from the world: faith and reason are at odds with one another, and true enlightenment must be found in reason, with faith offering little more than solace for the troubled soul. Solace, while comforting, is the extent of the purpose to which religion can attain. Truth must be found through reason. That, in fact, is what the Illuminati proposed, and what it has achieved through its progeny throughout the ages.

Unfortunately, while bringing awareness of the Illuminati and the failures of the Catholic Church to the general public, *Angels & Demons* offers nothing in the way of truth to suggest that what the Illuminati stood for is not only coming to pass, but the consequences will truly be diabolical. Nor does it offer anything to suggest that what the Roman Catholic Church stood for in the Middle Ages, and what it stands for today, is incompatible with true faith in Jesus Christ. Ultimately it will be found that, just as true faith and true science are compatible, both false science and false faith will be compatible. ❖

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