

Where's Aunt Bea and The Fonz When We Need Them?

Angelical? Or Demonic?

Here's What Catholics Should Know about the New Howard, Hanks Movie 'Angels and Demons'

BY MSGR. ERIC BARR
For *The Observer*

When Opie did something wrong on "The Andy Griffith Show," or Richie Cunningham screwed up on "Happy Days," one could always count on Aunt Bea setting the kid straight or the Fonz slapping the teenager around to knock some sense in him. No more. Opie's all grown up and Rich-

ie's graduated. Ron Howard is a major movie director now and gives us one more Catholic-bashing movie, "Angels and Demons," based on Dan Brown's best-selling novel of the same name and starring Tom Hanks in a reprise of his role as symbolologist Dr. Robert Langdon.

The movie is about a vengeful group of modern day Illuminati who wish to punish the Church for an old massacre of their members.

Along the way, the secret to

life is found, which the Church has hidden in order to protect itself — yada, yada, yada.

Haven't we all heard such tired litanies of Church abuses before?

Many, such as William Donohue, president of the Catholic League, have come out and denounced the film as anti-Catholic.

Howard denies that bias saying, "After all, in 'Angels and 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?"

Let me count the ways.

First of all, if it is possible to paint the Church in a bad light, Howard does so.

The movie claims Copernicus, the famous astronomer, was murdered by the Church — wrong, he died an old man supported by the Church.

The movie states the Church slaughtered a group of Illuminati around the time of Galileo — but that secret society did not exist until 100 years after the eminent astronomer's death, and the Church never took any action like that against this shadowy organization.

Of course, the Church is portrayed as persecuting science and being anti-reason — yet, much of science as we know it today owes the Church a huge debt for preserving knowledge during the Dark Ages.

Peculiarly, Howard goes out of his way not to offend Muslims, since in the book a Moslem assassin is the bad guy. Not so in the movie.

How come Islamic terrorists get such sensitivity and we get the back of Howard's hand?

As Donohue says, "If only Hollywood treated Catholics as if they were Moslems."

Howard's argument for the validity of his movie runs like

this: the Church gets saved in the end, so all the many, indeed uncountable, bad things it has done in its history can be reeled off in breathless cinematography, action and dialog, regardless of the actual truth. And no one should be offended.

Go ahead; ask the inevitable question: should a Catholic see this movie?

It depends.

If you want to see a sumptuously filmed flick that has a rather mediocre thriller at its center and an absolutely ludicrous portrayal of the Church — sure. It's doubtful whether this film will hurt one's faith.

But if you are tired of the Catholic-bashing media dishing up a bunch of historically inaccurate, logically implausible, and completely absurd plots and counter plots, then maybe staying home is the better choice.

In fact, watch a few re-runs of "The Andy Griffith Show" where the young Ron Howard as Opie actually listens to people wiser than him.

Opie was a smart kid. Too bad Ron Howard isn't a wiser adult.

Msgr. Barr is Rockford Diocese Vicar for Clergy and Religious and a frequent guest writer about movies and popular culture. By the way, he gives high marks to "Star Trek," which he saw during its opening weekend.



(CNS photo/Alessia Pierdomenico, Reuters)

Director Ron Howard, left, and actor Tom Hanks, center, joke with author Dan Brown at the world premiere of the movie "Angels & Demons" in Rome May 4. An actor (in the background) is dressed in a costume that mimics those of the Vatican's Swiss Guard. The movie is rated PG-13 by the Motion Picture Association of America but had not been classified by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops by press time.



(CNS photo/Sony)

Tom Hanks stars in the new movie "Angels and Demons," which opens in U.S. theaters today.