

## A Review of the Movie "Angels and Demons"

I went to see *Angels and Demons* last night. I'm glad I did. The main theme of the movie is that Galileo is alive and well on earth, speaking from the grave. In fact, counting this movie, I have never seen such a push for Galileo in popular science as I have in the last year. This movie puts the icing on the cake.

Early in the movie Tom Hanks is sitting down with his female science associate and going over the fact that, because the Church suppressed the heliocentric views of Galileo, Galileo went underground before his death in 1642 and created a secret society of scientists and astronomers who then called themselves *The Illuminati* (The Enlightened Ones). They are "enlightened," of course, because they knew better than the Church of how the world was created and how it operates.

The Church got wind of this and by 1668 made a massive purge of the Illuminati, supposedly murdering their leaders. The Illuminati have been progressing toward reprisal against the Church ever since, and the climax comes in our day when a pope is assassinated by the Illuminati, and the four preferred cardinals destined to take his place, are killed one by one. The Illuminati are successful in murdering three of the cardinals, but the fourth escapes and eventually becomes the new pope, and the whole Illuminati plot is foiled at the end of the movie. (What we actually find out in the end, however, is that there was never a current Illuminati plot in the first place. It was cooked up by a priest who was closest to the pope, and the implication is that this priest was the one who murdered the pope so that he himself could eventually become pope).

The movie wastes no time in bringing out the "science versus religion" theme. It's sole purpose is to make science the victor. The above priest, who is in authority during the *tempe sede vacante* (the time while the pope is dead and before the election of a new pope), hatched the whole plot to make it look like the Illuminati was attacking the Church because he wanted to create a confrontation between modern science and the Catholic Church so that the Church would fight back and defeat science. Hence, he is made the villain in the movie – the typical bigot who blindly accepts religion and avoids the objective truths of science. Once his plot is discovered, he commits suicide, notably by setting himself on fire which, I believe, is a symbol of him burning in hell. This is a way of saying that the Church gets a taste of its own medicine for what it did to Galileo, as it were, for trying to stop science from advancing beyond the constraints of religion.

In effect, *Angels and Demons* is nothing more than dramatized theatrics to advance the autonomy of science over religion. At the end of the movie, Hank's female assistant is struggling with whether she should go back to her work in nuclear physics. She is struggling because, in the very beginning of the movie she is part of a science team working at the Haldron Collider which has just produced the first quantifiable specimen of anti-matter. This anti-matter is

important, thematically, because it is touted as the first step to finding the so-called “God Particle,” the infinitesimal particle that supposedly began the Big Bang. In fact, later in the movie, the priest who plotted the Illuminati charade is caught on tape saying, ‘if science is to discover the God Particle, then what significance will the Church have in our day, for science has answered all the questions that puzzle mankind, even how the universe began’ (which implies no need for God to begin the universe; it can do it all by itself, thank you! Don’t laugh. There are a whole host of scientists today who preach that doctrine. I document them in the book *Galileo Was Wrong*).

This anti-matter is housed in a special magnetic container that prohibits it from touching any normal matter. (Anti-matter is composed of atoms that have a positive charge on the electron and negative charge on the proton, while normal matter is the reverse). If the anti-matter touches the normal matter, there will be a cataclysmic explosion. There is, in fact, such an explosion that occurs toward the end of the movie, but it happens at a high altitude so that there is minimal damage to the Vatican. But because Hank’s female assistant saw the destruction caused by the explosion, she struggles with whether she should return to her work. She fears that science could destroy the world. Hanks and her have a discussion about whether science is proceeding with wisdom, a wisdom that the Church offers science but that science is not always willing to accept. Hanks is an agnostic. His advice to her is to go back and continue her work, because science can save the world, not destroy it. In effect, Science is deemed as the savior of mankind.

Just prior to this conversation, Hanks is in dialogue with one of the chief cardinals about the existence of God. The cardinal suggests to Hanks that Hanks was sent by God to foil the “Illuminati” plot. Hanks doesn’t agree God sent him, but the cardinal insists. In effect, the cardinal is saying that Hanks saved the world and the Church from disallowing science to have autonomy over religion, and this was all directed by God so as to put the Church in its proper place after it made its egregious mistake with Galileo.

So we see how important the Galileo issue is. It never goes away because it is the most effective means for the world to undermine and destroy the authority of the Catholic Church, for if it is possible for the Catholic Church to make such a grave mistake on something as simple as whether the earth goes around the sun, we can imagine what it will do when it gets its hands on more complicated issues such as evolution, the Big Bang, and even when life begins in the womb, to name a few.

Every area of science today has a free ticket for autonomy once it is believed that the Church was not guided by heaven to say that heliocentrism was heretical in 1616 and 1633. I am convinced that this is the quintessential issue for our time. If the Church didn’t get Galileo right, then there is really little reason to listen to her on anything else (except dogmatic infallible proclamations by the extraordinary magisterium), for the simple reason that the Church put the full weight of her magisterium and tradition behind the supposition that heliocentrism defied the faith and morals of the Catholic Church because it denied the literal meaning of Scripture. Movies like *Angels and Demons* remind us of this undeniable truth.

Just to reinforce the point, take a gander at this lecture series at the Franklin Institute taking place in June. Note that the whole theme of the lecture series revolves around Galileo and how his controversy with the Church will then lead science into all kinds of controversial issues of which the Church should also choose to keep a low profile.

Robert Sungenis

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Thursday, June 18, 2009

Special Panel Discussion

What Would Galileo Think?

7:30PM

Franklin Theater

Hear four distinguished scholars talk about Galileo's struggle to reconcile science and religion during the Renaissance. Today our modern context of science and religion affect thinking about topics such as stem cell research, evolution and climate change. How might the controversies of Galileo's time be relevant to today's conflicts between science and cultural institutions?

Panelists: Mario Biagioli, Professor of the History of Science, Harvard University; Ruth Schwartz Cowan, Janice and Julian Bers Professor of the History & Sociology of Science, University of Pennsylvania; Maurice Finocchiaro, Distinguished Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, University of Nevada, Las Vegas; Joel Primack, Professor of Physics, University of California Santa Cruz

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Friday, June 19, 2009

Session 1: The Importance of Galileo

9:30AM - 10:15AM

Franklin Theater

Join the Reverend Ernan McMullin as he provides an overview of the fascinating period and region in which Galileo lived and worked.

Presenter: Ernan McMullin, O'Hara Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, University of Notre Dame

Session 2: The Lineage of Genius: From Galileo to Hawking

10:30AM-11:55AM

Franklin Theater

Science does not happen in a vacuum. The culture of the Renaissance is known for enabling genius but what was it that made this possible? Can the same be said of today's culture? How do culture and cultural change impact the practice and outcomes of science? Do the process and nature of science play a role?

Panelists: Nick Wilding, Assistant Professor of History, Georgia State University; Peter Dear, Professor of History in Science & Technology Studies, Cornell University; Joel Primack, Professor of Physics, University of California Santa Cruz

Session Moderated by The Franklin Institute's Chief Astronomer Derrick Pitts

Lunch with Dava Sobel, Author of Galileo's Daughter

12:00PM

Executive Boardroom

Fee \$25.00. Space is limited. To reserve, call 215.448.1254.

Award-winning author and former New York Times science reporter Dave Sobel has researched Galileo and the Renaissance extensively, traveling to Italy and translating original documents, including 120 letters to Galileo from his daughter, Sister Marie Celeste. Sobel has been a guest on major network stations, as well as National Public Radio and public broadcasting stations.

Tours of Galileo, the Medici and the Age of Astronomy

12:00PM - 2:00PM

Enjoy this opportunity to explore The Franklin Institute's exclusive exhibition featuring one of only two remaining Galileo telescopes. Free with symposium registration.