

Da Vinci revives author's earlier work

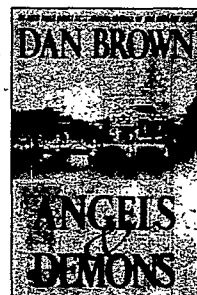
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Faith's Family Catholic Courier | Diocese of Rochester, NY | May 2004

The resurrection of Dan Brown's moribund *Angels & Demons* is something of a literary miracle. The book, on merit, succumbed quietly when it was published four years ago. Then, last spring, came Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, a water-into-wine Doubleday phenomenon, still on the best-seller list with more than 6 million copies celebrating the physical and intellectual derring-do of Harvard symbologist Robert Langdon.

Da Vinci, then, is the reason *Angels & Demons* was rescued from the Simon & Schuster morgue (Atria is a Simon & Schuster imprint), being reissued in paperback as a prequel to *Da Vinci*. Because it showed remarkable strength we now have the hardcover version.

The similarities between *Angels* and *Da Vinci* are many, but space prevents us from examining them at length. Let it simply be noted that both open with a murder in unusual circumstances, the victim in *Da Vinci* being a curator in the Louvre, whereas in *Angels* it is a priest-scientist who has created anti-matter in a bottle while working for a Swiss research firm that considers the God of tradition to be but a stand-in for science as the Almighty.



In both, a phone call to Langdon initiates a swirl of artful sleuthing. In *Da Vinci*, the summons pairs him with a leggy cryptologist who is the slain curator's granddaughter. In *Angels* he finds himself working with the victim-priest's leggy daughter by adoption.

A "bio-entanglement physicist," she is thought to be the only other person privy to the anti-matter secret. But of course she isn't. Otherwise we wouldn't have had a corpse with his eye plucked out, and Langdon would still be home in bed.

If you are familiar with *Da Vinci*, you know that in it the church is demonized. That continued the pattern Brown established in *Angels*, where the demonization is aimed mostly at structure and practice, whereas in *Da Vinci* the target is dogma and belief. Although the reader of one book is likely to feel a sense of déjà vu in reading the other, there is a monumental difference.

On the copyright page of *Angels* is this notice: "This book is a work of

Book Review

Angels & Demons
By Dan Brown
Atria Books (2003)
592 pp. \$19.95
Reviewed by Joseph R. Thomas

fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. ..." Indeed, as soon as Langdon boards a strange-looking plane that will whisk him from Boston to Geneva in an hour we know we are in the realm of fantasy.

Not so in *Da Vinci*. There Brown asserts, "All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents and secret rituals in this novel are accurate." Thereafter he weaves fact and fiction together deceptively, imparting an aura of authenticity, while shredding core beliefs, giving Jesus a wife and a child. The charade, which finds Langdon pursuing clues secretly hidden in *Da Vinci*'s art, argues that the church has murderously sought to suppress its "feminine side."

In *Angels*, Bernini and his works are the source of the clues, with the


plot hinging on the placement of anti-matter of unbelievable force under St. Peter's Basilica. The anti-matter is due to explode at midnight in the midst of a conclave to choose a successor to the murdered pope.

But first, a long-dormant secret brotherhood of scientists, The Illuminati, must be reinvigorated to set up the science-religion conflict. And for maximum effect, St. Peter's Square must be filled with people enticed there by the grotesque hourly murders of four cardinals kidnapped from the conclave.


There is a spectacular surprise ending and the basilica and Vatican City are saved thanks to Langdon and an unlikely cohort. Bodies lie scattered all over Rome's liturgical landscape, the new god, Science, reigns supreme and Langdon finds himself in bed with the bio-entanglement physicist who earlier disproved a favorite Einstein theory.

Thanks to *Da Vinci*, this heretofore sow's ear of a book has become a silk purse.

Thomas, retired editor in chief of *The Christophers* and a former diocesan newspaper editor, is a frequent reviewer of books.

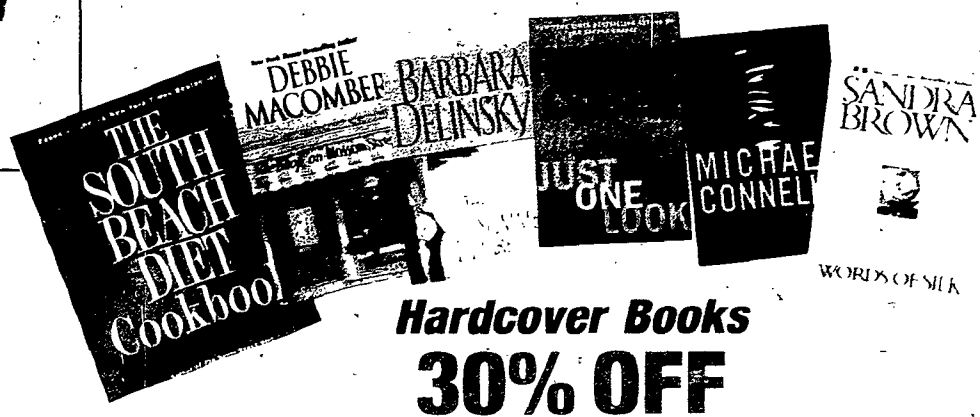


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