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"Angels and Demons" tour: a novel approach to Rome

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VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- The day is fast approaching when tourists circling Rome might be seen with their noses stuck between the pages of a Dan Brown novel rather than a Rick Steves' or Fodor's guide.

It has already happened in Paris. Staff at the Louvre and the Church of St. Sulpice said they are approached daily by Holy Grail seekers clutching worn copies of Brown's novel, "The Da Vinci Code."

The demand for details about the artwork and architecture featured in Brown's best-selling novel caught most Parisian curators by surprise, so earlier this year some enterprising organizations started to offer "The Da Vinci Code" tours.

The tours seek to retrace the steps of Brown's fictional hero, Harvard professor of religious symbology Robert Langdon and to juxtapose reality against the myths or factual errors in Brown's murder mysteries.

Now the same idea has come to Rome. As of Dec. 28, a guided tour based on Brown's other best-selling conspiracy novel, "Angels and Demons," was offered.

"American tourists asked us about 'Angels and Demons'" and where the different churches in the novel were, "so we did it, we started a tour," said the president of [angelsanddemons.it](#), which organizes the official "Angels and Demons" Rome Tour.

While fictional, code-cracking Langdon whipped around Rome in unmarked Vatican sedans and, at one point, a stolen car, [angelsanddemons.it](#) guides its armchair sleuths around the city in a chauffeured minivan or a private Mercedes.

In the novel, Langdon and physicist Vittoria Vetra race against the clock to try to prevent the murders of four eminent cardinals on the night of a conclave and to avert the legendary Illuminati sect's threat of destroying the Vatican.

The Angels and Demons tour concentrates on visiting just the Illuminati's alleged four altars of science by following the fictional Path of Illumination.

"We didn't want to add anything else" like a visit to the Vatican, because "I don't think the Vatican is a big fan of Dan Brown," [angelsanddemons.it](#) told [Catholic News Service](#).

The head of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, U.S. Archbishop John P. Foley, told CNS that Brown's books combine "interests in the religious, the mysterious and the conspiratorial."

Archbishop Foley said he's not surprised the novels harbor some factual errors because

the books are "supposed to be fiction." The real problem hinges on whether people with "a superficial religious formation may take the book as Gospel and be deceived," said the archbishop.

However, the president of angelsanddemons.it said he "didn't get the idea the people on the tour wanted the book to be true."

He said even though people came to Italy just to do the tour, their aim seemed to be to satisfy a curiosity that was sparked by the story and "to see what the sites they read about really look like."

The clues readers needed to unravel the novel's mystery essentially were hidden in some of Rome's statues and architectural designs by 17th-century baroque artist Giovanni Lorenzo Bernini.

The "Angels and Demons" Rome Tour brings visitors to those masterpieces, ranging from Bernini's more obscure "Habakkuk and the Angel" in the Church of Santa Maria del Popolo to the towering Fountain of the Four Rivers in Piazza Navona.

The head of Angelsanddemons.it said Brown's book "helps stimulate the tourist to look at and discover old things in a new way."

It's not the first time a book or movie has awakened curiosity in a reader and inspired travel, but the Brown conspiracy novels may be turning popular novels into additional money-making ventures.

"The Da Vinci Code" tours advertised on the Web can run anywhere from \$130 for a two-and-a-half-hour tour to \$3,000, which includes trans-Atlantic airfare and lodging.

The four-hour "Angels and Demons" tour run by angelsanddemons.it is priced, for now, between \$61 and \$272, depending on group size.

Though Langdon fans can certainly hunt for the clues and murder scenes on their own, the president of angelsanddemons.it said a guided tour sets the historical record straight, in this case concerning the Illuminati, the Inquisition, and the church's trial of 17th-century astronomer Galileo Galilei.

The battle between science and religion is the underlying conflict that powers Brown's "Angels and Demons."

The story opens with the gruesome murder of a priest-physicist who designed an experiment to prove Genesis was possible and that God could have triggered the Big Bang.

The novel resurrects the debate on whether science and faith are at odds with one another or whether those who succeed in merging the two are heretical or have crossed sacred bounds.

A Vatican astronomer, U.S. Jesuit Brother Guy Consolmagno, emphasized the church does embrace science.

"People have to remember that science started out as a branch of theology, and if there's any rivalry between the two, then it's a sibling rivalry," he said.

"You need to have a strong theological belief that the universe was created by a rational, intelligent being if you're even going to do science; why else would you be looking into causes and meaning?" he added.

The new book-based tourism sweeping Paris and Rome is proof scientists and fictional sleuths aren't the only people digging for the truth. Now "The Da Vinci Code" and

"Angels and Demons" tourists have added themselves to the ranks of adventurers scouring for deeper meanings hidden in Europe's artistic treasures.

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