

‘Angels and Demons’ is harmless entertainment, Vatican newspaper says

ROME - The newly premiered movie “Angels and Demons” is little more than “harmless entertainment,” with many factual errors and little cultural value, according to the Vatican newspaper.

Two dispassionate articles in L’Osservatore Romano May 7 may disappoint the film’s promoters, who had sought a conflict with the Vatican of the type that surrounded “The Da Vinci Code” in 2006. Both films are based on books by author Dan Brown.

An editorial in the paper called both the film and the book “modest” and “rather innocuous.” An accompanying review said that viewers “must face two hours of harmless entertainment that has little to do with the genius and mystery of Christianity, without getting beyond the usual stereotypes.”

The review said the film was “pretentious” but actually complimented the “dynamic direction” and “splendid photography,” and said the computer and studio reconstructions of the Vatican, Sistine Chapel and St. Peter’s Basilica, which were off limits to filming, were “magnificent.”

The film, an action mystery involving the kidnapping of cardinals from a papal conclave by a secret Catholic sect, is the second collaboration between director Ron Howard and Brown, with Tom Hanks again in the starring role. It was shown May 4 at a glitzy affair at Rome’s Auditorium performing arts complex.

Before the screening, Howard and cast met reporters and tried hard to get some controversy going. Howard said he had run into problems shooting the film in Rome, and blamed the Vatican without explaining what had been done to obstruct production or by whom.

The Vatican spokesman, Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, would not comment on Howard’s assertions, speculating that he was just trying to drum up a bit more

publicity for the big Hollywood production.

The Vatican newspaper editorial acknowledged that the two books and films dealt with hot-button issues: the church and sexuality in the case of "The Da Vinci Code" and faith and science with "Angels and Demons."

However, in these works "the point of view is always the least problematic possible," it said.

"The good guys are always the progressives in favor of sex and science, whether they are heretics or popes, and the bad guys are those who oppose them in the name of faith and tradition, who are always committing crimes," it said.

In the latest film, Hanks' character, Robert Langdon, an expert in religious symbolism, is called in to untangle the esoteric web spun by the shadowy sect known as "Illuminati" who try to influence the election of the next pope by threatening to blow up the cardinals in a conclave with an ampule of mysterious and powerful antimatter.

The review said that the film "certainly doesn't deserve the seal of good culture; it's more of a gigantic, clever commercial operation."

L'Osservatore Romano's editor, Gian Maria Vian, was reported in the Italian daily Corriere della Sera as saying that "Angels and Demons" posed no danger to the church. "It only confirms the centuries-old fascination with our faith and our symbols," he said, adding, "If only all anti-Catholic operations were like this one."

The movie is set to debut in U.S. movie theaters May 15.