

BISHOPS OPPOSE “GOLDEN COMPASS”

Despite the positive review (later withdrawn) of “The Golden Compass” provided by the Office of Film and Broadcasting, a division of the United States Council of Catholic Bishops, the reaction to the film by individual bishops was anything but enthusiastic. Every bishop who spoke out on the topic echoed the Catholic League’s take on the film: that it is based on the first book of a profoundly anti-Catholic, pro-atheist trilogy, and is something toward which parents should be very wary.

While we cannot list every bishop and Church leader who sought to warn his flock about the film and Pullman’s books, a sample is below.

Monsignor Paul Showalter, Vicar General of the Diocese of Peoria, wrote in a public letter, “As shepherds of the faithful, it is our moral duty to inform parishioners regarding any forms of media that seriously attack our faith.” Monsignor Showalter suggested that Catholics “continue to promote edifying films and books—and use this premiere as a teaching moment for the truths of our Holy Church and the beauty of serving our Loving Redeemer.”

Bishop William E. Lori of the Diocese of Bridgeport pointed visitors of his website in the direction of the Catholic League’s booklet *“The Golden Compass: Agenda Unmasked.”* All Catholic elementary and middle schools in the Diocese of Lexington got word from Bishop Ronald Gainer’s superintendent of schools, William Farnau, that they were advised to remove Pullman’s books from the check-out list in their libraries.

The Archdiocese of Chicago, headed by Francis Cardinal George, carried a note on the homepage of its website declaring, “Both

the movie and the books contain aspects that are deeply troubling to those who profess the Catholic faith. Archbishop Alfred Hughes of New Orleans circulated a memo to his parochial schools highlighting the problems with the books and movie. He also preached on the topic at St. Louis Cathedral and wrote a column for the diocesan newspaper warning that Pullman's books "surreptitiously lead children to atheism and pose a special threat to Christianity."

Bishop Gregory Aymond of the Diocese of Austin was short and to the point when he released an e-mail "e-pistle" reading, "Catholic schools and religious education programs should not encourage children to read any of these books and they should not be held in their libraries. 'The Golden Compass' attempts to devalue religion, especially Christianity. Our children deserve better education than what is in these books and movie." Indeed they do. Likewise, Andrew Walton, spokesman for Bishop Joseph Galante's Diocese of Camden, reasoned, "If a Catholic parent's responsibility is to do their best to bring their children up in the faith, then they will not likely want to make this material available to their children."

The Diocese of La Crosse published a question-and-answer sheet about the film for parents to download. Additionally, Bishop Jerome ListECKi sent a letter to all pastors in the diocese urging them to speak up about the movie and books. Addressing arguments that many of the anti-Christian, pro-atheist themes were watered-down for the film, His Excellency wrote "good fruit does not come from a bad tree...it is clear that this movie is the first part of a trilogy that expresses hatred of Christianity and that portrays God, the Church and religion as oppressive and urges children to join fallen angels in a rebellion against God." He also provided some words of encouragement to all of those out there speaking out about "The Golden Compass" with his words, "It is good for all of us to be reminded that it is our duty, especially that of the lay faithful, to form and inform our culture."

The Archbishop of St. Louis, Raymond Burke, wrote, "I caution all Catholics regarding the atheistic and anti-Catholic nature of Pullman's writings, upon which 'The Golden Compass' is based." Furthermore, the archdiocese's superintendent of education, George Henry, sent a letter of warning to all of his principals and religious education directors regarding the film. Henry noted that it was the first time he had done such a thing, but he felt it was an urgent matter that needed to be addressed. Archbishop Burke and Mr. Henry weren't the only Catholics in the area who refused to turn a blind eye to Philip Pullman's agenda: Jim Rygelski, editor of the archdiocesan paper, denied the film's promoters their request to buy advertising space.

It was Archbishop Charles Chaput of Denver who was arguably most forceful in his take on the film. After screening the film, His Excellency reported to his flock that "the aggressively anti-religious, anti-Christian undercurrent in 'The Golden Compass' is unmistakable and at times undisguised...The idea that any Christian film critics could overlook or downplay these negative elements, as some have seemed to do, is simply baffling." The archbishop left his sheep with the suggestion that they write to the folks at New Line Cinema about this situation. He's absolutely right—as we've realized time and again, when committed Catholics write letters, make phone calls, and shoot off e-mails expressing their views, they are not ignored.

The Catholic League was thrilled to see these, and other, bishops speak out about "The Golden Compass." The Church in America is blessed with a number of leaders who are good and great men. All Catholics should be appreciative for their guidance.