

“GOLDEN COMPASS” FLOPS; BOYCOTT WORKS

The goal of the Catholic League was to stop “The Golden Compass” from meeting box office expectations, thus making it unlikely that there would be a movie based on the second and third volumes of Philip Pullman’s trilogy, *His Dark Materials*. Looks like we won on both counts.

Even our adversaries begrudgingly concede we were victorious. The movie did so poorly that after two weeks out, it took in \$4 million less than “Alvin and the Chipmunks” did in one weekend!

Film critic Roger Ebert, who loved the film, said “the box office was wounded by attacks of religious groups.” He added that “The criticism was led by the Catholic League and its talkative president William Donohue.” He concluded that “Any bad buzz on a family film can be mortal, and that seems to have been the case this time.” The buzz was so bad that Hollywood reporters are now saying there won’t be a film version of Pullman’s second and third books.

The Catholic League sold 25,000 copies of its booklet, *The Golden Compass: Agenda Unmasked*, before running out. We made sure that every bishop, Catholic schools superintendents and directors of religious education received a copy. As we said from the beginning, our concern was less the film—the most anti-Catholic elements were being watered down—than the trilogy of books from which it was based.

Those who unwittingly validated our interpretation of Philip Pullman’s work included American Atheists and the National Secular Society in the U.K. Both were angry, as were Pullman’s fans, that the film didn’t deliver the red meat of anti-Catholic bigotry that they craved. Donohue congratulated the

leaders of both groups on TV for their honesty, if not for their bigotry.

Regrettably, the review by Harry Forbes and an associate, representing the USCCB, was mostly positive. Indeed, Forbes found it difficult to believe that Pullman was attacking the Catholic Church. He referred to Pullman's "very much fictionalized" church as "a stand-in for all organized religion." But this was simply wrong: Pullman made it crystal clear that his target was the Catholic Church. [For more on the Forbes debacle, see p. 10.]

The victory over "The Golden Compass" followed closely on the heels of the Catholic League victory over the Miller Brewing Company. In both instances we called for a boycott (which is not something we do too often), and in both instances we got what we wanted: a total apology and a box office flop.