

# 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Despite the positive review (later withdrawn) of “The Golden Compass” provided by the Office of Film and Broadcasting, a division of the United States Council of Catholic Bishops, the reaction to the film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.

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# BISHOPS PULL “GOLDEN COMPASS” REVIEW

On November 29, the Office for Film and Broadcasting of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops posted a positive review of “The Golden Compass” on the Catholic News Service website. Written by the office’s director, Harry Forbes, and an associate, John Mulderig, the review hailed the film as “an exciting adventure story” that “rates as intelligent and well-crafted entertainment.” It completely sidestepped the anti-Catholic nature of the books upon which the movie was based.

Forbes actually said that Philip Pullman’s use of the term Magisterium “is still a bit unfortunate,” thus suggesting that he did not want to concede what almost everyone else freely acknowledged.

At one point, Forbes even went so far as to congratulate the movie’s producers for promoting Catholic values. “To the extent, moreover, that Lyra [the protagonist] and her allies are taking a stand on behalf of free will in opposition to the coercive force of the Magisterium, they are of course acting entirely in harmony with Catholic teaching.”

After the Forbes review was published, Bill Donohue was asked by the media for his reply. Speaking of Pullman’s use of the term Magisterium, Donohue said, “He deliberately chose it because his target from the very beginning has been Catholicism, not anything else. It was Pullman who said that ‘I’m trying to undermine the basis of Christian belief.’ Not to accept what the man says about himself shows no respect for his integrity.”

When the Religion News Service pressed Donohue to explain why Forbes took this position, he offered, “I don’t know what his motive was. Maybe he’s just a simpleton who thought it was unfortunate.” But, Donohue contributed, “There was nothing

‘unfortunate’ about it; it was deliberate.”

Regarding the tribute Forbes made to the movie for emphasizing the Catholic value of “free will,” Donohue pulled no punches: “Nazis are portrayed as having free will in movies, too. Should the screenwriters of such films be commended for reflecting Catholic values? Free will is indeed a Catholic value, but it is the object of free will that carries moral weight.”

To complicate matters, Forbes—and by extension the USCCB—was used by New Line Cinema (the film’s primary producer). For example, an ad posted on the website of Beliefnet that was paid for by New Line Cinema was exploitative. It deliberately, and unethically, juxtaposed two unconnected remarks from the review, leading the reader to conclude that the bishops’ conference had ruled that the movie was “entirely in harmony with Catholic teaching.”

In fairness to Forbes, he never said any such thing. He qualified his remarks about the so-called “free will” components, saying *they* were “entirely in harmony with Catholic teaching.” He never said that the *story* itself was emblematic of Catholic teaching. But this is what happens when our side doesn’t take a strong stand against bigotry.

It didn’t take long before many bishops weighed in on this issue. Not one sided with Forbes. Every one of them who spoke out was unqualified in his denunciation of the movie. No wonder they quickly killed the Forbes review, removing it from the USCCB website.

Denver Archbishop Charles Chaput saw the movie and lost no time blasting it: “The aggressively anti-religious, anti-Christian undercurrent in ‘The Golden Compass’ is unmistakable and at times undisguised. The wicked Mrs. Coulter alludes approvingly to a fictional version of the Doctrine of Original Sin. When a warrior Ice Bear—one of the heroes of the

story—breaks into the local Magisterium headquarters to take back the armor stolen from him, the exterior walls of the evil building are covered with Eastern Christians icons. And for Catholics in our own world, of course, ‘Magisterium’ refers to the teaching authority of the Church—hardly a literary coincidence. The idea that any Christian film critics could overlook or downplay these negative elements, as some have seemed to do, is simply baffling.”

Baltimore Archbishop Edwin O’Brien said that “The Archdiocese of Baltimore is grateful that the conference withdrew the review because it caused much confusion in the Catholic community. From all reports, the review failed to adequately warn parents about the movie’s widely recognized dark themes and anti-Catholic imagery.”

On December 19, the Vatican condemned the film in a long editorial in *L’Osservatore Romano*. It called it “the most anti-Christmas film possible” and that “honest” viewers would find it “devoid of any particular emotion apart from a great chill.”

This was not the first time Forbes came under attack for one of his movie reviews. In 2005, he wrote a glowing review of “Brokeback Mountain,” a gay cowboy film that many found offensive. After mounting lay Catholic pressure, Forbes was forced to give the flick a more negative rating.

We are so happy that priests, as well as ministers, all over the country took our counsel on this issue. We knew that a movie aimed at kids at Christmastime that tried to sell the wonders of atheism and the horrors of Catholicism would fail, provided that people were given a heads up.

Perhaps the best news that the Catholic League won this battle came when it was reported by one Hollywood source that New Line Cinema is not likely to make a movie of the second and third volumes of Pullman’s trilogy. That was one of the

league's goals from the beginning.

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## HUCKABEE CATHOLICS

## DISAPPOINTS

When it was reported that Republican presidential hopeful Mike Huckabee would speak at the Rev. John Hagee's church in Texas on December 23, the Catholic League was inundated with requests from the media for comment. As readers of *Catalyst* know, it is no secret that Hagee has a long history of anti-Catholicism. The league had no trouble pulling together information about the bigoted comments and slanderous lies Hagee has aimed at the Church in the past.

Over ten years ago, Bill Donohue wrote to John Hagee asking him to stop with his Catholic bashing. Specifically, he complained about the falsehoods told about the Catholic Church in his video "Southern Steps: Jerusalem & Bible Prophecy." Hagee's film, which was designed to drive a wedge between Catholics and Jews, attempted to link the Church with Hitler's program of genocide. The preacher never responded to Donohue's letter.

On April 3, 2000, a Polish Catholic Holocaust survivor, Michael Preisler (Auschwitz No. 22213), wrote to Hagee saying the following: "On May 11, July 11 and December 23, 1999, I asked you to remove the falsehood in your book, *Final Dawn Over Jerusalem*, accusing Polish Catholics like me of creating the ovens at Auschwitz." Again, Hagee didn't bother to reply to Preisler, who is co-chair of the Holocaust Documentation Committee of the Polish American Congress and a member of the Catholic League.

But one needn't look back several years to reveal Hagee's contempt for Catholicism. In his latest book, *Jerusalem Countdown* (revised edition, 2007), Hagee wrote the following: "Most readers will be shocked by the clear record of history linking Adolf Hitler and the Roman Catholic Church in a conspiracy to exterminate the Jews."

This is far from the only incendiary claim Hagee makes in *Jerusalem Countdown*. He also rails, "Anti-Semitism in Christianity began with the statements of the early church fathers, including Eusebius, Cyril, Chrysostom, Augustine, Origen, Justin, and Jerome.... This poisonous stream of venom came from the mouths of spiritual leaders to virtually illiterate congregants, sitting benignly in their pews, listening to their pastors. They labeled the Jews as 'the Christ killers, plague carriers, demons, children of the devil, bloodthirsty pagans who look for an innocent child during the Easter week to drink his blood, money hungry Shylocks, who are deceitful as Judas was relentless.'"

He also adds: "The Roman Catholic Church, which was supposed to carry the light of the gospel, plunged the world into the Dark Ages.... The Crusaders were a motley mob of thieves, rapists, robbers, and murderers whose sins had been forgiven by the pope in advance of the Crusade.... The brutal truth is that the Crusades were military campaigns of the Roman Catholic Church to gain control of Jerusalem from the Muslims and to punish the Jews as the alleged Christ killers on the road to and from Jerusalem."

Readers are also treated to his charge that "The Spanish Inquisition was perhaps the most cynical plot in the black history of Catholicism, aimed at expropriating the property of wealthy Jews and converts in Spain for the benefit of the royal court and the Roman Catholic Church."

And returning to his attempts to blame the Holocaust on Catholicism, Hagee alleges: "Adolf Hitler attended a Catholic



school as a child and heard all the fiery anti-Semitic rantings from Chrysostom to Martin Luther. When Hitler became a global demonic monster, the Catholic Church and Pope Pius XII never, ever slightly criticized him. Pope Pius XII, called by historians 'Hitler's Pope,' joined Hitler in the infamous Concordat of Collaboration, which turned the youth of Germany over to Nazism, and the churches became the stage background for the bloodthirsty cry, 'Pereat Judea'.... In all of his [Hitler's] years of absolute brutality, he was never denounced or even scolded by Pope Pius XII or any Catholic leader in the world. To those Christians who believe that Jewish hearts will be warmed by the sight of the cross, please be informed—to them it's an electric chair."

This is just a glimpse of what Hagee thinks about Catholics. He has raised tens of millions for Israel and his outreach to Jews has been commendable. But he simply can't do so without sucker punching the Catholic Church, thus discrediting him as a responsible voice. That is why Catholics are so disappointed with Mike Huckabee.

When Huckabee spoke at Hagee's Cornerstone church, he called the bigoted minister "one of the great Christian leaders of our nation." When Donohue was asked by a Reuters news service reporter about this, he said, "Hagee has a history of denigrating the Catholic religion." How anyone could label him "one of the great Christian leaders of our nation" is astounding. It's also revealing.

What amazes us most is that it was just eight years ago that George W. Bush made the mistake of speaking at Bob Jones University, home of another anti-Catholic. Don't these guys learn?

The Catholic League has no dog in this hunt. Like many Americans, we are not happy with the slate of candidates from both parties. On the one hand, this is discouraging, but on the other hand it gives us maximum freedom to go where the

action is. That's good news for us, but not necessarily for others. Just ask John Edwards—we forced two of his anti-Catholic staffers out of their jobs last winter.

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## **PUNDITS GET IT WRONG ON BOYCOTT**

Most pundits predicted that the Catholic League boycott of "The Golden Compass" would backfire and actually entice more people to see the film. The movie, which was supposed to be the new "Lord of the Rings" or "Chronicles of Narnia," made a mere \$25.8 million its opening weekend and an even paltrier \$9 million the following weekend. Although the film was number one in the box office that first weekend, it brought in less money than "Enchanted"(\$34 Million) did its opening weekend (November 21), and was destroyed at the box office by "I Am Legend" (\$77.2 million) and "Alvin and the Chipmunks"(\$45 million), which opened up the weekend of December 14.

While we fought to practice our First Amendment right, there were some who believed that the boycott would have an opposite effect on the public and encourage people to see it. In various media reports it was said that the boycott would do nothing but heighten the anticipation of the film, making more people attend the movie than would have before. Following the old adage that, "Any publicity is good publicity," many jumped on the bandwagon to denounce the Catholic League's boycott.

"Golden Compass" director Chris Weitz cried that people were attacking "a film they haven't seen, often based on a book that they haven't read." Weitz however welcomed the attention saying that the boycott would make "more people see the film."

Despite Weitz's best efforts to water-down the anti-Catholic elements of the books, people saw right through the mirage and stayed away from the film.

While Mr. Weitz was claiming "the people who have been organizing this boycott type activity are getting it wrong," papers in our northern neighbor echoed his thoughts. In the *Hamilton Spectator* in Ontario, columnist Jeff Mahoney was certain that the boycotts would work in favor of the film. According to his column, he assumed that the Catholic League was working in cahoots with the New Line Cinema (the producers of the film) "as part of the carefully machined prerelease publicity." He attributed the large budget of the film to the boycott because "getting groups to boycott your film doesn't come cheap, but it can sure pay off." He likened the public backlash of "The Golden Compass" to that of "The Passion of the Christ" and suggested that the negative publicity drove its success.

In the *Calgary Herald*, Sean Meyers reported that the *His Dark Materials* trilogy would be jumping off the shelves because of the exposure the film was getting. In his interview with a University of Calgary professor, George Melnyk, Meyers said that the professor believed these sort of attempts to "censor" usually backfire. Professor Melnyk stated that "Censorship produces publicity, and the more high profile it becomes, the more interest is generated." Somebody needed to inform both Meyers and Melnyk that the Catholic League was exercising its right to boycott and never wanted to have the film censored.

Across the pond in the United Kingdom, Melanie McDonagh, of the *London Times*, followed in the footsteps of her Canadian peer and wrote that, "Christmas has come early for Chris Weitz." This, of course, was in reference to the boycott. McDonagh also stated, "if Mr. Weitz is really lucky, Santa may deliver what every director prays for...a condemnation from the Vatican." In the same article she called Bill Donohue, a "Vatican frontman" and said the controversy surrounding the

film is what "every film distributor longs for."

We cannot leave out the publications of America's higher education. In the *Daily Titan*, from the campus of Cal State-Fullerton, an editorial stated that, "The strength of Hollywood's advertising intertwined with a tasty controversy only makes us more curious," and, "Sometimes, a boycott is just the right marketing tool that studios or publishers need." Instead of an educated student, the editor sounded like an insolent child who would do something just because he is told not to, saying, "Tell us not to see something, and...there's a good chance we are going to see it."

At the prestigious Harvard University, the *Harvard Crimson* ran an article that called the Catholic League out of touch with reality and the boycott "pointless." The reporter questioned the faith of the league saying it "should realize it would take more than three fantasy novels to dissuade anyone, even children, from participation in the Church."

In the December 2 *London Sunday Times*, Philip Pullman wrote an article in which he questioned the purpose of the Catholic League and downplayed the effect that the boycott would have. In the article he called the Catholic League a small American group "which seems to be an organization mainly devoted to the self-promotion of its president." A few sentences later Pullman made the same mistake that the director of his film did. Pullman wrote, "The league's activities are having the usual effect, which is that far more people are now going to see the film and read the book than would otherwise have done." If only the box office would have cashed in on his optimism.

Our "small American group" stood directly in the path of the big-budget New Line Cinema, Philip Pullman, and Chris Weitz. In the end, despite the criticism and "free publicity" we were giving the film, our boycott worked. It looked like Christmas may have come early for the Catholic League and those who

supported us.

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# CATHOLIC LEAGUE QUOTES ON “GOLDEN COMPASS”

November 27, 2007

(BBC America) “World News Today”

**Reporter:** Bill Donohue, doesn't that play into the precise stereotype of the Catholic Church and organized religion? You are so intolerant, you can't bear the idea of kids making their own minds.

**William Donohue:** I think that if we had a movie based off of three books that are anti-gay you wouldn't ask that question, would you? What you are doing is picking up the stereotype. If you had a movie based on books which were racist or anti-Semitic you would not raise the question. You only raise the question with Catholics. Matter of fact, Catholics don't even ask the government to come in and censor what others segments of our population in America do. We are much more tolerant.

November 28, 2007

(CBS) “The Early Show”

**William Donohue:** Well, it's a stealth campaign. It's a dishonest way to produce anything. Quite frankly, the movie is unobjectionable because they want to make money. They want to make certain that there's a second and third movie based off the second and third books of the trilogy.

This is a book that teaches atheism to kids. Not my opinion. Philip Pullman himself is very, very open about this. The movie's basically innocuous, but parents may want to say to their kids, “You know what, a great Christmas present would be

to buy *His Dark Materials*," the name of the trilogy of the three books. Now you've introduced your kid to atheism at Christmastime. I don't think most parents want to do that.

**Ms. Ellen Johnson (President, American Atheists):** I think that the movies are about questioning authority and I think that's a good thing. Questioning the authority of the state, questioning authority of the church. I think that if more children were taught to question authority maybe a lot fewer of them would have been sexually molested by priests.

**Donohue:** That's very cute, Ellen, yeah.

**Johnson:** Atheism is a good thing, it's a healthy thing...and this idea that it's a bad thing is not true.

**Donohue:** It's done wonders in China, hasn't it? Under Stalin it's done a great job there, too.

December 7, 2007

(EWTN) "The World Over"

**Raymond Arroyo:** Philip Pullman has also weighed in and he also has a comment for Bill Donohue in this week's *Newsweek*. He says "to regard it (my work) as this Donohue man has said that I am militant atheist and my intention is to convert children and people, how the hell does he know that?" Bill?

**William Donohue:** Well I can tell you how the Hell I know it. Because I have read what Pullman said. Here's one of his quotes, "My goal is to undermine belief in Christianity." "My books are all about the killing of God." The man has been undisguised, he has been open about his hatred of the Catholic Church. So how the Hell do I know, Phil? Because I read what you have to say. Because I've read what you say and blathered it all over the place so everyone knows about it now, you're angry at me. Well it is a little too late in the game. I guess I won on that one, Phil.

December 7, 2007

(Fox News Channel) "Your World with Neil Cavuto"

**William Donohue:** We have a moral obligation, I think, to alert parents that the movie is not the problem. The problem is the books. But the kids may want to buy the books if they like the movie. If you want to teach your kid how great atheism is and how horrible the Christian Church is and Catholicism in particular then in fact buy your kids the books. I don't think too many people want to do that.

December 7, 2007

(Fox Business Channel) "America's Nightly Scoreboard"

**William Donohue:** The fan base, if you go to [bridgetothestars.net](http://bridgetothestars.net), that is the fan base of Pullman. They're angry as hell at him because again they want their red meat. They want their bigotry raw. They don't like it dumbed down.

December 7, 2007

(CNN) "The Situation Room"

**William Donohue:** I think that it's really slipping in atheism in kind of a back-door fashion.

December 7, 2007

MSNBC "News Live"

**Kiera McCaffrey:** It is not just something that promotes an atheist viewpoint. It actually trashes faith across the board. This is something Philip Pullman has been vocal about for years.