

***THE GOLDEN COMPASS:  
AGENDA UNMASKED***

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**Catholic League**  
*for Religious and Civil Rights*

***THE GOLDEN COMPASS:***  
**AGENDA UNMASKED**

**Published by the Catholic League**

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## NOTICE TO READERS

This booklet was prepared to inform the public of the agenda behind the upcoming movie, “The Golden Compass.” The film is being sold as an innocent children’s fantasy, but in reality there is nothing innocent about it: the movie is based on a book that was written to promote atheism and denigrate Christianity. It opens December 7.

The Catholic League believes in truth in advertising. It is precisely because we abhor deception that we prepared this booklet—to unmask the agenda behind “The Golden Compass.”

William A. Donohue, Ph.D.  
President  
Catholic League

## *About the Film*

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He is regarded as one of England's great storytellers. He is also known as "one of England's most outspoken atheists."<sup>1</sup> What makes him special is that this "atheist with a mission"<sup>2</sup> has targeted children to spread his message.

Meet Philip Pullman, author of *His Dark Materials*, a fantasy trilogy for children. His books are more popular in England than Harry Potter, and now a movie based on his first volume is coming to the big screen. "The Golden Compass" stars Nicole Kidman and is being promoted as a child-friendly film.

It is not clear at this time whether there will be a movie version of the second book, *The Subtle Knife*; it is even less certain whether the third volume, *The Amber Spyglass*, will be made into a film. All of the books teach children the virtues of atheism and the evils of Christianity, especially Roman Catholicism, and in each successive volume the hostility becomes more palpable.

There are indications that the movie version is being toned down so as not to anger Christians. But the fact remains that unsuspecting parents may take their children to see "The Golden Compass" and then buy the trilogy for them, perhaps as a Christmas gift. This is troubling, especially given that the first book is the least offensive; the second is more blatant in its agenda; and the third volume is the most overtly atheistic and anti-Christian of them all. Many secular critics, of course, like the most viciously bigoted book the best, which is why *The Amber Spyglass* won the prestigious Whitbread Prize in 2001; it was the first time a children's book had claimed this award.

Already, Christian-haters are angry that the movie will be a watered-down version of the book. Josh Tyler, for example, says he is "disappointed, but not surprised" that the film "would be Hollywoodized to remove any controversial material...." All the more reason why parents should not take the bait that the movie affords because then they may feel it is okay to purchase the books for their children. Tyler himself admits that the books are "pretty heavily anti-religion" strewn with "god-hating elements."<sup>3</sup>

As far back as May, London newspapers were already predicting that "The Golden Compass" was bound to be "a huge Christmas hit on both sides of the Atlantic." Whether this happens depends on how informed Christians are about Pullman's agenda. There is no question that if Christians, who comprise 85 percent of the U.S. population, learn of Pullman's anti-Christian message, they will boycott the movie. As well they should.

As bad as the books are, the deceit exercised by those associated with the film is worse. For example, Chris Weitz, the screenwriter and director, has already said that those who are looking for a movie about the Catholic Church “will be wildly disappointed.”<sup>4</sup> He further admits that “there may be some modification of terms. You will probably not hear of the ‘Church’ but you will hear of the Magisterium. Those who will understand will understand.” Weitz, by the way, calls himself a “lapsed Catholic, crypto-Buddhist, which I think is appropriate for the piece....”<sup>5</sup> We agree.

In both the book and the movie, the evil institutional force is called the “Magisterium.” In real life, the Magisterium is the teaching body of the Catholic Church, i.e., the pope and the bishops in communion with him. So there is no doubting Pullman’s desire to paint the Catholic Church as evil.

Weitz, however, sensing this could be trouble, is putting a spin on it: “In the books the Magisterium is a version of the Catholic church gone wildly astray from its roots. If that’s what you want in the film, you’ll be disappointed. We have expanded the range of meanings that the Magisterium represents.”<sup>6</sup>

What Weitz means is that the movie may cast God, or what Pullman refers to as the “Authority,” as an entity that “could represent any arbitrary establishment that curtails the freedom of the individual, whether it be religious, political, totalitarian, fundamentalist, communist, what have you.”<sup>7</sup> Similarly, when Pullman is asked why the movie is dumbing down the anti-Christian aspects of his book, he replies that “my main quarrel has always been with the literalist, fundamentalist nature of absolute power, whether it’s manifested in the religious police state of Saudi Arabia or the atheist police state of Soviet Russia.”<sup>8</sup>

This is, of course, dishonest. Pullman did not choose the Politburo as the evil empire—he deliberately chose the Magisterium. “In describing the Church,” writes an English author, “Pullman uses a host of specifically Catholic terminology: It has a pope, a magisterium, cardinals, oratories, intercessors, etc.”<sup>9</sup> So it is not just any ideology or institution that Pullman seeks to smear, it is the Roman Catholic Church.

Equally dishonest is the role of Deborah Forte, president of Scholastic Entertainment, the media arm of Scholastic Corporation. She has been associated with the film from the get-go, acting as producer for New Line Cinema. But unlike her work in producing “The Indian in the Cupboard,” a film that had several Indian advisers on set from two different tribes,<sup>10</sup> or her more recent brainchild, “Maya and Miguel,” an animated television series which accessed the advice of Latino consultants,<sup>11</sup> no religious leaders were asked for their input in the production of “The Golden Compass.”



Scholastic Corporation is the world's largest publisher and distributor of children's books. In making the movie, the mega-corporation expressly violated the tenets of its own Credo, one part of which says, "To help build a society free of prejudice and hate, and dedicated to the highest quality of life in community and nation." Astonishingly, Scholastic also professes a belief in "High moral and spiritual values," and says its stands square against "discrimination of any kind on the basis of race, creed, color, sex, age, or national origin."<sup>12</sup> Except when it comes to Christians.

Just as with Pullman, the rank hypocrisy of Scholastic is made worse by its glaring deceitfulness. On its website, it features a short review of each of the three books that comprise *His Dark Materials*, a short biography of the author and a two-plus page interview with Pullman. Not surprisingly, there is not a single hint of Pullman's in-your-face atheism.<sup>13</sup> In short, it amounts to a sanitized cover-up.

Thus, everyone involved with the movie has a vested interest in not disclosing Pullman's real agenda—using a fantasy to sell atheism to kids. Truth to tell, the real reason why the movie will not be as offensive as the book is profit—they're afraid of angering Christians. Referring to one of the film's producers, Weitz lays it on the line: "New Line is a company that makes films for economic returns. You would hardly expect them to be anything else. *They have expressed worry about the possibility of HDM's [His Dark Materials] perceived antireligiosity making it an unviable project financially.*"<sup>14</sup> (Our emphasis.)

In other words, if the movie offends Christians, they won't buy the books for their kids as a Christmas gift. Which makes our point: This is nothing but a stealth campaign.

## *Pullman's Agenda*

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One astute observer of Pullman's books, Mark Hadley, has said that the Pullman trilogy "may prove to be to children's literature what Richard Dawkins is to science. Both of their writings express a negative opinion of Christianity and its institutions that falls little short of hatred." Hadley hastens to add that Pullman is more devious than his fellow English atheist: "The difference is that Dawkins uses every opportunity to publicly proclaim the perceived dangers of faith, whereas Pullman has cloaked his convictions in the drama and delight of an award-winning children's series."<sup>15</sup>

Peter Hitchens, the English Christian writer and brother of atheist Christopher Hitchens, agrees: "The atheists have driven God out of the classroom and off the TV and the radio, and done a pretty good job of expelling him from the churches as well. But one stubborn and important pocket of Christianity survives, in the Narnia stories of C.S. Lewis. Now here comes an opportunity to dethrone him and supplant his books with others which proclaim the death of God to the young."<sup>16</sup>

Hitchens does not exaggerate. Indeed, Pullman, along with Michael Rosen, has created a DVD for 11-year-olds called "Why Atheism?" In the video, students talk frankly about their atheism and why they left their religion. Pullman wants atheism to be taught in the schools, which is why he made the DVD.<sup>17</sup>

But it is Pullman's fictional work that is the most pernicious, if only because his message floats under the radar. For example, in 2004, the National Theater in London witnessed a performance of his trilogy. "The kids were probably not aware that Pullman's title, 'His Dark Materials,' is a phrase from 'Paradise Lost,'" wrote Louis Menand in the *New Yorker*. "They were probably not aware, either, that the books are intended as an answer to Milton, and an attack on Christian theology and the Church."<sup>18</sup>

Make no mistake about it: Pullman's overarching goal is to indoctrinate children. He wants to seduce them into embracing atheism and rejecting Christianity. What is bothering him, among other things, is the innocence of childhood—he would like to crush it. He is convinced that "it's dangerous to believe that innocence is at its best when untouched by experience."<sup>19</sup>

"We don't seem to know how to view children," Pullman says. He should speak for himself. For example, when a children's book was released that portrayed a teenage girl who morphs into a fornicating dog, Pullman objected to the book's critics—not the book. Just as perverse, when the same author depicted heroin-ad-

dicted teenagers as suffering louts, Pullman responded with a sarcastic “horror of horrors.” No wonder he hates *Winnie the Pooh* books: “Nauseating whimsy, so toe-curling, marshmallowy, sweet and sickly you’d want to throw up.”<sup>20</sup> Not surprisingly, he regards Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* as “fundamentally an infantile work.”<sup>21</sup>

Pullman’s number-one enemy is C.S. Lewis, author of the beloved *Chronicles of Narnia*. It was Lewis’ Christianity, and the success he had in conveying his love for his religion to children, that convinced Pullman to write the anti-Narnia series. It bothers Pullman to no end that Lewis treated children as children: “The idea of keeping childhood alive forever and ever and regretting the passage into adulthood—whether it’s a gentle, rose-tinged regret or a passionate, full-blooded hatred, as it is in Lewis—is simply wrong.”<sup>22</sup>

Even Pullman’s admirers, such as Tony Watkins, have admitted that the atheist storyteller becomes unhinged at the mere mention of Lewis’ name: “When I first witnessed Pullman talking about Lewis I was startled at the anger with which he spoke. It’s a very strong reaction to a mere *story*, even if it is perhaps over-revered by some.”<sup>23</sup>

Watkins is exactly right. Pullman exclaims, “I loathe the Narnia books.”<sup>24</sup> Indeed, he calls the message of those books “anti-life,” “cruel” and “unjust.”<sup>25</sup> He even goes so far as to accuse Lewis of being “blatantly racist” and “monumentally disparaging of women,”<sup>26</sup> accusations which are patently unfair. Why the hate? Of the Narnia books, Pullman says, “I hate them with a deep and bitter passion, with their view of childhood as a golden age from which sexuality and adulthood are a falling away.”<sup>27</sup> In fact, Pullman considers the Narnia series “one of the most ugly and poisonous things I’ve ever read.”<sup>28</sup>

Gene Edward Veith understands what is driving Pullman’s assault on Lewis: “Mr. Pullman’s real objection to Lewis’s children’s books is that they are ‘propaganda in the cause of the religion he believed in.’ That is, that they are Christian. It is true that Lewis intended his stories to teach Christianity, although they surely are more than mere ‘propaganda.’ The irony is that Mr. Pullman’s children’s stories really are propaganda for his religion, namely, a militant and slightly mystical atheism.” This explains why Veith aptly titled his article on Pullman’s work, “Atheism for Kids.”<sup>29</sup>

Pullman wants to turn the story of Adam and Eve on its head. He beckons kids to learn that “the temptation in the Garden of Eden was that of enlightenment rather than an invitation to evil disobedience.”<sup>30</sup> Indeed, two of his central characters, Will and Lyra, “are a sort of Adam and Eve,” notes Deborah Ross, but “instead of reaffirming the Creation story, CS Lewis-style, they subvert it.” According to Ross, Pullman is “all for Eve listening to the serpent and trying the fruit.” Pullman himself

admits that “I see it as a positive act.” When asked if Eve’s defiance shows curiosity and a willingness to embrace life, he answered, “Yes. Absolutely.”<sup>31</sup>

Like so many other fanatical atheists, Pullman believes in a secular utopia—a “heaven on earth”—complete with all the trappings heaven affords, minus God.

He certainly knows how to wax lyrical: “The kingdom of heaven promised us certain things: it promised us happiness and a sense of purpose and a sense of having a place in the universe, of having a role and a destiny that were noble and splendid; and so we were connected to things. We were not alienated. But now that, for me anyway, the King [read: God] is dead, I find that I still need these things that heaven promised, and I’m not willing to live without them. I don’t think I will live after I’m dead, so if I am to achieve these things I must try to bring them about—and encourage other people to bring them about—on earth, in a republic in which we are all free and equal—and responsible—citizens.”<sup>32</sup>

## *Book Synopsis and Excerpts*

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Though much of Pullman's trilogy involves kid-pleasing romps through mystical worlds with talking animals and magical witches, the underlying theme is no simple fantasy. In the fictional universe of *His Dark Materials*, there is no real God; rather there is a high angel called the Authority, who purports to be God. The Church does the bidding of the Authority, repressing physical pleasure and subverting the will and wisdom of the people. Lyra, the protagonist, is a second Eve. Through her Fall, mankind will once again be knowledgeable and free of the restraints imposed by the Authority and the Church. Thus does Pullman turn the Biblical account on its head.

### The Golden Compass

*The Golden Compass*, the first in the series, takes place in the world of Lyra Belacqua, a land that is similar to our own but with marked differences. (Lyra's world has not caught up with the technology of our own, and "the feel is more Inquisition Spain than 19th century England.")<sup>33</sup>

The Church, frequently called the Magisterium, is a Calvinized version of the Catholic Church. The power the Magisterium wields over Lyra's world is explained early on: "Ever since Pope John Calvin had moved the seat of the Papacy to Geneva and set up the Consistorial Court of Discipline, the Church's power over every aspect of life had been absolute. The Papacy itself had been abolished after Calvin's death, and a tangle of courts, colleges, and councils, collectively known as the Magisterium, had grown up in its place."<sup>34</sup>

Lyra, effectively an orphan, resides in Oxford's Jordan College, and spends her days larking with her chums and getting into mischief. Children start to disappear, however, and Lyra and her friends suspect the kidnappers are a mysterious group called "the Gobblers." The Gobblers, it turns out, are not just a figment of the fertile minds of children: the moniker comes from the initials of the General Oblation Board, a division of the Magisterium headed by a sinister beauty named Mrs. Marisa Coulter (later revealed to be Lyra's mother).

The group is explained as follows: "Very old idea, as a matter of fact. In the Middle Ages, parents would give their children to the church to be monks or nuns. And the unfortunate brats were known as oblates. Means a sacrifice, an offering up, something of that sort. So the same idea was taken up when they were looking into the Dust business."<sup>35</sup> This "Dust business" drives the plot, and is a source of strife

between Church authorities (the bad guys) who see the invisible substance as original sin and want to suppress it, and those scientists and rebels (the good guys, led by the enigmatic scientist Lord Asriel) who want to promote it.

The Church kidnaps children because Dust isn't attracted to children as much as it is to adults. The General Oblation Board exists to perform vile experiments on children, the cruelest being one where they sever the child's soul, called a *dæmon* (pronounced "demon"), which lives outside the body in animal form. Though severing a person's *dæmon* effectively turns him into a zombie, it is the Church's idea that it is better to do this than let the children grow up and fall into sin.

With the help of an alethiometer (a magic device that can answer questions truthfully), talking bears, witches and the gyptians (a nomadic group of sailors), Lyra is able to elude Mrs. Coulter and the other agents of the Church and free the kidnapped children.

Lord Asriel (revealed to be Lyra's father) has discovered that severing a child's *dæmon* releases enough energy to actually create a break between worlds. He chooses a victim recently freed from the Church's clutches and destroys the boy, opening a doorway into a parallel universe. Lyra erroneously believes that Lord Asriel is out to annihilate Dust, just like the Church, and follows him into the new world.

### **Selected quotes:**

- **A gyptian leader, discussing the Church:** "The Church in recent times, Lyra, it's been getting more commanding. There's councils for this and councils for that; there's talk of reviving the Office of the Inquisition, God forbid."<sup>36</sup>
- **Mrs. Coulter, speaking about Lord Asriel:** "He's pushed his heretical investigations to the point where it's positively dangerous to let him live. At any rate, it seems that the Vatican Council has begun to debate the question of the sentence of death, and the probability is that it'll be carried out."<sup>37</sup>
- **Lord Asriel, telling Lyra about the Church and the discovery of Dust:** "Now all discoveries of this sort, because they have a bearing on the doctrines of the Church, have to be announced through the Magisterium in Geneva. And this discovery of Rusakov's was so unlikely and strange that the inspector from the Consistorial Court of Discipline suspected Rusakov of diabolic possession. He

performed an exorcism in the laboratory, he interrogated Rusakov under the rules of the Inquisition, but finally they had to accept the fact that Rusakov wasn't lying or deceiving them."<sup>38</sup>

- **Lord Asriel, discussing the General Oblation Board severing children's dæmons:** "There was a precedent. Something like it had happened before. Do you know what the word *castration* means? It means removing the sexual organs of a boy so that he never develops the characteristics of a man. A castrato keeps his high treble voice all his life, which is why the Church allowed it: so useful in Church music."<sup>39</sup>
- **Lord Asriel:** "The General Oblation Board grew out of...the Church's obsession with original sin."<sup>40</sup>
- **Lord Asriel, speaking gleefully of his plans:** "This will mean the end of the Church, Marisa, the end of the Magisterium, the end of all those centuries of darkness!"<sup>41</sup>

### The Subtle Knife

*The Subtle Knife* begins in the present-day Oxford of our own world. Will Parry, a boy with a mentally ill mother, is on the run from a group of violent and mysterious men looking for a suitcase full of letters written by his father, an explorer who disappeared years ago. After stashing his mother with a kindly teacher, Will discovers a window into another world and stumbles through it. In this new world, he meets Lyra.

While Will wants to find out what happened to his father, Lyra is determined to learn all she can about Dust. Lyra decides to go into the Oxford of Will's world, where she locates a physicist who can educate her about Dust. Dr. Mary Malone, a former Catholic nun, has been researching Dust and found that it is matter with consciousness. She has built a computer to communicate with this mysterious matter, and decides that Lyra is really speaking with Dust through her alethiometer. With her computer, Dr. Malone learns that Dust is actually a group of rebel angels who have interceded in human affairs in the past due to a motive of "vengeance." Further, Dust instructs her to follow Will and Lyra and "play the serpent."<sup>42</sup>

According to a prophecy foretold by witches, Lyra is particularly susceptible to being tempted by a serpent. They believe Lyra is a second Eve, destined to be the new mother of all through her disobedience. Additionally, the witches learn that Lord Asriel is planning a war against God, and they want to be on his side—not

only does the Church perform inhumane experiments on children, it also tortures and burns witches.

Meanwhile, Will has fought for possession of a powerful knife that is capable of cutting through the air and making doorways into other worlds. After obtaining this “subtle knife,” Will meets his long-lost father, John Parry, who spent many years living as a shaman in Lyra’s world.

However, the happy reunion is quickly spoiled when a spurned witch murders John. Will returns to the camp he and Lyra have set up, only to find that Lyra has disappeared, leaving her alethiometer behind. Two angels are waiting to meet Will.

### Selected quotes:

- **Mrs. Coulter, speaking from her position of authority with the Church’s General Oblation Board, in an attempt to extract information:** “Oh, there is more suffering to come. We have a thousand years of experience in this Church of ours. We can draw out your suffering endlessly. Tell us about the child.”<sup>43</sup>
- **Serafina Pekkala, a witch:** “They say the Magisterium is assembling the greatest army ever known...and there are unpleasant rumors about some of the soldiers...I’ve heard about...cutting children’s dæmons away, the most evil work I’ve ever heard of.”<sup>44</sup>
- **Ruda Skadi, a witch:** “In every world, the agents of the Authority are sacrificing children to their cruel god!”<sup>45</sup>
- **A servant, speaking about his master, Lord Asriel:** “Well, Lord Asriel has never found himself at ease with the doctrines of the Church, so to speak. I’ve seen a spasm of disgust cross his face when they talk of the sacraments, and atonement, and redemption, and suchlike. It’s death among our people, Serafina Pekkala, to challenge the Church, but Lord Asriel’s been nursing a rebellion in his heart for as long as I’ve served him, that’s one thing I do know.”

**Serafina:** “A rebellion against the Church?”

**Servant:** “Partly, aye. There was a time when he thought of making it an issue of force, but he turned away from that...it’s my belief that he turned away from a rebellion against the Church not because the Church was too strong, but because it was too weak to be worth fighting...I think he’s waging a higher war than that. I think he’s



aiming a rebellion against the highest power of all. He's gone a-searching for the dwelling place of the Authority Himself, and he's a-going to destroy Him."<sup>46</sup>

- **Will's father, speaking to Will:** "There is a war coming, boy. The greatest war there ever was. Something like it happened before, and this time the right side must win. We've had nothing but lies and propaganda and cruelty and deceit for all the thousands of years of human history. It's time we started again, but properly this time."<sup>47</sup>
- **A witch, to her fellow witches:** "Let me tell you what is happening and who it is that we must fight. For there is a war coming. I don't know who will join with us, but I know whom we must fight. It is the Magisterium, the Church. For all its history...it's tried to suppress and control every natural impulse. And when it can't control them, it cuts them out...I have traveled in the south lands. There are churches there, believe me, that cut their children too...not in the same way, but just as horribly. They cut their sexual organs, yes, both boys and girls; they cut them with knives so that they shan't feel. That is what the Church does, and every church is the same: control, destroy, obliterate every good feeling. So if a war comes, and the Church is on one side of it, we must be on the other."<sup>48</sup>

### The Amber Spyglass

Will and Lyra both start out in tough spots in *The Amber Spyglass*. Lyra has been snatched and spirited away to a cave by her mother. To keep the willful girl from running away, Mrs. Coulter keeps her in a drug-induced sleep. Meanwhile, Will is under the care of two male angels, Baruch and Balthamos. These angels are rebel angels, who encourage Will to bring his subtle knife, a.k.a. the "god-destroyer," to Lord Asriel for use in his quest to kill the Authority. Baruch and Balthamos are also homosexuals, and Will is touched by their passion for each other.

Metatron, the Authority's regent and the strongest of all the angels on the side of the Church, attacks Will and his two companions. They escape, and Baruch flies off to visit Lord Asriel and inform him that Balthamos and Will are attempting to free Lyra from Mrs. Coulter's clutches. Baruch is again attacked by agents of the Authority, however, and dies just after delivering his message.

Though Balthamos is devastated by the loss of his love, he continues on with Will. But they are not the only ones looking for Lyra. The Church has learned of the witches' prophecy that Lyra will be the new Eve. In response, the Magisterium's

Consistorial Court of Discipline dispatches a priest named Father Gomez to kill the girl in order to prevent another fall from grace. Father Gomez is chosen to be Lyra's killer because he has prepared himself by doing "preemptive penance."<sup>49</sup> (According to the book, one can obtain forgiveness for a future sin, through self-flagellation and other such mortifications, and then commit that sin while remaining in a state of grace.) He takes off after Mary Malone, believing the doctor will lead him to the girl.

Will rescues Lyra from the cave as agents of the Church fight with Lord Asriel's supporters. The two venture down to the world of the dead, which is "a place of nothing."<sup>50</sup> They free the dead souls into another world, where the spirits float up and dissolve into nature.

Mrs. Coulter is captured by Lord Asriel's army, but escapes and heads to the Church's Consistorial Court of Discipline. The priests promptly arrest her for hiding Lyra instead of turning the girl over to the Church. Mrs. Coulter, who has had a change of heart about the Church and has come to grow fond of her daughter, accuses the priests of having lecherous sexual obsessions.

As Mrs. Coulter sleeps, a priest creeps into her room and steals the patch of Lyra's hair that she wears in a locket around her neck. The priests use the hair to create a bomb that will destroy Lyra, but it fails to kill her.

Lord Asriel and Mrs. Coulter are reunited, and they know they are now on the same side—the side that is against God. Mrs. Coulter successfully lures Metatron into following her by using her powers of seduction. (It is the angel's great regret that he can no longer enjoy a physical body.) Coulter and Asriel tumble off a cliff, and bring Metatron down with them.

Will and Lyra stumble upon God himself. He is not an imposing force, however. Rather, he is encased in crystal and being terrorized by ghoulish beings called cliff-ghasts. He is "so old and he was terrified, crying like a baby and cowering away into the lowest corner...Demented and powerless, the aged being could only weep and mumble in fear and pain and misery."<sup>51</sup> The children release God from the case, and he dissolves into the air like the dead. Father Gomez, who had been stalking Lyra, is killed by Balthamos.

The war over, and God and his agents gone, Lord Asriel's followers can now settle down to building the Republic of Heaven on Earth. Dr. Mary Malone's job, however, still is not done. She is able to play the serpent by telling Lyra and Will about the joy she experienced when she quit being a nun to pursue a relationship with a man, and the pleasure—both physical and mental—that accompanied her decision. Dr. Malone opens the children's eyes to erotic love, and they soon confess

their feelings for each other. Lyra and Will kiss, and in doing so, they become conscious of the pleasures of the body.

Though the children are blissful for a short time, they soon learn that they cannot live for long in worlds other than their own, and every path between worlds but one will have to be closed. If the doors remain open, too much Dust will escape and several worlds will be ruined. Will and Lyra know they could keep the window between their two worlds open and periodically visit each other. However, they selflessly opt to leave open a window in the world of the dead so that departed souls can always find their freedom.

The children part from each other, resolving to live good lives full of hard work so they can help build the Republic of Heaven in their own worlds.

### **Selected quotes:**

- **Dr. Mary Malone:** “I used to be a nun, you see. I thought physics could be done to the glory of God, till I saw there wasn’t any God at all and that physics was more interesting anyway. The Christian religion is a very powerful and convincing mistake, that’s all.”<sup>52</sup>
- **Mrs. Coulter, to a priest, after she leaves the Church:** “Well, where is God...if he’s alive? And why doesn’t he speak anymore... Is he still alive, at some inconceivable age, decrepit and demented, unable to think or act or speak and unable to die, a rotten hulk? And if that is his condition, wouldn’t it be the most merciful thing, the truest proof of our love for God, to seek him out and give him the gift of death?”<sup>53</sup>
- **Ogunwe, an ally of Lord Asriel:** “I am a king, but it’s my proudest task to join Lord Asriel in setting up a world where there are no kingdoms at all. No kings, no bishops, no priests. The Kingdom of Heaven has been known by that name since the Authority first set himself above the rest of the angels. And we want no part of it. This world is different. We intend to be free citizens of the Republic of Heaven.”<sup>54</sup>
- **Balthamos, a rebel angel:** “The Authority, God, the Creator, the Lord, Yahweh, El, Adonai, the King, the Father, the Almighty—those were all names he gave himself. He was never the creator. He was an angel like ourselves—the first angel, true, the most

powerful, but he was formed of Dust as we are, and Dust is only a name for what happens when matter begins to understand itself.”<sup>55</sup>

- **Serafina:** “I met an angel: a female angel...She told me many things...She said that all the history of human life has been a struggle between wisdom and stupidity. She and the rebel angels, the followers of wisdom, have always tried to open minds; the Authority and his churches have always tried to keep them closed.”<sup>56</sup>
- **Father MacPhail, president of the Magisterium’s Consistorial Court of Discipline, discussing Lyra:** “Still just a child, I think. This Eve, who is going to be tempted and who, if precedent is any guide, will fall, and whose fall will involve us all in ruin. Gentlemen...I propose to send a man to find her and kill her before she *can* be tempted.”<sup>57</sup>
- **Dr. Mary Malone, on what she thought about good and evil when she was a nun:** “I knew what I *should* think: it was whatever the Church taught me to think...So I never had to think about them for myself at all.”<sup>58</sup>
- **Mrs. Coulter on why she did not turn Lyra over to the Church:** “If you thought for one moment that I would release my daughter into the care—the *care!*—of a body of men with a feverish obsession with sexuality, men with dirty fingernails, reeking of ancient sweat, men whose furtive imaginations would crawl over her body like cockroaches—if you thought I would expose my child to *that*, my Lord President, you are more stupid than you take *me* for.”<sup>59</sup>

## Book Reviews

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Tony Watkins, the author of a book on Pullman's trilogy, tags the books as "fabulous,"<sup>60</sup> yet this doesn't stop him from being brutally honest about them. Watkins identifies what he calls "the heart" of Pullman's work, that which "underpins the whole of *His Dark Materials*." To be specific, "Philip Pullman portrays the Magisterium and God as unremittingly bad, and he sees all that the Magisterium opposes as wholesome and good."<sup>61</sup>

There is more to this than mere storytelling—Pullman literally believes that God and the Catholic Church are evil. "In the real world," writes Watkins, "Pullman thinks the *idea* of God should be abandoned; in his imagined world, where the Authority is merely an angel, he can kill him off."<sup>62</sup>

At another point, Watkins says that "there is something about the passion with which Pullman denounces it [the Church], and the fact that the Magisterium has not one single redeeming feature, leaves one feeling that the contempt is still directed at the real-world church, even if the specific criticism is only within the realm of fiction."<sup>63</sup> At bottom, "the picture of both God and the church that Pullman paints in *His Dark Materials* is a straw man, which would matter far less if he didn't keep saying the same things in interviews."<sup>64</sup>

Three Australian fantasy writers had the following to say about the *His Dark Materials* trilogy:

Sophie Masson: "I think there is an underlying anti-Catholic tone.... Maybe it's a kind of unconscious English thing on his part—centuries of anti-Catholic 'gunpowder treason and plot stuff.' It's silly that there's no 'good' people in the Church—apart from those who have rejected it, like Mary Malone."

Richard Harland: "I think the anti-Catholicism is only half of what Pullman detests—he's equally opposed to authoritarian churches on the Protestant side."

Ian Irvine: "I felt his attack on the Catholic Church [in the third volume] went way beyond what was necessary for the story, and in fact damaged the story. By the end of the book I felt as though I'd endured a lecture about his beliefs, and that marred the story for me."<sup>65</sup>

In his review of the trilogy, professor Craig Bernthal says the reader meets "hordes of ghoulish and evil priests, who, like the Nazis, are interested in human experimentation." No wonder he labels the books "an anti-Christian fantasy for children."<sup>66</sup>

Another critic, Greg Krehbiel, says that Pullman “doesn’t only hate the church. He hates God—or ‘The Authority’ as he prefers to call him.” Moreover, “The heroes of the story are those who decide to cast off The Authority’s yoke and make war upon him, finally ridding the universe...of this heavenly tyrant. The ‘good guys’ are nuns who broke their vows, little girls who lie incessantly and fallen angels.” Krehbiel concludes with the following admonition: “Avoid this series altogether. It’s a sophomoric anti-Christian diatribe, but dangerous precisely because it is packaged as a fun series of books for young adults.”<sup>67</sup>

In her review of the books, Rachel Ebbs admits that “Pullman further attacks the church for the way it suppresses even the dead. To not be able to escape the church (even in death) is a way in which Pullman uses exaggeration to express his contempt of the church system.”<sup>68</sup> Another admirer, Sarah Lyall, called Pullman’s contribution “a thrillingly ambitious tale...with a radical view of religion that may well hold the most subversive message in children’s literature in years.”<sup>69</sup>

In the pages of the *Washington Post*, it was said that Pullman’s writings constitute “a scathing assault on organized religion.”<sup>70</sup> An English reviewer put it succinctly when she said, “Lewis’s version is informed by his Christianity; Pullman’s driven, far more explicitly, by militant atheism.”<sup>71</sup>

A Catholic reporter from England who is well acquainted with Pullman put it this way: “It is not his atheism (or agnosticism) that should concern Christian readers, but rather his animus against the Church...It is a kind of hatred that leads him to exaggerate the sins and mistakes of Christians down the ages, separate them from the virtues and great achievements, and lay the whole mess at the door not just of Church leaders but of Christian theology.”<sup>72</sup>

Cynthia Grenier was not fond of the trilogy, arguing that “In the world of Pullman, God Himself (the Authority) is a merciless tyrant, His Church is an instrument of oppression, and true heroism consists in overthrowing both. These are dark materials indeed, and they are being marketed to children.” In fact, she says, “were you to rate the trilogy like a film, it would receive an R. Granted, no four-letter words can be found in Pullman, but murder, torture, violent death, and sex abound. And turning Christianity topsy-turvy can certainly be considered blasphemy, another reason why Christian parents should be wary of the books.”<sup>73</sup>

Writing in the *New Yorker*, Laura Miller identifies the theme of Pullman’s work as a portrait of the Catholic Church “run by a cabal of celibate men who are obsessed with sin and eradication. The Church employs torture and a doctrine of ‘pre-emptive penance’—a program of self-flagellation that provides its adherents with a kind of get-out-of-Hell-free card, forgiving them in advance for such politically useful sins as assassination.”<sup>74</sup>

Josh Tyler, a Pullman fan, boasts that “The ‘His Dark Materials’ series is at its core, about a group of people deciding to kill god because well...he’s kind of a douche. Along the way they fight evil Church authorities who kidnap and murder children, and get help from a pair of helpful homosexual angels.”<sup>75</sup>

Philosopher Steve Burton characterizes Pullman as “a devout and unreconstructed child of the ‘sexual revolution’ that began in the 1960s. Not for him the doubts that afflict at least a few of us, here and there, concerning some of the consequences of that interesting episode. *If we could only sweep away the cobwebs of religious sexual repression, he imagines, then we could build the republic of heaven right here on earth!*”<sup>76</sup> Melanie McDonagh is left with a similar impression: “His story is about a battle between good and evil, with the forces of evil as an all-pervading institution, perverting natural sexual impulses and using torture to maintain its power.”<sup>77</sup>

Not for nothing did Britain’s leading Catholic newspaper, *The Catholic Herald*, label Pullman’s volumes “truly the stuff of nightmares.”<sup>78</sup> Similarly, Rupert Kaye, chief executive of the Association of Christian Teachers, said Pullman’s “blasphemy is shameless.” He also noted, quite accurately, that “Pullman uses the names many people will recognise as referring to the God of the Christians and Jews, like Yahweh, the Almighty, and then goes on to say that the same God is not the creator of the universe and hence a liar.” Kaye finds it revealing, as we do, that Pullman chose not to add Allah to the list of names.<sup>79</sup>

Sarah Johnson noticed the same hypocrisy: “What if Pullman had replaced the Magisterium’s crosses and churches with crescents and mosques? Not that he would have dared. Like any playground bully, Pullman knows which kids are least likely to kick him back.”<sup>80</sup>

## *Pullman Bares His Soul*

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“I am all for the death of God.”<sup>81</sup>

“My books are about killing God.”<sup>82</sup>

“I am of the Devil’s party and I know it.”<sup>83</sup>

“The trouble is that all too often in human history, churches and priesthoods have set themselves up to rule people’s lives in the name of some invisible god (and they’re all invisible, because they don’t exist)—and done terrible damage. In the name of their god, they have burned, hanged, tortured, maimed, robbed, violated, and enslaved millions of their fellow-creatures, and done so, with the happy conviction that they were doing the will of God, and they would go to Heaven for it.”<sup>84</sup>

“When you look at organised religion of whatever sort, you see tyranny and repression. It’s almost a universal law.”<sup>85</sup>

“Give them [the Catholic Church] half a chance and they would be burning the heretics.”<sup>86</sup>

“It [the trilogy] depicts a struggle: the old forces of control and ritual and authority, the forces which have been embodied throughout human history in such phenomenon as the Inquisition, the witch-trials, the burning of heretics, and which are still strong today in the regions of the world where religious zealots of any faith have power, are on one side; and the forces that fight against them have as their guiding principle an idea which is summed up in the words *The Republic of Heaven*. It’s the Kingdom against the Republic.”<sup>87</sup>

When asked why *all* of those who believe in God are portrayed as “monolithically odious” in his trilogy, Pullman facetiously said, “OK, that’s an artistic flaw.” He added that “if I’d had more time to think about it, no doubt I would have put in a good priest here or there, just to show they’re not all horrible.”<sup>88</sup>

According to Pullman, the history of the Christian Church is a “record of terrible infamy and cruelty and persecution and tyranny.”<sup>89</sup>

“I don’t profess any religion; I don’t think it’s possible that there is a God; I have the greatest difficulty in understanding what is meant by the words ‘spiritual’ or ‘spirituality.’”<sup>90</sup>



In a letter to the British Humanist Association: “I am happy to support you and argue for your aims, and pour ridicule on faith schools.”<sup>91</sup>

“We don’t need lists of rights and wrongs, tables of do’s and don’ts: we need books, time, and silence. ‘Thou shalt not’ is soon forgotten, but ‘Once upon a time’ lasts forever.”<sup>92</sup>

“Many religious leaders are men who, it’s obvious to anyone but their deranged followers, are willing to sanction vicious cruelty in the service of their faith.”<sup>93</sup>

“My own belief is that God is dead, but that we need heaven nonetheless; and since it’s no longer possible to believe in a Kingdom of Heaven, we shall have to create a republic.”<sup>94</sup>

“I’m trying to undermine the basis of Christian belief.”<sup>95</sup>

## Conclusion

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We live in a time when radical secularists will stop at nothing to advance their agenda. It is one thing to be indifferent toward religion, quite another to unleash an anti-religion crusade. This is exactly what the new atheism is all about—a dogmatic plundering of religion, especially Christianity, done in the name of tolerance.

What makes Philip Pullman different from all the other militant atheists is his determination to proselytize children. Though the movie version of *The Golden Compass* promises to walk very carefully on the subject of religion, the fact remains that parents may be seduced into buying Pullman's books, thinking they are innocuous. They are anything but.

Our interest is to alert the public to Pullman's goal, and we feel confident that the more informed parents are, the more they will reject his message. There is little doubt that if a movie were about to open that was based on a trilogy of children's books that were undeniably racist, anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim or anti-gay, there would be an uproar from the civil rights organizations that represent these communities. Moreover, it wouldn't matter a bit if the film version was mild in comparison to the book. What would matter is that kids were being taught a vile lesson in a back-door manner.

The time has come to draw a line in the sand. If this movie fails to meet the expectations of its producers, it will inexorably lead to a collapse of interest in Pullman's books. By any estimation, this would be an important marker in the culture war. It would also make for a very Merry Christmas.

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# Notes

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