

GOLDEN COMPASS – NARNIA IT'S NOT

By Don Feder

Posted: December 18, 2007

Like Japan's sneak attack on Pearl Harbor, "The Golden Compass" (an atheist's stealth attack on faith) was unleashed on December 7.

Unlike Yamamoto's attempt to sink the U.S. Pacific Fleet, there isn't much bang to "The Golden Compass." The \$150-million blockbuster (actually, it would have a hard time busting a street sign, let alone an entire block) is as flat as cola left in a glass overnight -- as stale as a week-old bologna sandwich.

The first in a planned cinematic trilogy intended to rival "The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe" and "The Lord of The Rings," "Compass" may turn out to be the "Heaven's Gate" of juvenile fantasy films.

The movie is based on a series of children's books ("His Dark Materials"), by British writer Philip Pullman, that are rabidly anti-faith. Pullman is an atheist who makes Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens seem sane by comparison.

"I don't think it's possible there is a God," Pullman opines. "I'm trying to undermine the basis of Christian belief." "My books are about killing God" and "I am all for the death of God."

In this regard, Pullman brings up the rear of a very long line. The death of God has been a cherished goal of French revolutionaries, German philosophers, Soviet commissars and the architects of Nazi genocide. (Hitler confessed that genocide was an act of deicide – that by killing Jews, he intended to prove the non-

existence of God) -- not to mention Hollywood scriptwriters and the current crop of proselytizing atheist authors.

“The Golden Compass” is devious project that has enlisted powerful allies. Everyone from Random House (publisher of Pullman’s books) and Barnes and Noble to brand partners like Coca-Cola and Burger King have a big stake in the movie’s success.

So as not to offend families at the outset, Pullman’s message has been downplayed to the point where most of the story’s anti-religious elements were removed from the script.

While the books make it clear that the evil Magisterium is a Calvinized Catholic Church (demonstrating Pullman’s grasp of theology), in the movie, it’s an ominous authority bent on global domination, whose motives are murky.

Still, there are echoes of the books’ anti-religious theme. Agents of The Magisterium refer to certain ideas as “heresy.” Unknown to most 8-year-old moviegoers, “Magisterium” refers to the teaching authority of the Catholic Church embodied in the episcopacy.

If “The Golden Compass” succeeds, Pullman’s agenda will be up front in the next two installments.

Director Chris Weitz (the genius who brought us “American Pie”) told MTV MovieBlogs.com: “The whole point, to me, of ensuring that ‘The Golden Compass’ is a financial success is so that we have a solid foundation on which to deliver a faithful, more literal adaptation of the second and third books. This is important: whereas ‘The Golden Compass’ had to be introduced to the public carefully, the religious (*anti-religious*) themes in the second and

third movies can't be minimized without destroying the spirit of these books.”

Thus, the movie is chock-a-block full of cute, talking animals (external reflections of the human soul), armored polar bears, valiant flying gypsies, good witches, and even poor Sam Elliot typecast as the wise, folksy ole hombre (but looking like he'd rather be in a sequel to “The Big Lebowski”).

“The Golden Compass” (movie, not book) may be mostly innocuous. It's also insipid. As the wicked Mrs. Coulter, agent of The Magisterium,” Nicole Kidman looks and feels as sinister as a *Vogue* model. This is thin gruel next to Tilda Swinton's menacing, manipulative White Witch in “The Chronicles of Narnia.” Even the young heroine (actress Dakota Blue Richards) comes across more bratty and petulant than spunky. (Its lack of luster is reflected at the box office. “Compass” bombed its opening weekend. In the U.S. and Canada, the box office was only \$26.1 million – compared to \$65.5 million for “Narnia” on its first weekend out, and \$33.3 million for the recently released Disney flick, “Enchanted.”)

There's nothing tentative about Pullman's books, which the author proudly declares are about “killing God” (exactly what happens in the final volume of his trilogy).

Various characters instruct young readers that: “The Christian religion is a very powerful and convincing mistake, that's all,” and “In every world, the agents of the Authority (*Magisterium*) are sacrificing children to their cruel god!”

The Magisterium experiments on children, separating them from their animal spirits (called daemons) and turning them into

zombies, in an attempt to create a more compliant, docile populace. Sounds like public education.

Mark Morford, who spews for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, is a huge Pullman fan. (In an October 24 commentary, the columnist sounds like he wants to have the author's child.)

Morford is borderline delirious over Pullman's books: "The nefarious thing the books aim to kill is, well, religious authority. It's about the destruction of dogma. It's about power, about who wants to control and manipulate life on Earth; it is about blind, ignorant, even violent adherence to insidiously narrow codes of thought and belief and behavior, sex and desire and love. This, of course, is the God of organized religion. This is the false deity that promotes numb groupthink and inhibits growth and abhors the feminine divine ... the same paranoid, dreadful God that votes for George W. Bush because, well, he will smite the icky gays and protect us from vile pagans and Buddhists and Muslims and feminists and frumpy genius atheist British writers."

Secularists never want to control or manipulate, which is why we have the progressive income tax, campus speech codes, hate-crimes legislation and the cult of global warming.

It's revealing how the God-haters always get around to whining about constraints on their sexual behavior. They long for the happy days of Canaanite frat parties, when sex was purely sensual and people rolled in the proverbial hay with men, women, children, domestic animals and every imaginable combination thereof – much like San Francisco today.

That's what feckless middle-class parents are supporting when they schlep their kids to see "The Golden Compass" and buy them boxed sets of Pullman's trilogy for Christmas. How's that for

irony? (“Mommy, why does the Catholic Church want to turn me into a zombie?”)

Hollywood has been bashing believers for decades. In movies like “V for Vendetta,” “King Arthur,” “The DaVinci Code,” “Kingdom of Heaven,” “The Saint,” “The Name of the Rose,” and “The Magdalene Sisters,” Christians are portrayed as vile, violent (but also cowardly), sadistic, hypocritical, greedy, lustful and intolerant, with marked totalitarian tendencies.

Compare the number of movies that depict Christians positively (I saw only one this year – “Amazing Grace”) to those that show them as mutants.

There is no more powerful force for inculcating values (especially in adolescents) than Hollywood, witness a Barna Group Survey, released in September (“A New Generation Expresses its Skepticism and Frustration with Christianity”).

The survey found that only 3% of non-Christians (mostly the never-churched or those who’ve fallen away from the faith) had a favorable impression of evangelicals, versus 25% of the Boomer generation. Most of the former view Christians generally as judgmental (87%), hypocritical (85%), old-fashioned (78%) and too involved in politics (75%).

As a result, while non-Christians are less than 25% of adults over 40, they comprise fully 40% of Americans 16 to 29. Barna observes that this is not a passing trend which will change as the youth of today mature. “While Christianity remains the typical experience and most common faith in America, a fundamental recalibration is occurring within the spiritual allegiance of America’s upcoming generation.”

You can thank Hollywood for that. More than any other institution, the entertainment industry shapes our attitudes about everything from fashion, politics and personal conduct to religion.

I just saw a photograph of Arlington National Cemetery in the snow, with Christmas wreaths resting against row upon row of headstones. Courage and loyalty don't come from Bruce Willis movies but from the faith symbolized by those floral displays.

Pullman understands this, writing: "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 God is dead (or at least on death row), Pullman finds, unsurprisingly, that, "I still need these things that heaven promised, and I'm not willing to live without them."

The British novelist believes that all can be achieved in a "republic of Heaven" – a this-worldly, secular utopia.

This is the delusion of Jacques-Rene Hebert (with his Goddess of Reason), Marx, Stalin, Hitler, Mao, Pol Pot, psychotherapy advocates and other proponents of the isms that have dominated the past two centuries. All end at the gates of Auschwitz, the steps of the scaffold, in an icy gulag, at the doorway of an interrogation cell or on a psychiatrist's couch at \$150 an hour.

Pullman has created a world with talking spirits in animal-form, flying witches, warrior polar bears and a compass that detects the truth. But without God there is no magic (what the Lion Aslan calls "the deep magic").

Not surprisingly, Pullman detests C.S. Lewis' children's classics, calling the series "cruel," "unjust" and "anti-life" (not to mention that Lewis is a better writer).

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." (Sex again.) Besides God, this author of children's stories also hates childhood.

Magic is more than the miracles celebrated at this season (for Jews, the miracle of the menorah; for Christians, a virgin birth). The wonder is all around us. A flower, a sunset, a lover's kiss, a friend's embrace, the smile of a three-year-old – these too are magic.

Everything in creation has a purpose. Doubt often leads to certainty. By challenging complacent faith, atheism can lead to a more mature belief.

For a half-century, Antony Flew was the world's most prominent atheist. An eminent philosopher, Flew was Dawkins before Dawkins – Hitchens with an intact brain.

Beginning with his paper "Theology and Falsification" (which became one of the most widely read philosophical treatises of the 20th century), delivered at the Oxford Socratic Club when Lewis chaired the group, Flew argued passionately and persuasively for the non-existence of God.

The professor said that absent convincing evidence, atheism must be the default position. However, if I ever find that proof, I'll get back to you, Flew promised.

He did in 2004, announcing that he is now a deist. Among other factors, Flew observed that human biology can't be explained by evolution or accident but presupposes a prime mover. This argument is expanded in his just-published book, "There Is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind."

So there is hope for Philip Pullman. In the meantime, by challenging us (modestly), he will end by bringing some closer to God. And that must drive him nuts.

An earlier version of this was posted at GrassTopsUSA.com