

Navigating the theology of 'The Golden Compass'

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For once, I'm on top of a pop culture story.

Evangelicals all over the country are warning one another of the anti-Christian beliefs behind Philip Pullman's "His Dark Materials" series.

But I discovered Pullman's worldview two years ago, when the psychiatrist who was my "don" in Taylor's Oxford January-term program told me to read the three novels before I arrived in Oxford.

My Oxford professor wanted me to read the Pullman books because he felt the development of Lynn's discernment was a great

metaphor for the development of the adolescent psyche. I was to read the books and use Lynn as a case study for my final paper.

That Christmas break, I delved into "The Golden Compass," ignorant of Pullman's atheistic personal views. I read the books, rooting for the merciful, just God who I thought would surely show himself through the messed-up war between the church and various principalities.

But in the middle of the second book, I realized Pullman didn't want me to root for God — that the God he depicted and the God I knew were two different entities.

My time studying adolescent psychology in Oxford was in-

teresting. My don shared many of Pullman's views, and we were both aware of our differing worldviews. I had the challenge of trying to engage his views of psychology as a Christian. Thankfully, the letter he wrote to assess me said I had done so intelligently and respectfully.

I don't regret reading those books. Reading them before I went to Oxford gave me an understanding of the anti-Christian beliefs that many Brits espouse. And I pray the sensitive way I tried to engage the beliefs of my don helped bring him a step closer to Christ.

But as I consider whether children should see the film based on Pullman's books, I must admit "His Dark Materials" requires a healthy dose of parental supervision.


But, honestly, when did parents decide it was OK to become inactive in their children's entertainment or cultural engagement?

Yes, Pullman intended to promote his worldview with the "His Dark Materials" novels in the same way C.S. Lewis influenced so many with "The Chronicles of Narnia." That may be a reason for many Christian parents to keep their young children away from theaters.

But "The Golden Compass" could give parents an opportunity to discuss real-life spiritual issues with their older children. My time in Oxford showed me firsthand the widespread influence of people like Pullman and atheistic / evolutionist Richard Dawkins. Teenagers and especially college students need to be prepared to engage people who espouse these arguments.

I therefore expect the film series will prove worth a watch for Taylor students and professors wanting to process a prominent line of thinking without reading those long fantasy books.

And since some of you will have children before the last film in this trilogy hits theaters — and perhaps more will be youth leaders — we should all start considering how to prepare the next generation for ministry in the midst of diverse beliefs.



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