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Hallowed Secularism

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12-19-2007

### December 19, 2007: More on Philip Pullman

Bruce Ledewitz

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Title: More on Philip Pullman

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12/19/2007--I saw Philip Pullman's *The Golden Compass* last night with my daughter. It was a little jumbled, as people say, but the basic ideas are clear enough. In terms of what people are thinking about an atheistic message, there simply isn't one. There is talk about free will and the Catholic Church is absurdly caricatured as the corrupt, all powerful Magisterium, but this is mere anti-Catholic bias on Pullman's part. It isn't anti-God. And free will is praised at the same time that a prophecy tells of the coming of something like a Messiah. The movie actually reminded me of *Dune*. Pullman is implicitly criticizing C.S. Lewis. In his anti-Narnia, girls are intelligent and powerful and people like sex. But to consider this anti-religion is to assume that religion is inherently sexist and conventional. On any fair reading, and making allowances for a much more conservative culture, Jesus was neither. Nor was Moses. Nor was Mohammed. Religion is more than a socially conservative response. In fact, insofar as the culture is corrupt, religion is radical. Who opposed the end to welfare? Who today risks prison to shelter hunted illegal aliens? You don't have to agree with these positions to see that they are more than social conservatism. Pullman clearly wants to be an anti-religious humanist. But he is too good a novelist to pull it off. I mean by that, that he sees the magic in life. *The Golden Compass* is filled with transcendence. There is nothing anti-religious about it.