

KILLING GOD, A GOOD IDEA?

A review of the books, "His Dark Materials," by Philip Pullman

"My books are about killing God," says award-winning author Philip Pullman, and in the third book of his trilogy, *His Dark Materials*, he does exactly that to God. He kills him.

It's not surprising, then, that Pullman, author of *The Golden Compass*, now a rollicking adventure movie, has gained cult status among atheists. He's an atheist's dream, liberally lacing all three of his novels with anti-God, anti-Church and anti-Christian froth that got him labelled "the most dangerous author in Britain."

He's certainly been clever. He's managed to destroy God and discredit Christianity inside books of fiction and aimed them at children who soak up this stuff without question.

But children's books that tear the guts out of God, the Church and religion? That's pretty heavy material for kids.

In *The Subtle Knife*, for instance, the second book in *His Dark Materials* trilogy, Pullman writes: "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. That is what the Church does, and every church is the same: control, destroy, obliterate every good feeling."

And in *The Amber Spyglass*, Pullman has a former nun say this: "They said Heaven was a place of joy and glory and we'd spend eternity in the company of saints and angels, praising the Almighty in a state of bliss, and that's what led some of us to give our lives and others to spend years in solitary prayer while all the joy of life was going to waste around us and we never knew."

In other words, kids, who needs all this stuff about God, Heaven and bliss in an afterlife when there's so much to enjoy in this life now? We have so much to explore, feel and experience in this world, but along come God and the Church demanding we deny ourselves these joys for the sake of our eternal reward in future. But that's Christianity, children, it rips the joy out of life.

So what does Pullman recommend to children instead? "We shouldn't live as if it (Heaven) mattered more than this life in this world, because where we are is always the most important place."

Forget the afterlife, Pullman preaches, this life is where it's at.

He has a point, though. We live in the here and now, so this is where our joy is, surely, not in some vague, idealized afterlife in the future? Well, yes, if you're someone who's got money, health and the wherewithal to enjoy this life.

But what about the child stuck in an abusive home, or the African child who's lost his parents to AIDS, or the parents who have a child with extreme autism or cancer? What hope does Pullman's atheist platitudes offer people like them, when there's nothing for them in this life and probably never will be? To them the hope of a better life beyond this one is the best news possible.

Christianity goes one better than that, though, by offering powerful help in this life, too.

Contrary to what Pullman thinks, Christianity is very much about the here and now. When the apostle Paul writes, for instance, that "I can do all things through Christ who

strengthens me (Philippians 4:13),” he was talking about the nitty-gritty of daily life in this world, and through Christ’s power being able to meet every challenge life threw at him.

Paul was speaking from experience, too. He went to hell and back in his lifetime, finding himself in situations so desperate and so beyond his reach he simply couldn’t cope on his own strength. But when he called on Christ’s power, he always got it.

Imagine what that tells billions of people on this Earth for whom this present life is the pits - as it is for all of us at one time or another - that strength beyond our human resources is readily available when we need it.

Atheists don’t offer that. They say our human strength and “the indomitable human spirit” are enough to see us through.

But even Pullman would admit that human strength is not enough. All through his novels the heroes need the help of spirit powers to see them through, whether it be angels, witches, knives that cut through into other worlds in the nick of time, or spirit guidance from a golden compass. Human power is never enough in the worlds of Pullman’s creation, just as human power is not enough in ours.

To me, then, it’s fascinating how an author who scoffs at God calls upon beings and objects with spirit powers to help his human heroes reach their goal! To kill God as a good thing in the minds of children, therefore, is not exactly a great idea, is it, when Pullman himself makes it obvious that without the help of powers beyond our own, we humans are helpless?