

THAW!

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IN THIS ISSUE

Please accept my apologies for the tardiness of this edition. I was interrupted by the great events of the Advent and Christmas season. This issue is about Philip Pullman's trilogy called "His Dark Materials", starting with the first story, "The Golden Compass". I have chosen the topic because it has become a cause celebre. Some call it "Atheism for Kids". One author has examined the Pullman entrails; her book is called "Killing the Imposter God". You see what she's getting at: she wants to defend Pullman against the fundamentalists and still end up a Deist, that is, a Christian. Pullman is, you see, a nice guy. Oh?

The first book has been made into a moderately successful movie which complicates my work. I have decided to bypass the theological bait which the

movie has engendered and treat the first book "The Gold Compass" as a book of children's literature and then, in the next issue, to compare it to the movie.

I have found the three volumes of His Dark Materials to be of the same excellence as anything by Tolkien in quality of descriptive writing and in imagination. The same for Narnia. I can recommend Pullman without reserve.

I have found, also, that His Dark Materials is uniquely different from its predecessors in important ways and these differences are the substance of the essay following.

Next month I will compare the book and the movie. And finally I will come to the obsessing question: "Who killed God?"

I hope Francis will forgive.

There's a poem by an over-enthusiastic Archdeacon Weir Shivering.

And there are Christmas greetings from Desmond Tutu and Michael Peers who are members or friends, of Sabeel an ecumenical gathering of Palestinian Christians.

THE GOLDEN COMPASS – His Dark Material, Book 1

Philip Pullman

Another trilogy! Another fantasy! When will the children who have read every word of Narnia, of Frodo, and supremely Harry – when will the kids burn out and get back to something real like SpiderMan III?

The short answer is, "Never"! If you look at the silver screen today, the movies are phantasms of smash and violence coming at you faster than a horde of X-Box paC men. No plot, no character, no relationships, no time. No thought, no imagination.

The field is open; good stories for children are still in demand.

The Golden Compassk volume one of "His Dark Materials" doesn't disappoint; indeed it produces for the young reader a lot more than he or she might expect!

First, this is a fantasy about the real world: where we live. Not about some imaginary realm through a cupboard door, (Narnia). It's not about magic school and riding brooms, (Philip Potter)..And it's not a time warp into middle earth before it all began, (Frodo). It's about this world, more or less.

The people live now – more or less. They have obsolete technology, like zeppelins. On the other hand their science is sometimes the same as ours; they have “anabaruc” force, which we know as electricity. They know about sub-atomic particles and most important they are on the track of the ultimate particle which we call the Higgs Boson and which they call, simply, “Dust”.

Now here we need a couple of reminders about, (ugh!), modern physics. First, in mathematics, there can be many more than one universe existing at a time. And second, the one we live in is based on principles of uncertainty and probability. The universe we live in is about 15 billion years old and is about as large as light can travel in that time. Rather large, you'd say. It all started from one singular event in which time and space, matter and energy all came flying out of a point of infinite heat and density. The original substance, the single individual particle of energy which burst on the scene and from which all else devolved is called the Higgs Boson. Not found yet, for it exists only in the original conditions of, dare we say, creation, if at all.. But the power of conjecture was never greater; the Higgs Boson is real enough in the imaginations of astrophysicists that, as we speak, a massive trillion dollar cyclotron is being built in Switzerland to emulate the astronomical conditions of the “big bag” and to create for a nanomoment, the Higgs Boson, or as it is often called “The God Particle”. Maybe. As in “In the beginning, God...”

Now if this so-called Higgs Boson did not set precisely the same initial conditions of the “Big Bang” as our's did, then the universe which evolved would not be the same as this one. A parallel universe (Higgs#1) might have sprung forth quite different. All iron, for example. Or perhaps like ours but not in ever respect. There could be universes made out of anti-matter, (to be avoided!) Furthermore if there are 10 possible conditions and one of them is “chosen” as an initial condition, then what happens to the other 9? They can become real in 9 other universes. So say the Mathematicians. So the idea that there is but one universe which is mathematically possible and it's ours and it is focused on the well-being of humankind, (the anthropic principle) is not correct. It's mathematical hooey.

Which leads to an ambivalence we hold when it comes to the creation of the universe. On the one hand we look out the window and there is space and we

look at our watches and there is time. They are both always the same. A minute is a minute is a minute. Inches don't stretch.

Except they do. Time and space are not constants; they are relative. We try to live in two universes at once, Newton's and Einstein's. But we depend on Einstein's; the universe of quantum mechanics, uncertainty, probability, relativity - in which almost anything can happen, unpredictably. This is not the world of the Psalmist in which all things were laid upon the surest foundations, but it's our dirty little secret universe.

Now which is imagination and which is down-to-earth- reality is a moot point. In the Golden Compass, the intellectuals, the scientists (who are called "theologians") are on to something not unlike Higgs. They call it "Dust" - this ultimately small stuff which drifts down into the universe from some other. Fine, invisible to the normal eye; charged, they know not with powers for good or ill. The Church thinks it's evil; the fall-out from original sin. Our heroine, the rather bratty Lyra, thinks it might be a tremendous force for good. But that comes later.

If there were one chief difference between the Pullman imagination and Potter's or Narnia, or Tolkien, it would be this: they operate in a one-universe science and Pullman doesn't. They are Newtonian. They are rather flat-earth. But Pullman! He is an Einsteinian. He is of the generation of Verner Heisenberg or Schroedinger or Bohr. Pullman - he will drag you through multi-worlds, and in the end he and his impertinent kids will save it all.

And don't be surprised to meet up with some mighty dysfunctional families on your travels.

In volume 2, "The Subtle Knife" you will journey through the many universes of Pullman's imagination and in the final volume, "The Amber Spyglass" we will come to the ultimate question of questions; "Who killed God?" and to another review of the trilogy, "Killing the Imposter God" by Donna Freitas

Finally, Philip Pullman does not take the back seat to other narrators of children's stories. His descriptions are lovely, his adventures unique and some of his creations should take a place in the hall of fame of children's fantasy; Iorek Bristle the armored bear, for example.

GOLD DUST

By the Ven Weir Shivering

Golden Dust is sifting down
light itself it seems to be
brings a smile for every frown
joyfully, so joyfully

Fine as flour and bright as mirth
mending cloth and broken thread
sprinkling everything with birth
giving vigour to the dead.

Some other universe is over-filled;
too much goodness to contain
on me let the residue be spilled
setting me all right again.

Dear Friends and Supporters of Canadian Friends of Sabeel,

Here are Christmas messages from Sabeel, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, patron of Sabeel, and Archbishop Michael Peers, patron of Canadian Friends of Sabeel. Below the messages you will find some resources regarding the plight of Palestinian Christians and the challenges of living in Bethlehem today.

Lastly, we finish this e-mail with the Sabeel Wave of Prayer for December 20, 2007. Please note that there will be no Wave of Prayer next week, and that it will resume on January 3, 2008.

Best wishes for a joyful Christmas & Peaceful New Year,

Rev. Robert Assaly
Chair, Canadian Friends of Sabeel

SABEEL CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

Bethlehem not Annapolis

Dear Friends,

During this Christmas season as we reflect on the message of the angels, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace..." we can only understand it against the peace which Caesar gives. God's formula for peace is juxtaposed with Pax Romana. For Caesar, peace is imposed by the might of empire. This is evident when occupied people are forced to give homage to Caesar, when they are coerced to pay taxes to Rome, and when they accept Rome's sovereignty and unquestioned domination. It is against this kind of peace that the radical message of Christmas comes to us, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace..." Peace comes when the sovereignty of God is acknowledged rather than Caesar's. For people living under occupation or oppression, Caesar has become a symbol of the evil that crushes and enslaves.

For many of us, the message of the angels stands for God's kingdom. In the kingdom of God, glory and sovereignty belong to God and not to Caesar. God's peace is not achieved by crushing and eliminating others but by embracing them. Caesar's empire is built on violence and military might, God's empire is built on justice and mercy. Caesar's peace enslaves and humiliates, God's peace liberates and restores dignity to the oppressed. Caesar builds walls to separate people, God tears down the walls of separation to join, unify, and reconcile them one with the other. Caesar's peace is exclusive for a chosen few, God's peace is inclusive for all regardless of their race or ethnicity.

Ultimately, peace will come not from the Caesars and all those who trust in their military might and in the arrogance of their power but from the meek that put their trust in God. It is the meek who will inherit the earth. Peace will come from the labor, toil, and hard work of all those who do not glory in their riches or in their power but glory in their love and service of God and in their love and acceptance of others. God's message of peace still rings true, not from Annapolis that represents empire, but from the small town of Bethlehem, Palestine that still suffers under occupation. The peace that the Caesars of the world give is largely false and deceptive, and it cannot last. Only the peace that God gives, the peace that is based on justice and truth will survive and prosper.

In the midst of these uncertain times, Sabeel wishes all its friends a joyful

Christmas. May the New Year bring us closer to the peace we hope for; and let us continue the struggle together for the achievement of God's peace for all the people of Palestine-Israel.

Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center
Jerusalem
December 18, 2007

Dear Friends of Sabeel,

Rejoice in Peace and proclaim the Good News! I send you my greetings of peace in this Christmas season of 2007 with a message of hope for Palestinians, Israelis and God's world.

Rejoice in Peace! This was the spirit of our unsurpassed Sabeel conference in October when almost 900 people gathered inside Boston's historic Old South Church to proclaim peace and to call for an end to military occupation and apartheid in Palestine. They came to learn about "The Apartheid Paradigm in Palestine-Israel" and the similarities and differences with our experience in South Africa. Jews, Christians and Muslims shared knowledge and views on theology, history, political analysis and recommendations for positive actions for change.

The Old South Church is itself a reminder of America's own history of struggle against oppression, a symbol of the founding revolutionary spirit calling for justice and liberty for all. Participants came from 30 U.S. states and five different countries. They packed the old church to the rafters. There is a spirit for change in the air, a hunger for justice and peace for the Holy Land and for the whole world.

My address at the Sabeel conference was really a *cri de Coeur*, a cry of anguish from the heart to the Hebrew children of God who are my spiritual relatives and antecedents, my plea that they hear the noble call of their scriptures, a plea to not forget what happened to them in Egypt and more recently in Germany, to remember and act appropriately by working to end the Israeli government's cruel and unjust occupation and policies of apartheid.

Apartheid's rulers in South Africa bit the dust as all oppressors have done always, for this is a moral universe and right and wrong matter. It cannot happen that evil, injustice and oppression can have the last word. No!

Ultimately, goodness, justice, freedom and peace--these will prevail. Each one of us who freely give of our talent and our treasure participate in this action.

The enclosed gift to you from Sabeel provides footage of the Boston conference and selected excerpts of the speakers and images of people working for peace. Use this to educate others in your churches and schools and in your communities.

Your generosity and hard work are helping to change God's world. With gratitude for your past support we ask for a generous Christmas donation to Friends of Sabeel so that this important work will continue.

Rejoice in Peace! And may the Prince of Peace be your light and your guide.

+Desmond M. Tutu, Archbishop Emeritus

The gift referred to above in Bishop Tutu's letter is a FREE DVD--18 minutes of excerpts from the FOS-NA conference in Boston in October. This DVD features Bishop Tutu, Naim Ateek, Hilary Rantisi, and clips from the post-conference rally. Some Friends groups received the Christmas Appeal package with the letter, DVD, donation form and envelope. CFOS does not have enough copies to send one to each of our members, however, if you would like the DVD mailed to you for free, please send an e-mail with your name and address to: cfos@ca.inter.net. We would be happy to send a copy to those who specifically request one.

CHRISTMAS 2007

One of the great carols of this time in the Christian year prays that the Christ child may "sleep in heavenly peace". And it is a prayer we can offer for all children in whatever time and place.

But the prophet Jeremiah speaks harshly of those who declare "peace, peace, when there is no peace". And a contemporary prophet, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, has said the same thing in his words "there is no peace if it is not peace with justice".

Jesus was born in occupied territory and Bethlehem is still occupied. In those days the occupier was Rome and the oppressed were Jesus' own people, the Jews. The names of the occupier and the occupied have changed but the script remains the same.

And we hear again promises of peace to be brokered by the leader of the world's greatest empire -- his track record for justice for the oppressed a dismal

one and his credibility, even among his own people, exhausted. And still the walls grow higher and more punitive.

But peace for the people of Bethlehem and all the occupied lands must remain our prayer, and the justice that alone can guarantee that peace must remain our goal, so that one day, sooner rather than later, the sleepless oppressed may know in their own land a peace they can call "heavenly".

+Archbishop Michael Peers
Patron, Canadian Friends of Sabeel