

Silver screen monsters lack intellectual basis

Now I see angels and demons everywhere, says Clary (played by Lily Collins) at the end of *The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones*, summing up the enlightenment she has attained. The movie's theme is good versus evil, and it has vampires and werewolves and pretty much everything else that's been populating the popular imagination from *Harry Potter* to *Twilight*.

Meanwhile, the Catholic writer Joseph Bottum thinks that traditional marriage is culturally indefensible. He alleges people don't have an "enchanted" vision of the world anymore.

Excuse me, but I can't fail to notice the glut of monsters and magic in entertainments. I think people are entirely comfortable with "enchantment." Apparently they can't get enough.

And no wonder. Lacking a traditional intellectual formation, such stories of "enchantment" are often the only way people can express their inchoate spiritual yearnings. So, if you aren't hitting home runs for the new evangelization in this slo-pitch culture of enchantment that's all around us,



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C.S. Morrissey

then I say you need to step up to the plate.

A film like *City of Bones* is a terrific conversation starter for anyone who wants to engage the culture. As its heroine Clary learns, "all the stories are true." In what sense? Well, a Catholic eye can easily see a human longing for the Eucharist in this movie's scrambled but "enchanted" mythology. Driving its plot is a special chalice upon which the fate of the universe depends.

But even more fundamental is what drives its central characters. Clary is raised by a single mother (played by Lena Headey). Clary's life is lived in the shadow of her absent father. Given that this is Clary's most fundamental dilemma, articulated by the story's main metaphor of "shadow-hunting" (the movie's own term for exorcising the demons that plague contemporary culture), then clearly it's a false diagnosis by Joseph Bottum to point to insufficient cultural "enchant-



Jemima West, Robert Sheehan, and Lily Collins star in a scene from the movie *The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones*. C.S. Morrissey writes, "A film like *City of Bones* is a terrific conversation starter for anyone who wants to engage the culture."

ment." Every enchanted story I see on the screen is a metaphor for the spiritual hunger of the children of broken families.

Our problem is thus not a lack of enchantment in the popular imagination. However clumsy, contemporary mythology like *The Mortal Instruments* gives undeniable evidence of the spiritual longings of wounded souls.

Our problem, rather, is

the way false philosophical premises govern our cultural mindset. False premises have taken root in people's minds and have corrupted their thinking about politics and morality.

This cultural sickness is accurately diagnosed in a new book, from Scott Hahn and Benjamin Wiker, called *Politicizing the Bible*. This impressive academic volume makes the case how secularization-the deliberate

subordination of the spiritual to the secular order-began intellectually in the fourteenth century and has been ruthlessly poisoning Christendom over the past seven centuries. Secularization has been shaping our cultural mindset, in a way we are scarcely able to recognize. Even if we can recognize it, most religious people are philosophically at a loss as to how to mount a resistance using reason.

Take, for example, the recent case of the New Mexico Supreme Court upholding a lower court ruling making it "illegal for a photography business owned by Christians to refuse to photograph a same-sex wedding ceremony." In the name of "human rights," Justice Richard Bosson said this of the business owners: the "Huguenins today can no more turn away customers on the basis of sexual orientation-photographing a same-sex marriage ceremony-they could refuse to photograph African-Americans or Muslims."

Really? And are we going to be forcing vegetarian photographers to take pictures of cooked animal flesh too? As if there are no carnivores out there happy to take pictures of what vegetarians would rather not?

Justice Bosson writes that "there is a price, one that we all have to pay somewhere in our civic life. In the smaller, more focused world of the marketplace,

of commerce, of public accommodation, the Huguenins have to channel their conduct, not their beliefs ... In short, I would say to the Huguenins, with the utmost respect: it is the price of citizenship."

The judge is asserting a radical claim: in the public sphere, the spiritual is entirely subordinate to the political. This is a philosophical argument that is nothing short of revolutionary.

As Scott Hahn and Benjamin Wiker make clear, this idea of the total subordination of the spiritual to the political was not always around. It was first articulated by Marsilius of Padua, in the fourteenth century, in an infamous book, *Defensor Pacis*, condemned by the Catholic Church.

This book, Hahn and Wiker write, was "not merely a political tract aimed at a particular political situation. It is, in the deepest sense, revolutionary, a landmark philosophical document in the secularization of the west."

If you have never heard of this book, then it is unsurprising if perhaps you have no coherent intellectual response to make to the sort of anti-Christian totalitarianism being imposed in the name of human rights in places like New Mexico.

We've got plenty of enchantment. I don't know if I can take another movie about vampires and werewolves. What real "shadow-hunters" need is philosophical argumentation and historical consciousness. So, if you don't know more about the intellectual assault that has been rolled out for the past seven centuries, perhaps it's time to go back to school-even if that just means educating yourself at home this fall with a book from Scott Hahn.

C.S. Morrissey is an associate professor of philosophy at Redeemer Pacific College. □

