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Open letter to
Msgr. Peter Fleetwood
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Fax: 0041 71 227 33 75

July 20, 2005

Dear Father Fleetwood,

I received a transcript of your interview with Vatican Radio, program 105live on 14 July 2005. In it you say:

Interview of Msgr. Peter Fleetwood with Vatican Radio, program 105live on 14 July 2005.

"I was sent a letter from a lady in Germany who claimed to have written to the then cardinal Ratzinger, saying that she thought Harry Potter was a bad thing. And the letter back, which I suspect was written by an assistant of the then cardinal Ratzinger in his office, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, suggested that there was a subtle seduction in the books. What that subtle seduction was, was not specified, which makes me think it was a generic answer. And she had written a book on these subjects and so the Cardinal's signature was at the bottom of the letter, suggesting she should send me the book."

"I think one has to be quite calm in judging cultural phenomena. I've got a funny feeling that the success of Rowling is what started some people. Is it a kind of envy? I don't know. But why they got so mad against her, I just don't understand."

On 19 July 2005 the Austrian News Service Kathpress released the following information:

„Vor Fehlinformationen über die Haltung des Vatikans zum Bucherfolg "Harry Potter" hat Msgr. Peter Fleetwood, Konsultor des Päpstlichen Kultur-Rates, gewarnt. Fleetwood war vom heutigen Papst, als dieser noch als Kardinal Joseph Ratzinger Präfekt der vatikanischen Glaubenskongregation war, mit der Untersuchung des Phänomens "Harry Potter" beauftragt worden.“

(Translation: Peter Fleetwood, Cunsultor of the Papal Council for Culture, warned concerning misinformations about the attitude of the Vatican towards the booksuccess ‚Harry Potter‘. Peter Fleetwood was assigned by Cardinal Ratzinger, then Prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith, to investigate the phenomenon ‚Harry Potter‘.)

I object to your statements as not being true. I am afraid, I can only prove this by quoting the relevant correspondence.

What happened is this:

In the **Vatican press conference of 2 February 2003**, where the New Age document by the title “Jesus Christ, Bearer of the water of Life” was presented, you were asked by the journalist John Allen whether “the new document’s concern about magic and witchcraft could be extended to the magic and witchcraft portrayed in the Harry Potter books by the British author J. K. Rowling.”

In your Fax to the Pontifical Council for Cultura on 6 February 2003 you say:

Fax by Peter Fleetwood sent to the Pontifical Council for Cultura on 6 February 2003

“This was clearly not a question about the New Age document, but an attempt to win a ‘scoop’, a ‘sound-bite’ that would make headlines. As the week progressed, Allen’s hopes were clearly realised beyond his expectations. However, some of the headlines strike me – the one who answered Allen’s question – as quite bizarre.

It is a pure trick of journalistic liberty to use headlines like “Vatican gives green light to Harry Potter”, [underlined by G. Kuby] or to suggest that, while New Age is bad, Harry Potter is good. I also never said that Rowling’s books were imbued with Christian principles. What I said was that they are meant to underline for children the difference between good and evil, and Rowling’s conviction that, in the end, good always triumphs over evil.”

Further down in this fax you say:

“As regards comments made by Father Gabriel Amorth about Harry Potter, it has to be remembered that what he is reported to have said is his opinion. Like mine, it is something personal and has no more or less authority than what I think.”

These “bizarre headlines” were the reason why I sent my book against Harry Potter to Cardinal Ratzinger, then Prefect of the Congregation of the Doctrine of Faith, who had supported my engagement for the renewal of Catholic Faith by making very favourable statements on my previous books. I wrote to Cardinal Ratzinger on 20 February 2003:

Letter of Gabriele Kuby to Cardinal Ratzinger on 20 February 2003:

Daß es in der Kirche Verwirrung über Harry Potter gibt und diese Bücher in den meisten Pfarrbibliotheken zu finden ist, ist schlimm genug, denn sie stellen Fluchen, perverse magische Praktiken bis hin zu einem auf 30 Seiten geschilderten satanischen Blutrítual als normalen Alltag dar. Daß es aber nun heißen kann: ‘Der Vatikan gibt grünes Licht für Harry Potter’, ist niederschmetternd.“

(Translation: „That there is confusion in the church about Harry Potter and the fact that you can find them in most church-libraries is bad enough, for they present cursing, perverse magic practises, including a satanic blood-light to Harry Potter’ is devastating.”) ritual described on 30 pages, as normal every day life. But that there are now headlines like ‘Vatican gives green

The answer of Cardinal Ratzinger to Gabriele Kuby of 7 March 2003:

Sehr geehrte, liebe Frau Kuby!

Vielen Dank für Ihren freundlichen Brief vom 20. Februar und für das lehrreiche Buch, das Sie beigelegt haben. Es ist gut, dass Sie in Sachen Harry Potter aufklären, denn dies sind subtile Verführungen, die unmerklich und gerade dadurch tief wirken und das Christentum in der Seele zersetzen, ehe es überhaupt recht wachsen konnte.“

Ich möchte Ihnen vorschlagen, Herrn Peter Fleetwood (Pontificio Consiglio per la Cultura, Piazza S. Calisto 16, 1-00153 Roma) direkt zu schreiben und ihm Ihr Buch zuzusenden.

*Herzliche Grüße und Segenswünsche
Ihre*

+ Joseph Kardinal Ratzinger

(Translation: "Thank you very much for your kind letter of 20 February and for the instructive book, that you attached. It is good that you enlighten us on the Harry Potter matter, for these are subtle seductions that are barely noticeable, and precisely because of that have a deep effect and corrupt the Christian faith in souls even before it could properly grow. I want to suggest to you to write to Mr. peter Fleetwood directly (address) and send him your book.)

On 13 March 2003 I wrote to you and sent you the book, quoting the above letter.

You answered by e-mail on 2 April 2003. Not with one word do you doubt the authenticity of the letter of Cardinal Ratzinger, nor is there any indication that you were officially assigned by the Cardinal to evaluate Harry Potter. You repeat your private positive judgement of the Harry Potter series and include the fax you sent to the Pontifical Council for Cultura (6 Febr. 2003). You refer to Father Peter Milward, “whose judgement on the subject” you consider as “far more worthy of consideration than my own”.

I replied to your e-mail with letter of 11 April 2003.

Letter of Gabriele Kuby to Peter Fleetwood of 11 April 2003:

“It surprises me that you see Father Peter Milward's judgement ‘far more worthy of consideration than my own’, but don't seem to think Cardinal Ratzinger's judgement worthy of any consideration at all. Cardinal Ratzinger says that Harry Potter ‘destroys Christian faith in the soul, before it could take root.’ Is this not something to consider very seriously if it is said by the highest protector of our faith?”

You mention that what you said is just your personal opinion. Since it is hugely magnified through your position, your opinion doesn't remain ‘personal’, but carries the weight of great responsibility.”

Meanwhile I had received another letter from Cardinal Ratzinger, allowing me to make public use of his above statement against Harry Potter:

Letter of Cardinal Ratzinger to Gabriele Kuby of 27 May 2003

Sehr geehrte, liebe Frau Kuby!

Irgendwie ist ihr Brief in der Masse der Namenstags-, Geburtstags- und Osterpost untergegangen. Endlich ist dieser Stapel abgetragen, so daß ich Ihnen gern gestatten kann, sich auf mein Urteil über Harry Potter zu berufen.

Herzliche Grüße und Segenswünsche

Ihr

+ Joseph Kardinal Ratzinger

(Translation: “Somehow your letter drowned in the mass of nameday-, birthday- and Easterpost. At last this stapel has been cleared, so I gladly give you permission to call on my judgement about Harry Potter.”)

On a Christmas Card 2003 Cardinal Ratzinger added in handwriting:

“Herzlichen Dank für Ihren mutigen Einsatz gegen Okkultismus und Magie.”

(Translation: „Thank you very much for your courageous engagement against occultism and magic.”)

Do the letters of Cardinal Ratzinger sound like “a generic answer of an assistant”? Is it necessary to hint at “envy” as my motivation? Have you been officially assigned by Cardinal Ratzinger to evaluate the Harry Potter series?

Dear Mr. Fleetwood, you and I believe in a society where different opinions can be put forward. As a priest and consultant of the Papal Council for Culture I ask you

to publicly correct your statements and “suspicious” that are not in accordance with the truth.

I will send a copy of this letter to Radio Vatican and any other media where the erroneous information is passed on.

Yours sincerely

Gabriele Kuby