

What About



FOR PARENTS: A balanced review of the best-selling book series

by John A. Younts

Harry Potter is at once a likeable, daring, and mischievous orphan who holds the fate of his magical world in the grasp of his wand. J.K. Rowling has created an engaging story line which in some ways resembles C.S. Lewis' Narnia. Rowling explores the lives of children in their early adolescent years with insight and compassion. Her literary strengths of plot and dialogue set the "Hogwarts Chronicles" firmly in place as classic children's literature. Rowling is a powerful storyteller. She has created a fantasy world which is remarkably consistent and inviting. It is one which appeals to children and adults alike. The record setting sales of the four Harry Potter books bear this out.

So, is Harry Potter a good friend for your children? To answer this you must first understand Harry's world which Rowling has constructed. It is a world where good and evil battle for dominance. After reading the first four books there is no clear evidence that good or evil will prevail. Harry seems to be the best hope the good side has to offer. This uncertain balance between good and evil is called dualism. Dualism is the dominant theme of eastern thought and philosophy. Both good and evil are necessary to maintain the balance of life. If one side were to get the upper hand the balance of life would be disturbed. In the world of the dualist, both good and evil are needed.

This is distinctly different from the Biblical worldview, which teaches us that not only will evil be defeated, but that God through His Son, Jesus Christ, has already won the victory. The presence of evil is not ultimately necessary to maintain balance and perspective. The Christian looks forward to the place where the Lamb will be honored and provide all the light that is needed. The Christian looks forward to life

without sin and misery. His world is not dualistic but monistic, focused on the one true God Who has triumphed over the forces of evil with great spectacle, as Colossians 2:13 teaches.

Harry Potter, like Luke Skywalker before him, is presented as a temporary savior, one who can hold back the forces of darkness for a moment, for a lifetime, but not ultimately. Just as defeating Darth Vader provided the reason for Luke Skywalker's existence, the defeat of Lord Voldemort is Harry Potter's purpose and focus. Indeed, I believe that Harry Potter will become even more dominant in the beginning of the 21st century than Luke Skywalker was at the close of the 20th century.

There are many similarities between the first three Star Wars movies and the first three Harry Potter books. As a parent you will want to inform your children about dualism and the dangers of the "dark side." You will want to make sure your children understand the differences between the biblical worldview and the eastern, new age, dualistic themes that control Harry Potter and Luke Skywalker. You will want encourage your children that while the powers of Harry and Luke are fictional, the power of Christ is real and vital. If you provide your children with this insight and warning, and you interact with your kids about them, there is no reason for you and your kids not to enjoy Harry and Luke as fictional characters.

However, the fourth Rowling book, *Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire*, moves into different territory. Sadly, it is territory that possibly should not be traveled at all. At the end of the fourth novel, Harry is confronted by a reincarnated, dark, Satan-like Lord Voldemort. Rowling intermingles themes of blood sacrifice, fear, death, evil beings and the dark spirit-world, which moves her fiction into the arena of spiritism, where the Bible (in Deuteronomy 18) forbids us to go. The dark creatures in this fourth novel resemble more the forces of hell than the musings of fantasy.

The real danger in any well-done movie or book that lacks a biblical worldview is for the reader or viewer to look at the world as if Christ did not live and did not care for His people. For example, when a book or movie deals with a theme that is fearful, it is crucial to understand how the main characters are coping with fear. How does this fictional coping differ from the

way a Christian, relying on the Bible, should deal with the same fear? To the degree that the reader or viewer experiences fear (or any other theme) through the eyes of the leading character (that is, through the eyes of the author), it is to that degree he is learning not to rely on Christ.

God designed people to learn by example. If you identify with how Harry handles his fear in the face of evil without Christ, you also will learn to attempt to face evil by relying on yourself. The more appealing the character and plot, the more powerful influence it will be and the more this example will be followed. Harry is an appealing character. What protects him is his bravery, courage and resourcefulness when confronted with evil. What protects a Christian is the commitment of His God to him and the love and trust that he places in the God of the Bible. Powerful literary themes and plots can subtly teach a Christian not to rely on Christ but on himself. The author of the story (and therefore, his worldview), rather than God and the Bible, becomes the reference point for dealing with fear. The evil confrontation that climaxes the fourth Potter novel is too close to the biblical view of darkness. It is too close in the sense that Satan-like evil is successfully thwarted without the power of Christ.

So, the fourth Potter book presents two new problems for the concerned Christian reader. The first problem is a presentation of evil forces that more closely represent the satanic forces of Scripture than the earlier novels, and the second is Harry's temporary victory over these forces without the power of Christ.

To be sure there are other issues that need to be addressed with Harry Potter. However, these two issues in the fourth book should give pause to Christians who want their children to have a biblical view of God's world. In *The Goblet of Fire*, Harry takes a path that your children should not follow. Consider these recommendations:

Before you let your children read the Harry Potter novels you should be confident that they have the ability to sharply define the difference between fantasy and God's world. Because Rowling is a good storyteller younger children could be easily influenced to think the world of Harry Potter is real or possibly real. While this is somewhat arbitrary, depending upon the child, I would suggest that you wait until your child is at least eleven and probably older, before you let

him read these books. Parents, you should definitely read these novels before your kids do. You need to know what is coming in order to determine how children will interact with the books. Rowling, like C.S. Lewis, introduces many dark, spiritual characters in her books. She, like Lewis, constructs a world of magic and enchantment. Your children need to know how to handle these themes. You will do your children a tremendous service if you do biblically interact with them about these themes. Healthy discussion at this point in a child's literary development will give you a basis for warning them of the evil dangers contained in the hugely popular writings of Anne Rice and Stephen King. Rice and King are two authors you want your children to avoid.

Sadly, *Harry Potter and The Goblet of Fire*, could be a bridge to the truly malevolent writings of Rice and King. Some of you might counter that the first three Potter books are a bridge to *The Goblet of Fire* and thus all Harry Potter is a bridge to a darker world. My response is that we cannot hide our children from the world around them. Themes of the occult and dark magic are increasing in the literary world. Addressing these themes by attempting to avoid them altogether will leave your children defenseless when they are confronted by them. Anne Rice and Stephen King are also good writers. By discussing Lewis, who is widely accepted by Christians, and Rowling, who is not, will let you show your kids where true danger lies. You will prepare them to deal with the challenges presented by powerful writers.

Discussions about the evils of Rice and King, and others like them, after your kids are reading them will be too late. Follow the example of the Proverbs and give your children a heads up by discussing Lewis and Rowling now.

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For another balanced and more in-depth article on the magical worldview of the Harry Potter book series, go to the World Wide Web address:

http://cana.userworld.com/cana_harrypotter.html

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