

# HARRY POTTER AND THE DEATH THAT FOLLOWS

“Always the innocent are the first victims . . . So it has been for ages past, so it is now.”

—Ronan (Yr 1, 253)

Father Jim Costigan, CPM

I love Harry. I admire him for his courage, for his fight against evil, and for his love of and loyalty to his family and friends. I love Hermione and I respect her scholarly industry and her concern to play (and fight) by the rules. Even Ron—who annoys me most of the time with his many little acts of meanness and cheapness—I love when he generously sacrifices himself at clutch moments, as he did on that giant chessboard (Yr 1, 283). I love Dumbledore for protecting young Harry, for his wisdom and magnanimity, his patience and tolerance. I love Severus for the hidden love and goodness in him that no one (except Dumbledore) has any inkling of. I love Remus and Tonks, McGonagall and Moody. I especially love Luna and Neville and Molly Weasley. And so, naturally, I love Joanne Kathleen Rowling for her masterful telling of a story that thrills me and scares me, that makes me laugh and makes me cry; I love her for describing villains I wish I could stab and heroes I wish I could hug.

And therein lurks the trouble.

It’s proverbial : the best lies have the most truth; the most seductive evil appears as beautiful good. And if intelligent Christian parents who are careful about what they allow their children to read and who know, however dimly, that *magic* means *sorcery*—a grave evil, a violation of the First Commandment, a direct offense against God Himself—if these parents are not on their guard with the Harry Potter stories, then there are reasons they’re in the dark. What reasons? Well, perhaps we enjoy the novels ourselves, we get caught up in the adventure, we come to love Harry and his friends, and our critical faculty gets lulled to sleep. Or, confronted with the unprecedented success of the series, their garnering of nearly every literary laurel for children’s books, their endorsement by educators, publishers, critics, media stars, clergymen—that smiling mass of experts—we may doubt that our fears can be right, our objections valid; we wonder if we are not overreacting. “Lighten up,” we’re told. “It’s just fantasy, make-believe, like Grimm’s Fairy Tales. You let your kids read Tolkien and Lewis, right? Where’s the harm?”

Here’s the harm : ***Our heroes are sorcerers.*** The characters we admire spend seven years studying, and a lifetime becoming proficient in, something that is intrinsically and gravely evil—sorcery. No room for doubt here. ***Magic is good, Dark Magic bad.*** This is a false dichotomy. In the real world, in God’s Eyes, all sorcery, the manipulation of preternatural powers—which means, yes, demons—is dark, is evil. White magic/black magic opposition is propaganda sold us by the occultists themselves. ***The end justifies the means.*** This should be a bright red flag for American Christians. As we contracept for the good of our marriages and kill babies and old people for wonderful long-range goals, so Harry, Ron, and Hermione lie, cheat, steal, and harm others so that someday Voldemort will be defeated. ***Muggles are pathetic and/or despicable fools.*** “Perfectly normal,” “boring,” “law-abiding,” “square owners” of “square houses”—Muggles (non-magical people), as exemplified by the narrow-minded, hideous Dursleys and the timid, inept Prime Minister, are nuisances or burdens to Harry and company, pawns or targets to Voldemort. As a Christian is by definition a Muggle, the message to our children is : “Magic is fun, hip, exciting, and powerful; your old religion is dull, dumb, dorky, and dead.” ***Break the rules and***

**win; disobey and be rewarded.** Instead of being expelled from Hogwarts for disobeying Madam Hooch's order not to fly on his broom, Harry is made Seeker for the Gryffindor Quidditch team. This sets a pattern for the whole series —repeated reinforcement of the principle *The end justifies the means*. Our heroes constantly gain victories, and even the approbation of authority, by bending rules and breaking laws. **"Babies" may be chopped up and stewed —or just left to suffer.** Check the treatment a Mandrake (a magical plant described as "a small, muddy, extremely ugly baby . . .") receives from young witches and wizards in Professor Sprout's herbology class (Yr 2, 91-94, 234); then take a look at how Harry, safe and secure in the limbo of King's Cross, responds first with a desire to comfort, then with revulsion, then, finally, with cold indifference to the sufferings of (what is apparently all that is left of Voldemort after the final duel) ". . . a small, naked child, curled on the ground, its skin raw and rough, flayed-looking, . . . shuddering under a seat where it had been left, unwanted, stuffed out of sight, struggling for breath (Yr 7, ch 35)." This is horrific stuff, even in the Culture of Death. Especially in the Culture of Death. How about : **Harry sites link to Satanism sites on the Net ?** Is that scary enough?

There's more. I haven't gotten into *the vulgar language, the gross conversations, and the sexual innuendo*; there are *the erotically suggestive scenes* (Myrtle visiting Harry in the bath); there is *the total absence of God* (except as a name in casual oaths); there's *the approval of euthanasia* (Snape dispatching the ailing Dumbledore); there's *the brutality of magical pranks* —and this by the good guys; there, in superabundance, are *sick jokes about death and torture*; there's *the scatological humor* —toilets and bathrooms feature as the locales of a tediously disproportionate share of the action; there's *the blending of solid ethical principles with amoral sophistries*; there is, throughout the entire saga, *the constant utilitarian rationalization for immoral acts* —and that out of the mouths not just of Death eaters and quislings but of McGonagall and Dumbledore; there is for these children *the relatively easy access to "restricted books"* —volumes in the Hogwarts Library with detailed instructions on how to conjure murder, mayhem, and worse through "forbidden" curses; Harry's world is *an environment of pervasive child abuse*, from careless negligence to sadistic torture, and beyond. There's more.

And then there's more yet. But isn't this already more than enough for us to say, "I do not want my child reading *Harry Potter*." Yeah, Harry's fun. Yeah, Harry's unwholesome.

I do love Joanne Kathleen. But her books are pernicious. I have no reason to suspect her of malice. (Well, her outing of Dumbledore was particularly creepy.) But, malicious or not, her stories are corrupting children. The Harry Potter novels are presented to us as an epic tale of the triumph of good over evil. Against impossible odds, by prodigious labors and self-sacrifice, the courageous young wizard conquers the evil dark lord. What actually happens is the defeat of blatant, ugly, darker-than-black evil by subtle, attractive, snow-white-looking evil. This is the snare : grave and intolerable evil, sorcery, is at the core of the entire saga. Evil and error are in the hearts, not just of Voldemort, Bellatrix, and Grayback, but also, however unwittingly, of Dumbledore, Molly, and Harry. Joanne Kathleen herself may be an innocent (because of invincible ignorance), but the worldview in her works is hardcore neopagan and exuberantly, aggressively Wiccan —and is therefore, whether she intends it or not, anti-Christian.

It's not just the fun —it's the good, the virtue in Rowling and in her heroes, shining out and obscuring all that evil and error underneath, that moves our children to gobble down this fare with such gusto and delight. Unhappily, they swallow the poison too.