



**Looking for
God
in
Harry Potter**

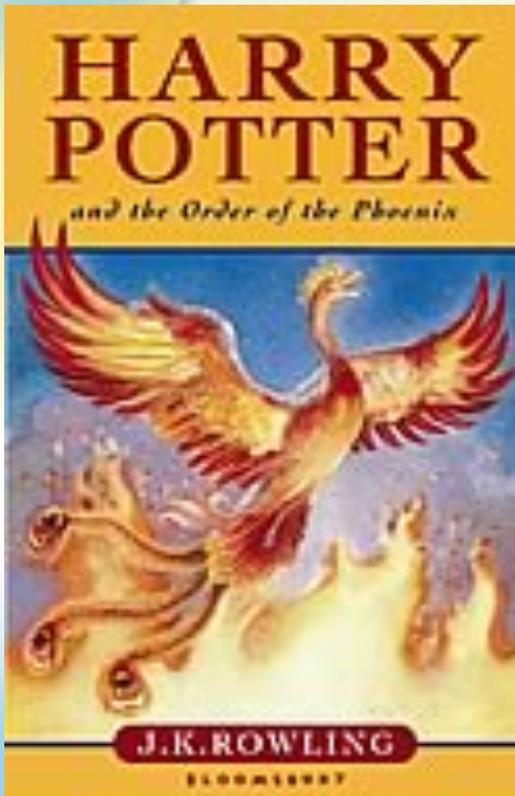
**The Pro-Potter Christian
Response**



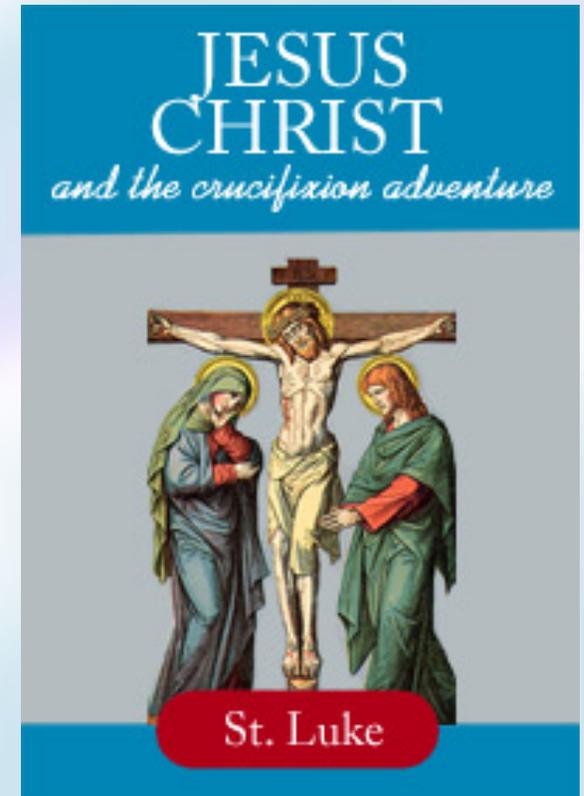
Harry Potter as a Christian Story?

- Argument #1: The Potter books illustrate a Christian worldview and fill our human need for stories about the fulfillment to be found in Christ.
- Argument #2: The books portray Christian values and ethical teachings
- Argument #3 The books are appropriate for everyone, Christian and non-Christian alike, young and old, and will lead some people to find Christ.

The Greatest Story Ever Told...?



- “Christians, of all people, should be celebrating the Harry Potter books and the attendant Potter-mania...my thesis is essentially this: As images of God designed for life in Christ, all humans naturally resonate with stories that reflect the greatest story ever told - the story of God who became man. The Harry Potter novels, the best selling books in publishing history, touch our hearts because they contain themes, imagery and engaging stories that echo the Great Story we are wired to receive and respond to.” (pp. xviii-xix)



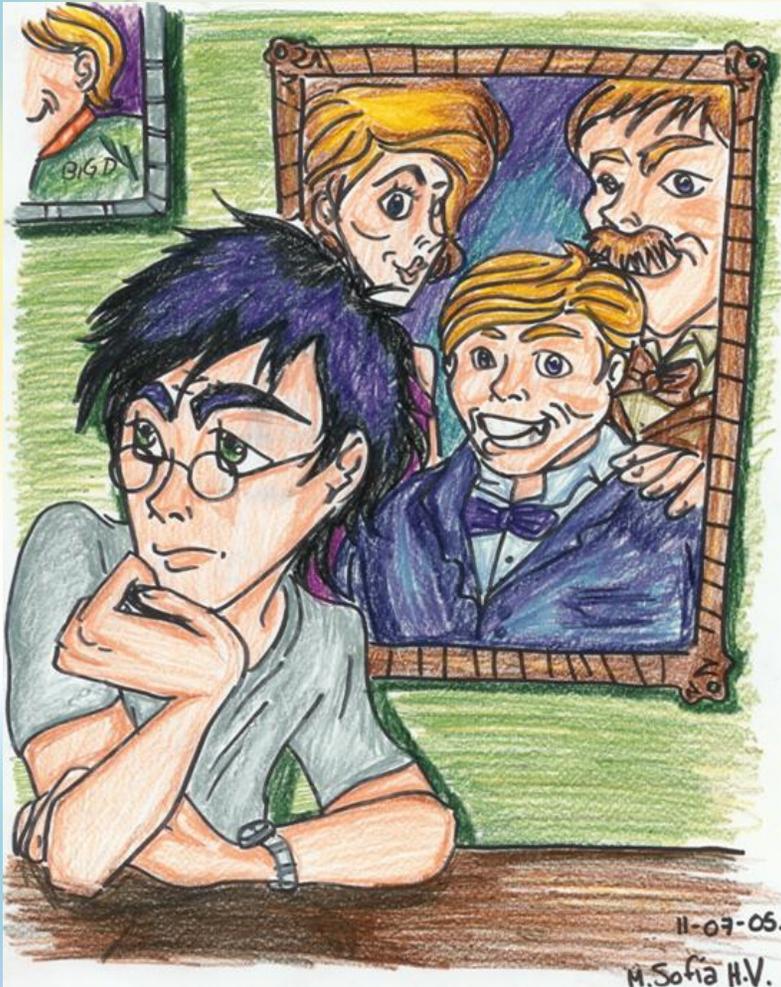
Potter magic as Christian magic?

• “Despite initially having forbidden my children from reading the Rowling books, reading them myself has convinced me that the magic in Harry Potter is no more likely to encourage real-life witchcraft than time travel in science fiction novels encourages readers to seek passage to previous centuries. Loving families have much to celebrate in these stories and little, if anything, to fear.” (p. 5)



- Invocational magic - calling in spirit forces for power and control (bad) vs Incantational magic - literally, to harmonize, to imitate the power of God's word to create (good). Magic in Harry Potter is entirely incantational. True?

Muggles as metaphor?



- The overlap between “reality” (world of muggles) and fantasy (world of wizards), far from confusing children, is in the tradition of the best Christian fantasy novels (Narnia, LOTR...)
- “I don’t want to belabor this point, but C.S. Lewis described the life of Christians as a life spent “in an enemy occupied country.” ...The magical and secret world inside Muggledom is not cause for concern so much as it is a parallel to celebrate... her secret world within our world coincides with rather than contradicts the worldview of Christians.” (pp. 7-8)

The Symbolic importance of Harry Potter



Body

Ron

Spirit

Harry

Mind

Hermione

The Symbolic importance of Harry Potter

- Fantastic Beasts and where to find them... the Christian symbolism of:
 - **Griffins** (Griffindor, golden griffin) - Lion/Eagle, double nature = man/god of Christ
 - **Unicorn** - medieval symbol of Christ
 - **Phoenix** - (Fawkes) - “resurrection bird” - symbol of Christ, Christ’s sacrifice for us, and our hope of eternal life in Christ.
 - **The Stag** - Patronus symbol - symbol of resurrection in medieval times because antlers regrow - symbol of Christ
 - **Centaur** - symbol of man, symbol of Christ
 - **Hippogriff** - half griffin, half centaur - double-natured again, symbol of Christ
 - **Philosopher’s Stone** - promise of eternal life and golden, incorruptible riches = promise of Christ
 - **Red Lion** - elixir of Life, from Philosopher’s stone, blood of Christ - red lion of Griffindor house = Christ



Fun with names



- **Albus Dumbledore** - white, glorious, resplendent, and “bee” - (symbolic of the soul)
- **Voldemort** - flight of death, flight from death
- **The Malfoys** - Malfoy = “bad faith”, Lucius = Lucifer, Narcissa = self-centred, Draco = Dragon or serpent
- **The Potters** - Potter as metaphor for God (created mankind from clay - used repeatedly in OT and NT); also “pater” (father) in latin, is pronounced “potter”, James = brother of Jesus, Lily = symbol of resurrection, Harry = heir or herald - so Harry Potter = heir of God, son of God, or herald of God

God's Army vs the Servants of Satan?

“The battle between Gryffindor and Slytherin is a battle between good and evil - I will even argue, believe it or not, that it is a reflection of the battle between those who serve Christ and those who serve the evil one. You may have read critics of the Potter books who assert that Harry's world is morally ambiguous because the white hats need cleaning and the black hats demonstrate sufficient loyalty to one another not to be “jet black.” This is silly... Bad guys don't do the wrong thing after struggling with a decision; they almost automatically do what most advances their individual or group advantage without regard for principle. Good guys often are tempted to do the wrong thing - may even do the wrong thing- but they either choose the right or repent of their error in light of right and wrong. This is exactly the situation between the Gryffindor white hats and Slytherin black hats. The Gryffindors... choose to do the right thing... though doing the right thing will probably mean their death. The Slytherins do the wrong thing without reservation or restraint.” (p. 16)





Harry Potter's Christ-like Journey

- Born of special parentage
- Raised in obscurity
- Learns truth of heritage
- Makes a choice - chooses "good" over "evil," even when his own death seems inevitable.
- Dies, and is resurrected.
- "The climax of Harry's hero journey invariably turns out to be a strong image of the Christian hope: that death is followed by resurrection in Christ. The answer these stories offer to the ultimate human problem-death- is always love or a symbol of Love himself, Jesus Christ." (p. 23)

Harry Potter's Symbolic Death and Resurrection



- In Philosopher's Stone: “[knowing] all was lost, and fell into blackness, down, down, down...”

Harry Potter's Symbolic Death and Resurrection



- In Chamber of Secrets: “Harry slid down the wall. He gripped the fang that was spreading poison through his body and wrenched it out of his arm. But he knew it was too late. ‘You’ re dead, Harry Potter,” said Riddle’s voice.”

Harry Potter's Symbolic Death and Resurrection



- In Prisoner of Azkaban “A pair of strong, clammy hands suddenly attached themselves around Harry’s neck... His mother was screaming in his ears... She was going to be the last thing he ever heard...”

Harry Potter's Symbolic Death and Resurrection



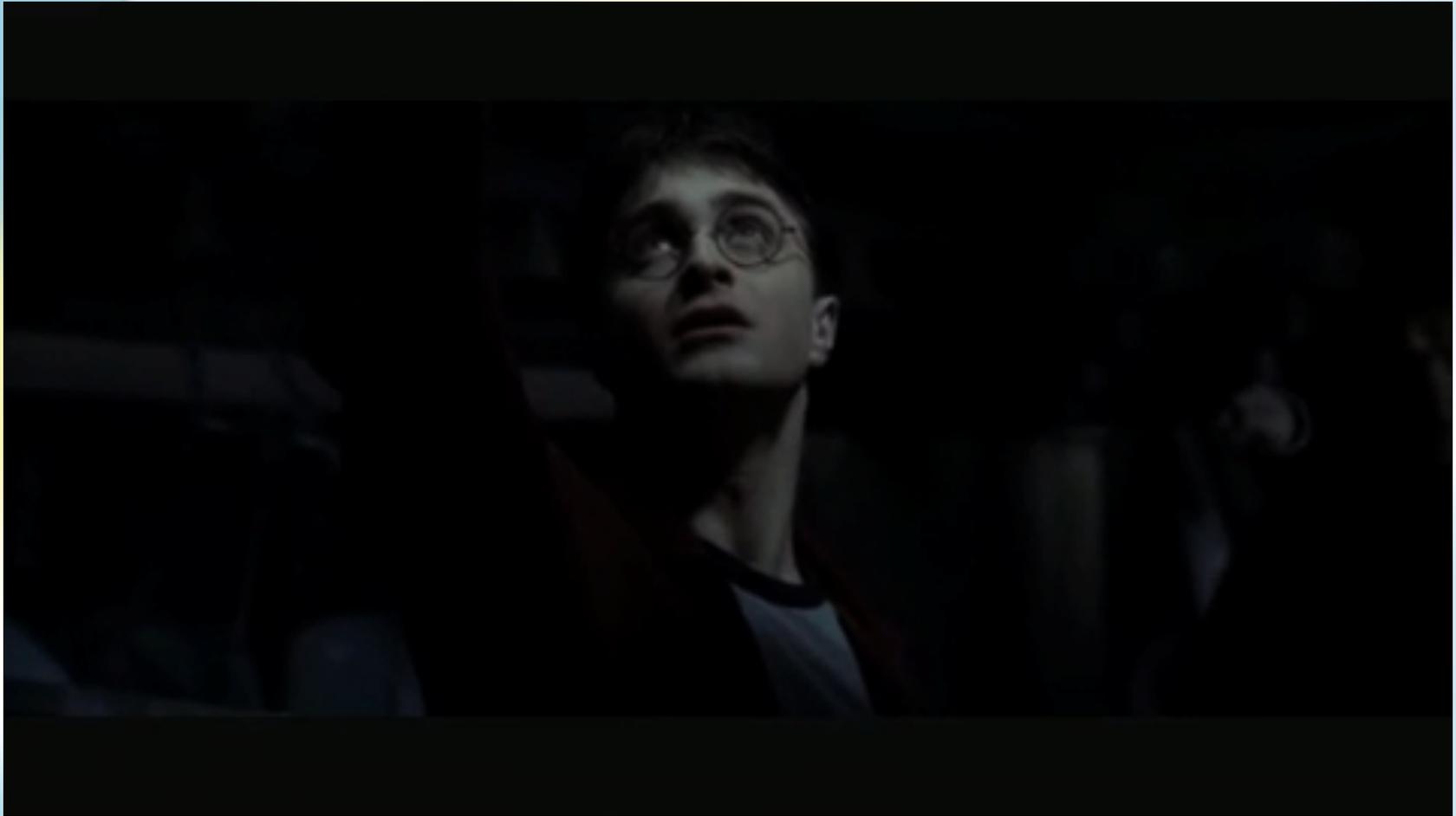
- In Goblet of Fire -death symbolism of the graveyard, blood sacrifice, torment by Voldemort.

Harry Potter's Symbolic Death and Resurrection



- In Order of the Phoenix “And then Harry’s scar burst open. He knew he was dead: it was pain beyond imagining, pain past endurance.”

Harry Potter's Symbolic Death and Resurrection



- In Half-Blood Prince, spell of paralysis and invisibility... (note: film departs strongly from book in this regard - not sure why they made this decision, as it weakens the symbolic death theme here...)

Harry Potter's Symbolic Death and Resurrection



- “Please note that Harry never saves himself but is always saved by a symbol of Christ or by love.... In Sorcerer's Stone, it is his mother's sacrificial love...in Chamber of Secrets, it is Fawkes... in Prisoner of Azkaban, it is the white stag Patronus... in goblet of Fire, it is the Phoenix song; and in Order of the Phoenix, it is Harry's love....[in Half-blood Prince, it is Dumbledore and Snape's love] - That he rises after three days in Sorcerer's Stone is another obvious reference to the Resurrection.”

Prior to the release of *Harry Potter 7*, John Granger wrote...

- “I do think that Harry’s death is a probable end for the series... Rowling has told interviewers that she thinks the ending of Dickens’ *Tale of Two Cities* has the finest single line written in English (‘It is a far, far better thing that I do’), and I am convinced that Harry has a fate much like that of Sydney Carton. Harry’s self-sacrifice (in love for his friends) and Neville’s consequent defeat of Voldemort, after all, have been foreshadowed in the ending of *Sorcerer’s Stone*. I have no substantive reason to say that Harry sacrificing himself to save the world (“love trumping death”) is the ending that “must” happen; it just makes sense to me. It jibes with what I think is becoming increasingly clear with each book: Harry’s adventures, if not allegories, are at least an Everyman morality story about our life in Christ. I expect the books’ finale will make this relatively obvious even to those who have persisted as long as they have in denying the Christian imagery and themes of the series.” (p. 181)
- Now that *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* has been released... did this prediction come true?

Harry's death – Deathly Hallows



Do you think Harry's other symbolic deaths were foreshadowing this one? J.K. Rowling does state that the religious implications of the final book 'will be obvious to anyone with an interest.'

Film vs book: the finale of Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows



- "I'll join you when Hell freezes over," said Neville... 'Very well,' said Voldemort... He pointed his wand at Neville, who grew rigid and still, then forced the Hat on to Neville's Head... 'Neville here is now going to demonstrate what happens to anyone foolish enough to continue to oppose me,' said Voldemort, and with a flick of his wand, he caused the Sorting Hat to burst into flames... In one swift motion Neville broke free of the Body-Bind Curse upon him; the flaming Hat fell off him and he drew from its depths something silver, with a glittering, rubied handle... with a single stroke, Neville sliced off the great snake's head, which spun high into the air, gleaming in the light flooding from the Entrance Hall, and Voldemort's mouth was open in a scream of fury that nobody could hear..." p. 586

Film vs book: the finale of Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows

- The salvific power of love: “You won’t be killing anyone else tonight,’ said Harry as they circled, and stared into each other’s eyes, green into red. ‘You won’t be able to kill any of them, ever again. Don’t you get it? I was ready to die to stop you hurting these people-’. ‘But you did not!’ ‘-I meant to, and that’s what did it. I’ve done what my mother did. They’re protected from you. Haven’t you noticed how none of the spells you put on them are binding? You can’t torture them. You can’t touch them”” p. 591
- The need for repentance: “Before you try to kill me, I’d advise you to think about what you’ve done... think, and try for some remorse, Riddle...’ ‘What is this?’ Of all the things that Harry had said to him, beyond any revelation or taunt, nothing had shocked Voldemort like this. Harry saw his pupils contract to thin slits, saw the skin around his eyes whiten. ‘Its your last chance,’ said Harry, ‘it’s all you’ve got left... I’ve seen what you’ll be otherwise... be a man... try... try for some remorse...’

Pro-Potter Christian responses to Book 7

- "For millions of religious believers who embrace Harry Potter, this pivotal scene in 'Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows' — book seven in J.K. Rowling's giant puzzle — offers new evidence that the author is, in fact, a Church of Scotland communicant whose faith has helped shape her work...The first inscription is from St. Matthew's Gospel and the second — stating the book's theme — is a passage in St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians about the meaning of Christ's resurrection. Is this part of what Dumbledore had called an all-powerful 'deep magic' built on sacrificial love?" Terry Mattingly
- "Aside from J.K. Rowling quoting from the New Testament (although unattributed in the book), her depiction of substitutionary sacrifice in the series, especially in Book 7, reflects a Christian concept. I know of no other religion that speaks of a Savior who took within himself the sins of those he came to save, although he himself was sinless. Sacrificial love is probably the defining characteristic of what is "Christian." Lashawn Barber
- "So is that it? Is Rowling's Harry Potter a narrative exposition of the Gospel of Saint Matthew 6:19-24? I have not argued and do not contend it is only that. But, is Dumbledore a metaphor of "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also?" Is Snape a metaphor of "he will be devoted to the one and despise the other?" Is Harry a metaphor of the "eye is the lamp of the body?" Is Rowling's tale as didactic as it is delightful? We ought to seek lasting treasure. We cannot attempt to serve two masters. We are full of light only when we live out sacrificial love. "Nutters" as it sounds, I think Harry Potter 7 is Matthew 6." Dave Bruno
- "After Harry and Hermione discover the grave of Dumbledore's mother and sister, they come upon the grave of Harry's parents. On that tombstone too is an epitaph, another word-for-word quote from the Bible. "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (1 Corinthians 15:26). I think it most likely that Dumbledore is responsible for this inscription also, as there seems to be no other person in the Potters' lives who would take precedence over him in this decision. Now in the context of that Scripture passage it is the crucifixion and literal resurrection of Jesus that conquers death. Rowling and Dumbledore could have put anything on the Potters' tombstone. They did not have to quote the Bible. They did not have to reference the New Testament passage that most explicitly connects Jesus' death and resurrection with a genuine faith. But they did quote that very passage. She seems to me too careful a writer to make this reference without its fullest meaning in mind." Dave Bruno