

Bettie Groenhout

Professor Andrus-Henry

COM 203

20 November 2007

## **The Changing Face of “Witchcraft”:**

### **Why the *Harry Potter* Series Does NOT Lead to the Occult**

The face of witchcraft has changed over the past several years into that of a young boy wizard with unruly hair and round glasses: Harry Potter. This popular series of children’s books has received incredible debate in the Christian community over whether or not the series leads children into the occult due to its positive portrayals of witchcraft and wizardry---which the Bible strongly forbids. Books in the *Harry Potter* series do not lead children into the occult and can actually be tied into Christian morals and values. The books praise the defeat of evil and strong moral character, the types of magic in the books greatly differ from those present in the Bible, and, finally, the debate as a whole stems from adults reading for a specific purpose with preconceived notions—ideas that children do not yet have.

First of all, although the plot of the *Harry Potter* books involves witchcraft and wizardry, it revolves around the defeat of evil and the exhibition of strong morals, something that Christians also value. Throughout the series, for example, Harry Potter seeks to defeat a dark wizard who uses his powers to oppress, kill, and annihilate “muggles” (humans with no magical powers) and wizards and witches with “muggle” blood in them. In this battle with evil, Harry and his comrades exhibit strong values of courage, friendship and loyalty. Potter persists in fighting for what is good and right instead of following the status quo, even in times when submitting to the dark wizard’s oppression would prove much, much easier. Although the inborn magical powers that

the characters in the books have are fictional, they can nevertheless be tied into real life, and even into Christianity. In fact, Christian author John Granger states, “triumphing over death and choosing what is right instead of what is easy are very compatible with Christianity” (“The Harry Potter Debate” 2). Granger’s connection between the *Harry Potter* series and the morals taught in Christianity prove especially important in today’s world laden with declining morals, violence, crime, and hate. In this sense, characters in the *Harry Potter* series provide children with refreshing examples of strong moral character—in taking a stand against what is wrong, even if it does not prove easy. Children in today’s world *need* strong examples of moral character, as they too will one day have to choose between doing what’s right and what’s easy, between ungodly and godly ways of living. And just as young wizards and witches have to decide between using their powers for good or evil, children will also have to decide how to use their individual talents—to serve God or otherwise, even when serving God might not prove easiest. Therefore, the *Harry Potter* series advocates strong morals that remain in concordance with Christian principles— and this fact strongly conflicts with the idea that they lead children into the dark arts.

Although it is often argued that the *Harry Potter* series will introduce children to witchcraft and the occult, thus turning them against God, the types of magic present in the *Harry Potter* books and the magic forbidden in the Bible prove very different. For example, the type of magic forbidden in the Bible involves voluntarily communing with the supernatural world to obtain powers. This type of magic is even listed as a grave sin in Revelation 21:8, “But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and **sorcerers** and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” Sorcery, the use of magic, is listed here as a type of sin that one *commits*, that involves a choice between obeying God or burning in Hell. In contrast, characters in *Harry Potter*

are *born* with powers and then given a choice at some point to use these powers for good or evil—they make no mention of the occult. Therefore, the type of magic forbidden and the Bible and the type in the *Harry Potter* books remain vastly different. The witches and wizards in the books do not seek out the dead or demons to obtain their powers, they do not do so through disobeying a Supreme Being such as God. In J.K. Rowling’s fantasy world, magic is an inborn ability—something that does not exist in our world. So based on the *Harry Potter* books, children will not seek out modern, dark witchcraft because, according to the books, magic is an inborn ability, not something to be obtained through dark powers. Thus, it can be asserted that adults find threatening references to magic in the books merely because they read with different purposes and have preconceived notions that children do not possess.

Finally, adults in general tend to read with different purposes and ideas than children do, therefore spotting vastly different things in the *Harry Potter* books. Even J.K. Rowling states, “People tend to find in books what they want to find” (“The Harry Potter Debate” 1). In any case, if you are reading for reason, chances are you will be able to mold concepts in such a way that will fit this purpose. This concept especially fits to the Harry Potter debate. Due to the negative portrayal of witches throughout the ages—and the general *fear* of them, the *Harry Potter* books also receive negative portrayal, as some people are reading only to find the negative characteristics of magic because Bible deems magic inappropriate. These preconceived notions and uncritical thinking about Biblical interpretations prevent the *good* qualities of these books from being noticed—the preference of good over evil, the strong sense of friendship, courage, and loyalty, the correlation between Rowling’s fantasy world and the real world— and even Christian values. On the other hand, the books’ desired audiences, children, have almost none of these preconceived notions, and are thus more likely to pick up on the positive attributes. Since their minds remain open to the *fantasy* world that Rowling creates, they can truly

experience this world and its accompanying morals and values—the idea of seeking out witchcraft on their own will remain far from their minds and will be regarded as a fantastical thought.

That said, if children, later in life, join a Wiccan coven or get involved in the occult—can the *Harry Potter* series be wholly to blame? The fear of witchcraft is one that has pervaded the ages, and can often get out of hand. Often irrational and unfounded, it has led to the deaths of many during events such as the Salem Witch Trials. Is the fear that the *Harry Potter* books will lead to the occult any more rational or founded than the fear that led to these trials? Are we so bogged down with ‘moral reasoning’ that we can no longer embrace a world of fairy tale magic, no matter what good values it teaches? Overall, the *Harry Potter* books do not lead to children to the occult, because they promote strong values such as courage, loyalty, and the defiance of evil, and the magic present in these books differs from the dark magic that is forbidden in the Bible.

Works Cited

The Harry Potter Debate: Religious Resources. 17 Jan. 2000. Apologetics Index. 19 Nov. 2007

<<http://www.apologeticsindex.org/po3.html>>.

Holy Bible: New American Standard Bible. San Diego: Zondervan Bible Publishers,

1999.