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“Satanic Harry”: How a Wizard Has to Fight the Church

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1 Introduction

More than 400 million copies sold worldwide. About 6.9 million copies of the seventh and last volume sold in the first 24 hours of its release in the U.S. alone. About one billion moviegoers achieved with each film worldwide. Not to mention all the DVDs, audio books, video games and the rest of the 400 additional types of merchandise sold. All in all, the series counts among the best selling children's books of our century and has guided millions of readers into a fascinating, magical world: of course we are talking about the Harry Potter books by Joanne K. Rowling.

The name of the black-haired orphan with round glasses, a characteristic, bolt-shaped scar on his forehead and magical powers, which are extended and exercised at the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, quickens the heartbeat not only of small children and adolescents, but also of many adults who read the books with as much enthusiasm and passion as their children do. However, as is always the case with the most popular phenomena, the literary figure of Harry Potter separates the nations: people either love or hate him. With the growing success of the Potter series and the increasing hype around publishing, merchandising and fan cult the number of critics and objectors rose proportionally. They tried to find flaws in the logic of the books, looked for parallels in other books in order to accuse the author of plagiarism or derided older fans for being so passionate about children literature. Nevertheless, all these accusations were harmless in comparison to the "magical duel" which was started by one of the most important and longest established institutions of mankind, the Christian church of the Western World¹. Suddenly, newspapers were no longer busy with printing the newest sales records for the Potter series, but instead by the soaring number of challenges handed in by members of the church, worried parents, affiliates of conservative Christian groups or all of them in one person. "The books are a guide into occultism", "Harry Potter is the Satan in person", "The series has a bad impact on our children" and "The books clearly support anti-Christian movements" are only some of the claims and accusations which were made by opponents. In addition to these arguments, the books were banned in several libraries and schools, publicly damned or even burned. Statements, articles, even books were published about this issue; all in all, it was not an innocent quarrel about literature anymore but an acrimonious fight over "good" and "evil".

¹ "The Christian church of the Western World" is going to be referred to as "the church" on the following pages.

Given the unbelievably large numbers of readers and moviegoers the Potter series has achieved over the years, the fascination in reading it has rekindled in children and the support it has received from schools and other educational institutions, we have to examine why there is still such serious criticism on the grounds of occultism and Satanism. In other words: Can an innocent, wispy, and by the way fictional figure like Harry Potter in fact be an embodiment of the devil? If not, why has he sometimes been attacked as such?

Not only as a fan of the Harry Potter books myself, but also as an observer from the outside, I am interested in this conflict which the church itself started and then had to settle among its own people. Therefore I decided to have a closer look at the struggle between the church and the book series, the complaints which were made as well as the responses to them. This investigation will comprise the question whether the Harry Potter books can still be categorized as children's literature as well as how far one institution is allowed to go, regarding the banning and burning of the books. Why does the church work against a book which tries to teach children the same values that the church itself advocates? Since many representatives of the church also reacted positively to the book series, these will be taken into account as well. In order to provide a context for the different sides of this controversy, I will look at different situations in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* and analyse characters, relations and actions. The perceived crime and cruelty of which the church accuses the series will be scrutinized in this volume more clearly since the whole story darkens and becomes more frightening from there on.

Finally, the conclusion will try to announce the result of this "duel" between the church and the Potter series and have a look at its consequences; besides, it will highlight the changes that took place during the publishing of the last volumes and give an outlook on the latest news of this issue.

As mentioned earlier, there has been a lot of articles and essays published which represent the position of the church or other opponents, but also academic books which try to scrutinize the conflict in an objective, serious way. Particularly useful in relation to this essay were *Reading Harry Potter: Critical essays* and *Reading Harry Potter Again*, both edited by Giselle Liza Anatol. In these collections of essays, several authors interpret the books regarding different aspects of literary theory and focus on various topics. Some of the other articles cited in the bibliography might have tried to deal with the problem in an objective way, but are clearly recognizable as biased. The same thing is true for articles written by members of the church. These are often fervently written and in some cases even agitate against Potter fans, which is striking in the context of sophisticated literary conversation and

the usually tolerant Christian attitude towards other people. I will give further explanation on both issues later in the text.

2 Harry Potter and the Church: A Serious Wizard Duel

2.1 The church's complaints: Occultism and Black Magic

Who would have expected that a children's book could ever create such a furore and division in the church? However, that is exactly what happened when the Harry Potter books were first published in 1997 and became particularly popular with the release of the third volume, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. An outcry went through the church, as the Potter series portrayed witchcraft and wizardry and in a positive way no less. Challenges were handed in to schools and official institutions like the American Library Association (ALA), asking to ban the book from the school curricula or the libraries' available book lists. School-district committees were overwhelmed with requests and had to review every book in the series again and again because of worried parents and outraged students (Wilgoren, nytimes.com). Most of them claimed that "the Harry Potter series are too violent, present 'occult activities' as fun, are anti-Bible, depict sorcery and magic, and open the door to 'spiritual bondage'" (Stephens, "Hierarchy" 52). However ridiculous this might seem at first sight, it is nevertheless necessary to investigate these ideas and fears and relate them not only to other opinions voiced from within the church but also to the texts themselves.

An essay by Lindy Beam, a resident supervisor for the *Christian Focus on Family Institute* and known as a strict critic of the Potter books, is helpful for an overview as it addresses several concerns that have been expressed from the Catholic position. The first and foremost complaint of church members has not been the fact that the Potter series is "too cruel" for young children, but instead that it displays magic in general. According to the opponents, several Bible passages explicitly condemn any kind of witchcraft and magic. One of the most cited passages can be found in Deuteronomy 18:9-12:

When you come into the land which the Lord your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the abominable customs of those other nations. Let no one be found among you [...], no augur or soothsayer or diviner or sorcerer, no one who casts spells or traffics with ghosts and spirits, and no necromancer.

It is the resoluteness and certainty of these words that lead some Christian believers, particularly the most conservative and traditional ones, into rejecting everything immediately

that has the slightest connotation of magic. They do not even raise the question whether it is good or bad magic that is portrayed or if it relates to reality at all. For them, Magic is as naturally part of reality as God, i.e. they believe that there is evil on earth and that it must constantly be contested. Harry Potter knows that, too. Anyone who reads the books can confirm that Harry himself is engaged in a never-ending fight against the evil powers of Lord Voldemort, a wicked wizard who tries to obtain the magical world supremacy by gathering supporters, killing the reluctant ones and threatening Harry's life more and more acutely with each volume in the series. In the Potter books, magic is indeed not, as some people claim, "portrayed as harmless, fun or good" (Taub 55), but instead there is a clear distinction between good wizards and evil ones. We will have a closer look at this later when scrutinizing a Harry Potter book on the level of content.

Another frequent complaint of the church members is that the literary figure of Harry Potter, as well as the other protagonists, is not only depicted non-Christian but even Anti-Christian. Objectors focus particularly on the practice of Wicca, the largest neopagan religion, which is often ill-reputed as evil and occult (Stephens, "Hierarchy" 54). This kind of nature-based religion is as little comparable with the Potter books as are occultism and Satanism in general. What is more, clergymen denounce the fact that there is no single good power in Rowling's text, i.e. no authority like God who declares clear rules of what is right and wrong or like Jesus who lives an ideal life of how to "behave" in a Christian way. Reading the books, however, one gets the impression that Albus Dumbledore, the long-bearded and white-haired headmaster of Hogwarts, is the paternal demonstration of a wise and successful magician and a leader for the good side. In several volumes of the series it is emphasized that Dumbledore is the only wizard the evil Voldemort has ever feared; the only one who is equal to him in intelligence and finesse and capable of seeing through the Lord's dark plans. Furthermore, he is the one people ask for advice and help, and whose judicious and calm instructions are almost always followed immediately. He teaches Harry and his friends exactly what they need to know in the fight against Voldemort, but nevertheless lets them have their own experiences and always operates reliably in the background (see for instance Stephens 56). Katherine Grimes even describes Dumbledore as an "almost godlike" figure (95). However, although Dumbledore occupies a very high position in the magical world, he is nevertheless not infallible. This is shown the first time in the fourth volume, where Dumbledore puts a protection circle around Hogwarts to create a safe environment for the Triwizard Cup, but cannot prevent Harry from being transported by a charmed portkey to Voldemort who then celebrates his resurrection. Not even the death of another pupil, Cedric

Diggory, can be avoided, and from there on Dumbledore seems to be depicted more and more “human” in every volume, a condition which entails errors and wrong decisions. Besides, there are two other points to make: first, should it not be a satisfying point that in the Potter series evil is concentrated into one person mainly in order to be able to fight it properly? And second, what would the church say if Rowling had tried to copy the hierarchical system of the church, with a godlike figure on top that was nevertheless able to cast spells? Magic and religion would have been combined in their most obvious forms.

2.2 Satanism and Occultism: Official Definitions and the Church’s Interpretation

Without trying to interfere in people’s belief or disbelief, several questions pop up nevertheless regarding one general definition of “magic”: “The power to make impossible things happen by saying special words or doing special actions” (Longman Dictionary). Let us think about the stories of the Bible and its inexplicable wonders: the Immaculate Conception, Jesus’ miracles like the cure of the blind man Bartimaeus, the healing of the leper, turning water into wine, walking over water and finally his resurrection, only to mention a few of the reported occurrences. Rationally, none of them are possible. The same goes for the adventures of Harry Potter and his friends, the whole magical world, the spells and transformations. However, people do believe in Jesus’ actions which can be described as magical, too. In relation to the definition of “magic” mentioned above, we can clearly confirm that Jesus makes use of rituals and thereby produces something supernatural. He is of course not the only one: the whole Bible is full of wonderful stories like the one about Jonah who was swallowed by a fish and survived, the apostle Paul who healed a cripple or even the one of the apostle Peter who returned a woman to life. The obvious difference between waving a wand and praying is overshadowed by a fact which can hardly be denied: doing something supernatural, in fact, doing magic, is not necessarily harmful.

Heading back to the church’s claims against the series, it should be noted that people are using even more drastic terms: “The threat of the Harry Potter books is that they might desensitize children to the sinfulness of magic and that ‘children may learn to see them [occult or Satanic practices] as acceptable’” (Taub 56). First, the Potter series does not portray in any kind the presence of a “supernatural” power, i.e. in the book “magic” is addressed as something quite natural. It is neither something visionary which makes people better nor is it a power used to get a connection to Satan. In fact, God and religion are not themes in the books at all, consequently there is no obvious link to the figure of the devil either. Second,

definitions of these terms give us more information: “The occult: mysterious practices and powers involving magic and spirits” (Longman Dictionary). This is probably one of the definitions that offend the church. However, it might be important for the church as well to differentiate between the various kinds of belief in magic, or to put it in other words: between fiction and reality. Of course it is difficult to judge whether the rituals and practices of an occult circle of people are dangerous for society, but following the church’s standpoint that their behaviour and beliefs are “abnormal”, the difference between this religion and the Potter books becomes even clearer. If we define “occultism” in the most widely accepted terms, i.e. as the invocation of ghosts or dead people, particular dress codes and activities like sacrificing, midnight-meetings and secret conjurations, we have a basis for comparing it to the alleged occultism in the Potter books. Probably disappointing Potter’s detractors, it can be noticed that the books do not depict the sacrificing of animals and the calling of Satan, but rather describe witches and wizards – particularly children – as ordinary people, with pimples, spectacles, a chubby body and the usual problems of adolescents.

Another objection of the church concerns Satanism. Let us look at a general definition of this term as well: “Satanism: the practice of worshipping Satan” (Longman Dictionary). As mentioned above, Satan is not present in the Potter books. Admittedly, his personality could be projected onto the literary figure of Lord Voldemort, the evil opponent of Harry. According to the Bible, Lucifer was once one of God’s angels, too, before he became bad and fell into disgrace. Voldemort was a diligent, intellectual member of the wizard society himself when he was young and still called “Tom Riddle”. However, both Lucifer and Voldemort later tried to achieve world supremacy, one as revenge, the other as a reason for his insatiable desire for power, and to win supporters, manipulating their minds, making them slaves of their own will. Amanda Cockrell sees this similarity as well, naming Voldemort “the fallen sorcerer angel” (22). What is more, both Lucifer and Voldemort are fought constantly by the “good ones” as the most fearsome incarnation of evil. Be it the devil, whose powers are prayed against, fought by proselytization, exorcism, baptism, confirmation and various other rituals of the different churches; or Lord Voldemort, who is named from the first Potter book onwards as the evil in the magical world and is, volume per volume, defeated by Harry Potter and his friends as well as the good-minded, powerful majority of the wizard world who sticks together to fight evil. That is a good example of honesty to children: to admit to them that there is evil on earth, but then go on to demonstrate that it can nevertheless be fought with the arms of love, friendship, courage and magic. The Sunday schools of many Christian communities as well as the subject religion taught at school allow stories of the devil, and

since this does not make children interested in the “darker side” or the occult itself, why would a children’s book do so?

Some Christians, however, believe that reading the Potter books produces “a desensitization to witchcraft” (Beam, mfc.org), i.e. that children who have read them do not perceive magic as something bad. From another perspective, one could see this desensitization as a way to become familiar with different aspects of belief, which will not necessarily lead into a seduction to adopt those beliefs. Is it not true that things which are kept away and forbidden are the most interesting, luring temptations? The church which tries to hinder its followers from reading the books provides the basis for crossing exactly that forbidden line. Rowling, on the contrary, follows an open way of writing and comments on it as follows: “There are those things in the book because I made a very conscious decision right at the beginning that I was writing about someone evil and I was not going to tell a lie” (BBC News, “Harry Potter fights back”). Relying on Rowling’s words, we do not have to look for “hidden messages” in the Potter series, since it is one of her concerns to explain the topic of evil comprehensibly to her readers.

2.3 The Increasing Conflict: The Position of the Pope and the Book Burning

What was probably most reassuring to Christian objectors to the Potter books was the opinion on this issue voiced by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the current Pope, Benedict XVI. Based on two letters from Ratzinger to Gabriele Kuby, a German critic of the Potter books, the *Times Online* cites him saying that the book series is a subtle seduction of children and “precisely because of that has a deep effect and corrupt[s] the Christian faith in souls even before it could properly grow” (Blakely, timesonline.co.uk). In a second letter, which was made public on the webpage of Kuby herself as well as the first letter, the future Pope allowed Mrs Kuby to refer to his judgement about Harry Potter (gabriele-kuby.de). Even though these comments were made before Ratzinger became Pope of the Catholic Church, it was doubtful up until this point in time whether the staunchly traditional clergyman would change his critical standpoint in an even more powerful position. Recent news, however, reported a surprising u-turn of the official Vatican newspaper and a “rave review” on the latest film, *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince*. According to thefirstpost.co.uk, the Vatican praises the film for clearly distinguishing between good and evil and points out that what remains in the end is not magic but love, loyalty, friendship and the giving of one’s self (Chance, thefirstpost.co.uk). This turnaround, titled “Pope forgives Harry Potter” and thus underlining the irreconcilable

position the leader of the Catholic Church had taken before, is indeed amazing; yet it mirrors the relaxation of the overall attitude towards the Potter books within the church.

These had indeed been harsh attacks, be it through words, challenges or book bannings. Some strong opponents did not even flinch from burning the books, a terrifying procedure. Even though book burnings have occurred many times before throughout history, it reminds one immediately of the Nazi book burnings which took place in 1933. Books written by Jewish, Marxist or Pacifist authors were burned because they did not fit into the regime's views or depicted an alternative way of thinking. The idea of burning something as valuable as a book as an attempt to censor the freedom of thought and speech is in general incomprehensible; to burn children's literature in order to drive out evil ghosts is ridiculous and inhuman. However, more than one such burning took place, for instance as reported by the BBC and academic researchers (Gupta 18):

The congregation of the Christ Community Church in Alamogordo in southern New Mexico heard an anti-Harry Potter sermon in which Pastor Jack Brock claimed [...]: 'Behind that innocent face is the power of satanic darkness. Harry Potter is the devil and he is destroying people.' [...] The anti-Potter sermon was followed by the night-time book burning, which Pastor Brock said was part of a drive for Christians to get rid of items that prevent them from communicating with God. (news.bbc.co.uk)

What makes the reaction of the church as mentioned above even more absurd is the next sentence where the pastor explains that he has never read any of the Potter volumes but "researched their contents" (BBC news, "'Satanic' Harry Potter Books Burnt") - whatever that means. Another reverend in rural Pennsylvania burned the books publicly in 2001 as well, as did some fundamentalist church groups in other states from 2001 to 2003 (Stephens, "Lightning Bolt" 15). It is important to note that these book burnings were conducted by fundamentalist Christian groups, often in rural areas where innovations and changes are neither quickly nor willingly accepted. According to one definition of Christian fundamentalists, that is "a Christian who believes that everything in the Bible is completely and actually true" (Longman Dictionary) - which means it usually takes the words of the sacred texts as literal truth. That might be a reason why the followers of this religious movement cannot accept the Potter series as purely fictional children's literature or see any connection to Christian values.

2.4 "The Moral Harry": Positive Counter Reactions from the Church

It may seem as though the church exhibited a great deal of intolerance through various objections and challenges to the Potter series. In relation to the tumult caused by these actions, however, we must keep in mind that only a few people, communities and countries participated in the protest, and that they are clearly unable to speak for all Christian believers and their individual point of views on this matter. Quite contrary to the first negative statements, more and more Christian leaders and renowned members of the Church have published positive and promoting articles on the Harry Potter topic. Ted Olsen, news director and online managing editor of *Christianity Today*, gave his article on Harry Potter the interesting subtitle “Despite what you’ve heard, Christian leaders like the children’s books”. He asserts that, in fact, many people with a high standing in the hierarchy of the church have signalled green light for reading Harry Potter and even using the stories and its morals in school and religious classes. An often cited quote of the columnist Charles Colson from *Christianity Today*, not only used by its news director Olsen himself but also in academic essays by Taub and Servaty (56), Stephens (“Lightning Bolt” 21) and Duthie (32), says:

Magic and sorcery in the books are purely magical, as opposed to occultic. That is, Harry and his friends cast spells, read crystal balls, and turn themselves into animals - but they don’t make contact with a supernatural world. ... [It’s not] the kind of real-life witchcraft the Bible condemns. (ctlibrary.com)

Even strong critics like Beam, whom we encountered before taking serious opposition to the Potter books because of the perceived “occultism” and bad influence on children as well as the absence of a divine authority, changed her attitude towards the books during the course of time. As Stephens points out, she made distinctively more positive comments in each review of the books or the movies and even explained that there are many indications of Christian values to be found in the Potter books, even references to the Scripture (“Lightning Bolt” 20). In fact, Stephen’s article displays the same results as the ones that were highlighted by Christian leaders like Olsen before: attitudes towards the Harry Potter books changed from negative to positive or were positive from the very beginning onwards. However, approvals of and enthusiasm about the books on the part of the church were often overlooked at first, since the furious outcry on the other side attracted much more media coverage and interest. Olsen highlights this by listing several leading Christian magazines in his report, not all of them agreeing with each other: after pointing out the change of the magazine *Focus on the Family*, he writes about the *World Magazine*, a paper covering news from a Christian perspective, and

its surprisingly changing attitude, from positive to slightly negative, towards the Potter books. *The Christian Century* and the *Mars Hill Audio Journal*, on the contrary, are explicitly cited as accepting the series again: “But we strongly doubt that it fosters an attachment to evil powers. Harry’s world, in any case, is a moral one” (Olsen, ctlibrary.com).

Stephens makes an interesting analysis in scanning the amount of challenges handed in because of the books’ contents. According to her, “the attempts to censor Harry had actually decreased [...]. In fact, some of the very groups that had previously censured the series, most prominently Focus on the Family [sic], were now encouraging followers to read the books” (“Lightning Bolt” 14). Later, she continues her analysis by stating that the challenge numbers among the conservative Christian groups that were formerly objectors to the series are waning (“Lightning Bolt” 21). Between 1997 and 2007, the groups fighting Harry Potter changed in their formation. The former conservative Christian right wing, which turned to become more moderate, was condemned by more radical groups as not living up to Christian values. However, due to their often relatively small membership those groups get less media attention and their challenges trail off unheard. Another group is formed by indignant parents who sue schools and libraries for making the Potter books available although they contain elements of magic. Several legal cases have been fought between school boards and concerned parents who complain that “the series might promote disobedience and disrespect for authority” (Stephens, “Lightning Bolt” 15). Unfortunately, it is impossible to find out the religious background of the people who handed in suits against the series. As far as worried parents are concerned, however, their sense of responsibility plays an important part in their behaviour. They have the understandable need to protect their children from dangers, whether real or perceived. As mentioned before, the parental idea of danger does not necessarily have to correspond to children’s idea of what is dangerous or threatening. Besides, parents will not always have the chance to protect their children from danger, and therefore it is better to let children have experiences of their own. If they want or need to talk about something that worries them, their parents will probably be the first contact point for them. Contrary to common perception, those complainants are in fact not only American parents or schools, but as Gupta points out also British, Australian, Canadian, German, Arabic and Taiwanese ones (19). Regarding the last two regions it is possible that their common strict law of censorship is responsible for protests against the Potter books as well (Read more about their law of censorship on dailybits.com).

This side of the church which denies that there is any sense of morality in the Potter books, however, stands in a blatant contrast to the comments made by the other, more tolerant

side. Several religious leaders highlight the description and practice of love, friendship, loyalty, courage and truth in Rowling's work which are central topics in the Christian doctrine, too; others like Baptist minister Ernest R. Flores praise the Potter books for their way of explaining topics such as death in a child-friendly manner (Duthie 38). Another important motif for the church is to love your fellow men like yourself. This was recognized by a preacher in the Potter books as the basis for Lily Potter's sacrifice of her life in order to save her son's life. Solemnly, he declares the victory of love over evil and death: "Love: a force so powerful it marks us forever. Not every book gives us this message. Thank God for the ones that do" (Duthie 39). This is probably the most important conclusion religious believers came to when voting in favour of the Potter series: love as the overall theme, love as being stronger than magic - particularly dark magic - and love connecting people and finally saving lives.

2.5 J. K. Rowling's viewpoint on religious criticism

Since the criticism of the Potter books turns against not only the books but Rowling, too, it is important to have a look at the author's viewpoint on this religious discussion. Notably, Rowling is a member of the Church of Scotland herself. Indeed, although God and Christianity play no direct and obvious role in the Potter books, a verse of the New Testament is quoted in the 7th and last book: "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (Duthie 32; Gibbs, time.com; in the Bible used for this essay: "The last enemy to be abolished is death", 1 Corinthians 15:26-27). This passage from the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians where Paul talks about the Resurrection of Christ inevitably refers to the Christian idea of ascending to heaven after death, the survival of the soul and the defeat of earthly needs. Even though Rowling admitted in a 2007 profile of the *Time's* online edition that this quote is the theme of the whole book series, she points out in several other interviews that she did not write the Potter series planning to plant religious hints throughout the books: "I did not set out to convert anyone to Christianity. [...] It is perfectly possible to live a very moral life without a belief in God, and I think it's perfectly possible to live a life peppered with ill-doing and believe in God (Gibbs, time.com)". Nevertheless, she stresses in the aforementioned interview that although no one in her family was religious, she was drawn to faith ever since her early childhood days. Like many other Christians, she goes to the church service, had her children baptized and still has a great religious curiosity. Understandably, she was hit hard by the attacks of religious leaders around the world, getting wearied by the various interviews in

which she had to justify her writings and at the same time be careful not to spoil too much of the next book's content. For this reason, she is glad that there have been several religious defenders who lauded her book and even took it into pulpit, not only those of Christian faith as she says with a proud undertone (Gibbs, time.com). Peggie Lin Duthie points out the approach of some priests who present parallels between Harry Potter characters and biblical heroes, shared motifs found both in the Bible and the Potter books and films. Besides, these priests criticize their colleagues for objecting to this literature and remind their parish to see the moral values and the depiction of good versus bad in Rowling's books (Duthie 34, 36, 38-39).

3 Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire

3.1 Values in HP: Love, Friendship, Courage

In order to understand the objections of the church or find arguments against them, it is important to have a closer look at the books. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, the fourth volume of the book series, fits the purpose of this analysis since it was the first book which turned considerably more sinister and competitive, but at the same time deals most openly with the themes of friendship, support, fighting spirit, love and hope. The basic plot of the book revolves around the Triwizard Tournament, a competition between the three wizard schools of the British Hogwarts School, the French Beauxbatons Academy and the Russian-Bulgarian Durmstrang Institute. From each school, one representative is chosen to try to win the final cup and thereby honour and prestige for her or his home country (165). Accidentally, not only Fleur Delacour of Beauxbatons, Victor Krum of Durmstrang and Cedric Diggory of Hogwarts are chosen by the magical hat, but also the young protagonist Harry Potter. He, who was not even allowed to line up for the competition because of his age, gets into real trouble through that incident: his best friend Ron is angry and starts to ignore him, thinking that Harry did it on purpose and without telling him in order to take credit from the rest of his school alone; his classmates and schoolfellows think that he only wants to be in the spotlight and run campaigns against him, including badges which blinkingly announce "Potter stinks". What is more, he is far too young for the difficult tasks of the tournament and not even close to being adequately prepared for them. The danger of participation is evident from headmaster Dumbledore's statement in the beginning that this tournament was discontinued for the last few years because of the alarmingly high death toll (166). Harry suddenly finds himself facing not only fear and danger, but also the possible loss of his closest friend Ron.

Rowling describes the heavy feelings and thoughts which now beset the protagonist, showing how empty a life without friends and support is. These are feelings with which many children, but also adults, can identify: to feel lost, overstrained, being accused without having done anything wrong. However, Rowling shows us a solution to this dilemma. The first task the four champions have to solve is to fight a dangerous, aggressive dragon in the Quidditch arena, i.e. they have to get past it and catch a golden egg which is itself important for the second task. Of course they do not have a clue about it, because the aim is to test their capacity of reaction and inventiveness. However, Harry gets an important hint from his friend Hagrid, the gamekeeper of Hogwarts, who takes him on a secret walk, carefully hidden under the Invisibility Cloak, down the grounds to the place where the dragons are kept and fed. Harry is shocked by the gigantic animals he gets to see, but receives information what the competitors are supposed to do with them and so can start preparing himself. He knows that he should be grateful for the gamekeeper's help, as he admits himself that "maybe if he'd seen the dragons for the first time on Tuesday, he would have passed out cold in front of the whole school..." (288). Through this example, Rowling shows us that the help and loyalty we extend to other people will by some means or other be returned to us. Since the first book, Harry is linked to Hagrid in a special relationship and helped him several times to solve difficult problems: smuggling away an illegal dragon baby; keeping quiet about the giant spider Aragog; helping Hagrid's hippogriff Buckbeak to escape before getting slaughtered. Finally, Hagrid sees his chance to return something back to Harry. This is one of the motives the church values so much: friendship and loyalty, caring for others, especially for those who are closest to you: "Give, and gifts will be given you" (Luke 6:38). This type of aid is received by Harry in the second task, too: someone valuable was taken from the competitors and they have to rescue it from the bottom of the deep and dark Hogwarts Lake. Harry, Ron and Hermione are sitting in the library for hours, leafing through books, but still do not have a clue how Harry might manage to breathe for a long time under water. The next morning, when almost everything seems to be lost already, the house elf Dobby turns up. Harry once helped to liberate him from the terrible ownership of the Malfoy family and since then, the two of them have been friends. Helping Dobby achieve freedom, Harry unconsciously acted according to the Bible phrase: "Open your mouth and speak up for the dumb, against the suit of any that oppose them; open your mouth and pronounce just sentence and give judgement for the wretched and poor" (Proverbs 31:8-9). Usually, house elves do not have any rights or are not allowed to speak up, but Harry treats Dobby like an equal partner. Now the elf does him a big favour in return: he gives him "Gillyweed", a plant which produces gills at his

throat and webs between his fingers and toes in order to survive in the ice-cold water (426-29). Again, Harry masters a task with the help from a friend.

Additionally, it is important to notice that the competitors help each other during the tournament even though they are quite naturally opponents. As Harry is informed by Hagrid about the dragons of the first task and recognizes that the headmasters of the other part-taking schools, Madame Maxime and Professor Karkaroff, know about it too and will probably tell their students, he feels obliged to inform Hogwarts' champion Cedric Diggory as well.

“Cedric,” said Harry, “the first task is dragons.” [...] “Why are you telling me?” he asked. Harry looked at him in disbelief. He was sure Cedric wouldn't have asked that if he had seen the dragons himself. Harry wouldn't have let his worst enemy face those monsters unprepared - well, perhaps Malfoy or Snape... “It's just ... fair, isn't it?” he said to Cedric. “We all know now ... we're on an even footing, aren't we?” (298-99)

Harry embodies a feeling of justice which is held high by the church as one of the most important Christian values: do justice to others, help the poor or uneducated, stay fair. We find several proverbs concerning this issue: “Better a pittance honestly earned than great gains ill gotten”, or “When justice is done, all good men rejoice, but it brings ruin to evildoers” (Proverbs 16:8 and 21:15). As the Potter-supporting members of the church point out, Harry exhibits many more Christian character traits than are visible at first sight, only his actions are not explicitly described as religiously motivated.

In return for Harry's help, Cedric gives him a hint how to handle the secret of the egg in the second task in advising him to take a bath in a special room at Hogwarts the existence of which Harry did not even know about (375). Finally, both help each other in fulfilling the third task; Harry rescues Cedric who is attacked by the Bulgarian Victor Krum in an ambush (544), and is almost defeated by a gigantic spider (548). As both of them are eventually standing in front of the winner's cup, ready to grasp it as the champion of this tournament, they hesitate and reflect upon their way of helping each other:

Cedric took a deep breath. “You take it. You should win. That's twice you've saved my neck in here. [...] You told me about the dragons,” Cedric said. “I would've gone down in the first task if you hadn't told me what was coming.” “I had help on that, too,” Harry snapped, trying to mop up his bloody leg with his ropes. “You helped me with the egg - we're square.” [...] “Go on,” Cedric said. [...] “Both of us,” Harry said. “What?” “We'll take it at the same time. It's still a Hogwarts victory. We'll tie for it.”

Cedric stared at Harry. He unfolded his arms. “You - you sure?” “Yeah,” said Harry. “Yeah ... we’ve helped each other out, haven’t we? We both got there. Let’s just take it together.” (549-51)

Even though Harry and Cedric had never been friends up to this point, they sense the importance of fairness and justice towards each other. They want to be honest winners, not defeat the other by taking advantage of his helpfulness.

However, friendship and loyalty are not the only Christian values depicted in the novel. So are morality and responsibility. In the second task when Harry is required to save only the object which is most important to him from the bottom of the Hogwarts Lake, which in this case is Ron, he nevertheless feels obliged to rescue the other three as well - Hermione, Cho and Fleur Delacour’s sister Gabrielle. As Fleur does not turn up in time to rescue Gabrielle, he decides to take her to the surface with him, though he is losing incredible amounts of time. It turns out that nothing would have happened to her if she had not been rescued, but nevertheless Harry is awarded extra points for his showing of “moral fibre” (*Goblet* 440). Olsen, the online editor of *Christianity Today*, acknowledges the high moral ground of Rowling’s protagonist, too: remember his statement, quoted above, about Harry’s world as being a moral one.

3.2 The Depiction and Condemnation of Dark Magic

A lot of conservative Christians also had problems with the dark magic which was portrayed in the Potter series, claiming that it was used as a tool to seduce children or young adults into occultism. Reading the books thoroughly, however, clearly gives the reader the impression that dark magic is not desirable, or rather that it is something evil, unwanted, and sometimes even unforgivable. This kind of admonition starts in the first book when Harry finds out that most of the dark wizards, including Lord Voldemort and most of his Death Eaters, belonged to Slytherin, one of the four houses at Hogwarts. The children reading the books get to know with every further volume that dark magic is outlawed in the magical world by the “good side”. Often, the evil side is explicitly pointed out: for example in the “Three Unforgivable Curses”. First, there is the “Imperius curse” (*Goblet* 188) which forces the bewitched into the absolute control of the one who utters it and makes them lose their own free will. The second one, the “Cruciatius curse”, produces unbearable pain and tortures the person until his or her mind breaks down or death occurs. The third and worst one is “Avada Kedavra” - the killing curse. As the name of these curses indicates, they are unforgivable, meaning that the person

who casts these spells on others will have to spend a life sentence in the wizard prison Azkaban (*Goblet* 192) - a scary place where most people go mad.

To Christians as well, the crimes represented by the “Unforgivable Curses” of the Potter books are reprehensible. At least “You shall not murder” is one of the Ten Commandments, the most basic tenets for a Christian sense of justice. So far, we have already found considerable parallels between the content of the Potter books and the principles of the Bible - value friendship, stay fair to enemies, treat the powerless as equals, do not murder, torture or suppress anybody. What was not said before but should be considered as the most important basis for human life and relationships, as a fundament for the Bible and the Christian belief as well as the main theme of the Potter books is of course: love.

The most important example is set by Lilly Potter, Harry’s mother: when Voldemort tried to kill the newborn Harry, she begged him to take her life instead, shielding the baby with her body. As Dumbledore explains to Harry later, this was the reason he survived the attack: “Your mother died to save you. If there is one thing Voldemort cannot understand, it is love [...]. To have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever” (*Sorcerer’s Stone* 299). We will see in a later scene of the fourth book how this protection continues to work. Of course, love is not only depicted in family relations; however, it would go beyond the scope of this paper to describe all the other occurring forms. What is crucial to note at this point is that the concept of love is centrally important to the church as well: Jesus died for us over 2000 years ago; he gave his life for our sins and worries because God is loving and caring. Even if the one who saved us is dead, he or she lives on in our memories and hearts.

To address all aspects of consideration relevant to the church it is crucial to have a closer look at contents of the Potter books which could be regarded as “cruel” or connected to dark magic. Many critics have claimed that the fourth book of the series was the first for which the classification as children’s literature became questionable. This is particularly due to the fact that the magical world’s most dangerous and evil wizard, Lord Voldemort, comes into power again. It is true that the chapter in which his uprising is described, promisingly entitled “Flesh, Blood and Bone”, is in fact a nail-biting and gloomy piece of literature, but at the same time gives the story a refreshingly new direction. Observed from the outside, the recreation of Voldemort could fall under the category of “satanic activities”: His almost inanimate body, small as a child’s torso but feeble, flat and snake-like, is put into a boiling cauldron; his servant Wormtail chops off his right hand to give the flesh to his master and takes blood from Harry, the “enemy”, to add it to the cauldron:

And Harry stared back into the face that had haunted his nightmares for three years. Whiter than a skull, with wide, livid scarlet eyes, and a nose that was as flat as a snake's, with slits for nostrils ... Lord Voldemort had risen again. (*Goblet* 558)

Of course we have to consider that children have a vivid fantasy indeed and could be scared by the described scene. However, they have the opportunity to close the book whenever they want to and rather go on reading with their parents instead – as only one possible alternative.

Coming back to the above-quoted section of *The Goblet of Fire*, there is a second point that needs to be discussed: at which point do we refer to something as satanic? Although the described scene might appear close to our previous definition of it - the belief in something supernatural - the question arises who ever succeeded in creating a person by doing magic? Most likely, Satanists are neither able to put up a connection to the dead nor have they brought something or somebody into being. To put it in other words: As scientifically impossible as Satanism is, as much is magic in the Potter series. Even if the church condemns the *belief* only and not the *use* of it, it must be obvious at that point that Satanic practices cannot be compared to a children's book content.

Another scene which could be criticized by the church is the situation in which Harry's and Voldemort's wands connect and thereby make the spell "Priori Incantatem" work, which produces the last performed actions of a wand in the reversed order again. Thus, Voldemort's last victims, including Cedric Diggory and Harry's parents, appear as smoky ghosts and help Harry to endure the great effort to fight against this wizard (*Goblet* 577-79). The church could have problems with the appearance of ghosts here, but as Dumbledore points out later in the book, these are not ghosts but echoes (606), i.e. remembrances of the past. They are neither real nor will they come back through this spell, but Harry is close to and supported by them in the moment he fears the most to die. Only the belief in these smoky creatures and their assumed ability to help him gives him enough power and courage not to give up though the situation seems desperate. Exactly that principle is taught by the church, too: believe and you will get helped. Try to get over obstacles. Fight and you will not lose in vain. So is the fact that Harry is helped here by his family instead of God an indication of Satanism or even a depiction of dark magic? This scene is the above mentioned notion of parental love which protects Harry and his life again by faith and trust. It shows that we are able to make deep connections on earth which even outlast death.

4 Conclusion

Harry Potter, an evil book series that was created to mislead children into occultism and dark magic? Many claims and accusations, made by Christian fundamentalists and conservative Christians about the Potter books and investigated in this paper, sound like the above formulated morbid prejudice. As absurd as the topic must appear to people from the outside who are glad that children start reading books again and are able to immerse themselves into fantasy and fiction, this fear is of importance for some Christian believers. Particularly the fundamentalist ones who try to interpret and act out every word of the Holy Scripture in a literal way feel immensely disturbed by the depiction of magic in general. However, most significant for this essay was to show that the literary figure of Harry Potter is in no way satanic or occult, nor does the Potter series trivialize dark magic. As was clearly pointed out throughout this essay, dark magic is depicted as a power used by “evil” wizards and is constantly fought in all volumes of the series. The “good” magic is used to fight against evil powers and help the young students to achieve an honourable life. Even if young readers may be attracted by the portrayal of magic and the wonderful things which can be achieved by it, this by no way means that they take fictional literature for real or turn their back on religion and God. If they are raised religiously and are able to talk to their parents about concerns which may arise during the reading, there is no need to worry about children “changing sides”.

Particularly because, and that is the next point, there is no explicit mentioning of God or religion in the books, it is impossible to find scenes which deny or condemn it. In contrast, the church should be - and generally, is - aware of the many connections which can be made between the Potter books and churchly values. Love, friendship, courage, justice and mutual help are some of the most important values in human life, and exactly these are described throughout the books in a warm, compassionate tone again and again. A closer look on book four showed that without help from the outside, that is, from his friends, Harry would have never been able to solve the tasks which were part of the Triwizard Tournament.

As underlined by comparing different opinions and quotations, the church itself is divided on this subject, with a majority of Christians supporting the books and its goals. Amazingly, scrutinizing the source of the opponents, it became clear that especially “ordinary” Christians protested in the name of Christianity, whereas leaders of Christian magazines and people higher in the religious hierarchy gave positive feedback on the books. There is nothing to say against these people if the books do not match their idea of education or moral values, but it is unfair to speak of evil seduction or spoilage of the youth in general. After scanning the fourth book even from a religious point of view, but also gathering

information from the psychological perspective and a logical moral standpoint I cannot say that there is any need to condemn the Potter books as unfit for children's reading.

It was obvious from the beginning that the radical church members will not change their mind even through logical argumentation; however, it was important to point out what these books actually depict or not. A surprising insight while writing this essay was to realize that even some of the most radical opponents of the Potter books became more positive over the course of time due to the affirmation and approval of other church members. It is the right of everyone to be sceptical about new phenomena or to question them; however, if the discussion is conducted in terms of "what one said", "what one heard", or "what one personally thinks", it does not only become unscientific, but pointless to argue against.

I hope that this essay clarifies two things: on the one hand it argues that Harry Potter is neither evil nor satanic, but a warm-hearted piece of children's literature which helps the young generation as well as older ones to fire their imagination; and on the other hand, it tries to provide explanations on the objections of some church members in order to help the society understand their reasons. We should not get separated, neither religiously nor as fellow human beings, by a children's book which can and should be read instead as a piece of pleasure, fantasy and entertainment.

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