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HARRY POTTER AND THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT:
An in-depth look at the Christian undertones
in J.K. Rowling's series

By Cody Hall

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of
the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College.

Oxford
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Approved by



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Reader: Professor Debra Young

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ABSTRACT

CODY PHARR HALL: Harry Potter and the Religious Right: An In-depth Look at the Christian Undertones in J.K. Rowling's Series
(Under the direction of Dr. Natalie Schroeder)

This thesis involves an investigation of the Christian elements in J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter book series. Methods and procedures included researching right wing religious responses to the Harry Potter series through media outlets. Each book was read and analyzed in response to religious objections. The series was explicated and studied for religious themes and ideas. The claims of the witchcraft content in the series were researched and expounded upon. Supplementary readers were used, and commentators were relied upon for certain cited ideas. The findings of this thesis are that fringe religious groups who oppose the Potter series are misinformed in their objections. In conclusion, Rowling's series supports many Christian ideas and serves as edifying literature to readers.

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Introduction

J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* collection is the most successful book series of all time. With over four hundred million books sold, it ranks as number one in sales throughout the world. The Potter series has also spawned a multi-billion dollar film franchise. It has taken Rowling from obscurity to celebrity billionaire. However, the success of the novels has been met with a great deal of controversy. Many Christian groups have remained outspoken against Potter.

Nearly all of the objections leveled at the Potter series have been from Evangelical Christians, mostly those with a fundamentalist tendency. They maintain that the Potter series proselytizes pagan and occult imagery that is supposedly contained in the books. Focus on the Family, a Colorado Springs, Colorado based Christian group, summarized its issues with the Potter series by stating, "It contains some powerful and valuable lessons about love and courage and the ultimate victory of good over evil... However, the positive messages are packaged in a medium -- witchcraft -- that is directly denounced in scripture" (Holly). Many groups share this sentiment. They enjoy the books and find the message of good conquering evil acceptable, but they feel there is no delineation between what is forbidden in scripture and what is practiced in the Potter books. Critics, like Focus on the Family and Chick Publishing, cite Bible verses such as Deuteronomy 18:10-12 which command, "There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a

sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord” (ESV).

Other fundamentalist groups have been much more outspoken in their criticism, arguing that the books in the Potter series “open a doorway that will put untold millions of kids into hell” (“The Nervous Witch”). Certain Christian groups have even organized and supported local book burnings. The Potter books have been burned alongside Stephen King novels, ouija boards, AC/DC records, Eminem CDs, and copies of the animated Disney film *Snow White* (“ ‘Satanic’ Potter Books”). One example of such behavior was in 2001 when the Christ Community Church of Alamogordo, New Mexico had an anti-Potter sermon preached from the pulpit followed by a book burning. Christ Community Church’s pastor, Jack Brock, was quoted as stating, “Behind that innocent face is the power of satanic darkness... Harry Potter is the devil and he is destroying people” (“ ‘Satanic’ Potter Books”). Pastor Brock later said that he had never read any of the books from the Potter series but that he had researched their contents (“ ‘Satanic’ Potter Books”). How could Pastor Brock speak out as an authority without having read the Potter series in its entirety?

Objections to the books have continued as the fanfare surrounding the Potter series has grown. In 2007 an article appeared in *Christianity Today* that compared the appeal of the Potter series to “rat poison mixed with orange soda” (Komschlies). The article’s author, Jacqui Komschlies, wrote, “We’re taking something deadly from our world and turning it into what some are calling ‘merely a literary device’ ” (Komschlies).

Many of the Christian fundamentalists opposed to Potter view the witchcraft in the series as a promotion of the religion Wicca. Jeremiah Films released a DVD named *Harry Potter: Witchcraft Repackaged*, which argues that children are learning occultism and Wicca in classrooms through the *Harry Potter* books (Witchcraft Repackaged). These critics have argued that the series is too close to Wicca and therefore keeping the collection in public school is a violation of the separation of church and state (“Anti-Potter Group”). In one such instance, education attorney Victoria Sweeny responded to protestors stating, “if schools were to remove all books containing reference to witches, they would have to ban mainstays like ‘Macbeth’ and ‘Cinderella’ ” (“Ban Harry Potter”).

Even former president George W. Bush had a stance on the books. Matt Latimer, George W. Bush’s former speechwriter, claims in his memoir that administration officials objected, “to giving the author J.K. Rowling a presidential medal because the Harry Potter books encouraged witchcraft” (Flood).

The religious fear surrounding the series has led to at least two online scares. Both of the urban legends were inspired by satirical publications that were unintentionally taken seriously. An American satirical newspaper named *The Onion* published the article “Harry Potter Books Spark Rise in Satanism Among Children” in 2001. The article jokingly quoted the “High Priest of Satanism” who described the Potter series as “an absolute godsend for our cause” (“Books Spark Rise in Satanism”). Meanwhile, the article quoted a supposed recent convert to Satanism, a ten year old boy named Craig, as stating, “I want to learn the Cruciatus Curse, to make my muggle science teacher suffer for giving me a D” (“Books Spark Rise in

Satanism”). Many fundamentalist Christians circulated the article as “proof” that the Potter series was evil despite the fact that the article was written in a comedy newspaper (“Harry Potter Satanism”). A year later the National Post of Canada’s publication *Post Mortem* released a similar satirical article stating that:

“Rowling—or, as she shall henceforth be referred to and credited as, Mrs. J. K. Satan—said that as she sat in a coffee shop one grey day, wondering what to do with her empty, aimless life, it hit her: ‘I’ll give myself, body and soul, to the Dark Master. And in return, he will give me absurd wealth and power over the weak and pitiful of the world. And he did!’”
 (“Author Admits”)

Both articles were erroneously used to prove Rowling and *Harry Potter* promote satanic ideas.

The inclusion of the Potter series in public libraries has been frequently challenged because of the series’ focus on magic, which fringe Christian groups maintain is synonymous with witchcraft and Satanism. In the United States the series ranked among most challenged books in libraries between 1990 and 1999. This ranking was earned despite the first copy of *Sorcerer’s Stone* only first being published in the United States in 1998 (“100 Most Frequently Challenged”). According to the American Library Association, the Potter series books are now the most challenged books in the United States in the 21st century (“Top 100 Banned/Challenged”).

Rowling has spoken out many times about the religious criticism of her books. In an Oprah interview in 2010, Rowling responded to the objections, stating, “If

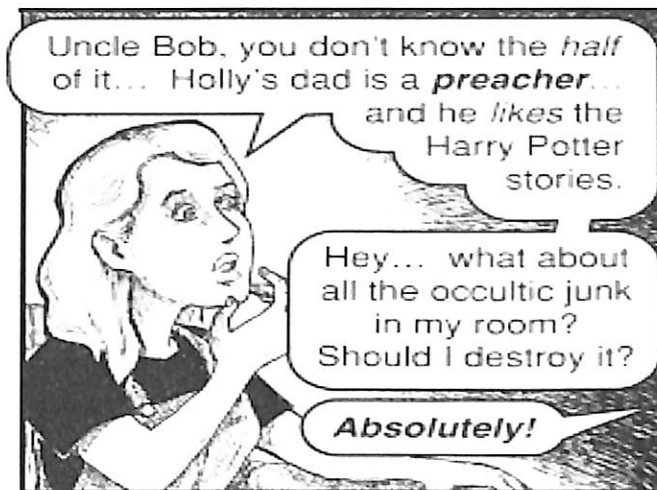
we're talking about the dark and scary stuff, I think it's perfectly legitimate for a parent to look and say 'that's a little old for my child,' or 'we're going to need to discuss it together' ... On the 'you must not discuss witchcraft,' 'you must not have witches or magic depicted in a book,' I find that nonsensical..." Rowling has also professed to believing in God and attending church regularly. She admitted that her religion would play a significant role in the Potter series. Rowling explained, "I believe in God, not magic... If I talk to freely about that, I think the intelligent reader... will be able to guess what is coming in the books" (Nelson).

So what truth is there in the criticism of Rowling and the *Harry Potter* books? Does the series explicitly teach readers witchcraft, which far right Christian groups condemn, or a Hollywoodized version of magic? As millions of readers can attest, the Potter series is an epic tale about death, love, friendship, bravery, loyalty, forgiveness, and self-sacrifice. A closer study of *Harry Potter* is needed to determine if it is an edifying and imaginative story containing Christian imagery or an instruction manual on witchcraft and occult practices.

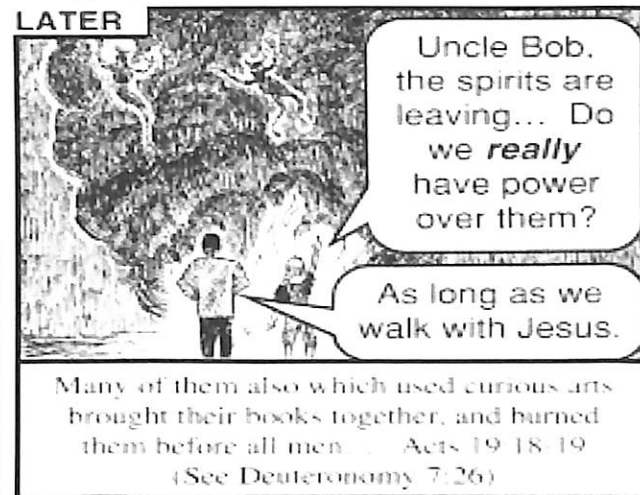
Chapter 1: Witchcraft

J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series has been surrounded by nearly as much fanfare as controversy. Many fundamentalist Christian sects consider there to be "alarming parallels between contemporary occultism and Rowling's message," and some have gone so far as to label the books "witchcraft" (Berit). Reactions to the novels have ranged from Christian leaders speaking out against the novels from their pulpits to some proclaiming that Harry Potter is the "devil." Others have even staged mass book burnings (" 'Satanic' Potter Books"). Many of the Christian leaders cite Deuteronomy 18:10-11 as their biblical guidance in condemning Potter: "Anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord." Christians speaking out against witchcraft also cite New Testament scriptures such as Galatians 5:19-20 which includes the Greek word "*pharmakia*" which means "preparing poisonous potions in secret, to harm or kill other people" and is sometimes mistranslated as *witchcraft* or *magic* (Robinson). Other scriptures used to condemn witchcraft include Revelation 21:8 which states, "But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death," and specifies a second death of burning as the consequence for acts of sorcery.

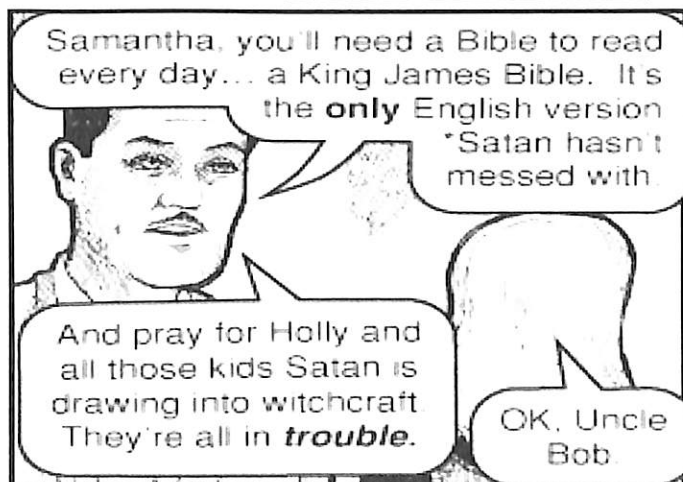
Jack Chick, a far right Christian publisher, even goes so far as to make a comic strip style religious tract condemning the Potter series. His comic strips include almost all of the usual anti-Potter rhetoric and yet are still very unique. Here is an excerpt from a tract named “The Nervous Witch”:



*See the video, "Harry Potter: Witchcraft Repackaged," available from Chick Publications.



What about *your* house?



The children of darkness hate Jesus. On doomsday He will say to the wicked...



Here is your only hope: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (like Samantha did) and thou shalt be saved." Acts 16:31

*For more information on Bible versions, see www.chick.com/information/bibleversions/ ("The Nervous Witch")

Interestingly, the character Samantha includes ouija boards as something she learned about in the Potter series though there is no reference to ouija boards in the books at all. Chick's tract draws a hard line between those who "like" or read Harry Potter, as Samantha once did and Holly's dad the preacher still does, and those such as Uncle Bob who hate the series. Chick is insinuating a one to one association of demon possession and occult practice to Harry Potter readers and fans. He further implies that to be a true Christian one must be anti-Harry Potter: "The Potter books open a doorway that will put untold *millions* of kids into hell" ("The Nervous Witch").

While many fringe Christian critics have a strong reaction to the Potter series, the most common witchcraft association is to the Neopagan religion and modern form of witchcraft known as Wicca. However, a simple look at Wicca reveals that Harry Potter's magic is much different. For instance, both men and women who consider themselves Wiccans are referred to as Witches and therefore practice *witchcraft* exclusively. The term "wizard" is not used at all in Wicca to specify males, though "wizard" is often used to describe magical males in the Potter series. For example, the school Harry attends, which is also the most prominent magical school in the series, is named the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

In the Potter series, magic is a natural science (Breimeier). Harry and his cohorts use magic for everything from flying on brooms as a normal mode of travel to cleaning their homes. Wiccans believe that magic is rooted in the natural world and that the abilities gained are "natural innate powers" (The Church and School of Wicca). The Wiccan views are that "The Craft" or Wicca "draws its strength from the diversity of nature itself" and teaches of the "ethical use of the natural innate powers"

(The Church and School of Wicca). Also, Wiccans do not view their magic as something that can overcome more universally recognizable natural laws, such as physics (Wigington). The laws of physics do not limit Harry and his magical world. Characters are seen performing apparition (magical teleportation), moving objects with their wands, flying on brooms, and making others levitate by use of the spell “*levicorpus*” (*Half Blood Prince*).

Some critics have made the connection between the Divination classes that Harry and his pupils attend under the direction of Seer Sybill Trelawney and the Wiccan rituals of perceiving “rhythms in the patterns of the sun, moon, and seasons” (The Church and School of Wicca). Both Divination and Wicca insinuate the idea that balance and harmony are important in the lives of believers. Divination and Scrying are known for using varied means to obtain answers about the future including: “Crystal and or Crystal Ball Gazing, Reading Tea Leaves, Gazing into a pool or bowl of water, Tarot Cards, Feng Shui, Palmistry, Candle Gazing and the list goes on...” (“Divination & Scrying”). Trelawney’s Divination classes use almost all of the said means to obtain answers about the future. However, the Christian right should not find a problem with Trelawney. Based on her role in the novel series, readers see that she stands in as comic relief and as a plot device.

Most students and teachers at Hogwarts find Trelawney and her teachings and rituals insufferable. Professor McGonagall best displays this by commenting, “You should know, Potter, that Sibyll Trelawney has predicted the death of one student a year since she arrived at this school. None of them has died yet” (*Prisoner of Azkaban* 109), and Ron later makes the trite remark, “She’s a right old fraud” (321). There are

only two examples in the whole seven book series of an esteemed character respecting prophecies made by Trelawney. The first is when she successfully predicts the return of the Dark Lord through the help of his servant in *Prisoner of Azkaban*. Harry is leaving Professor Trelawney's classroom after performing very poorly on his end of the year exam when she becomes rigid and goes into a trance-like state announcing:

“The Dark Lord lies alone and friendless, abandoned by his followers. His servant has been chained these twelve years. Tonight, before midnight... the servant will break free and set out to rejoin his master. The Dark Lord will rise again with his servant's aid, greater and more terrible than ever he was. Tonight... before midnight... the servant... will set out... to rejoin... his master...”

(Prisoner of Azkaban 324)

The second successful prediction is revealed in *Order of the Phoenix*. Professor Dumbledore recounts his memory of the incident. He had gone to Hog's Head tavern in a nearby village to interview applicant Sybill Trelawney for the post of Divination professor at Hogwarts. Though he believed the subject should be discontinued, he gave Trelawney a chance to prove her abilities. She quickly proved incapable of doing so during the interview. Yet, just before leaving their meeting, Trelawney was suddenly entranced and stated in a harsh voice:

“The one with power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches... Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies... and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord

knows not... and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives... The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies..." (*Order of the Phoenix* 841)

This revelation caused Dumbledore to hire Trelawney. It was his attempt to protect her from danger. He knew that if the Dark Lord caught her that she would be tortured in an attempt to gain information about the prophecy.

Trelawney's accuracy is in spite of herself. She has no recollection of any of the real predictions she has made. She is completely unaware after having made the prophecy about the Dark Lord's servant returning to his aid in front of Harry:

Then, quite suddenly, Professor Trelawney's head snapped up again.

"I'm so sorry, dear boy," she said dreamily, "the heat of the day, you know...I drifted off for a moment..."

Harry sat there, staring at her.

"Is there anything wrong, my dear?"

"You—you just told me that the—the Dark Lord's going to rise again..."

Professor Trelawney looked thoroughly startled.

"The Dark Lord? He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named? My dear boy, that's hardly something to joke about..."

"But you just said it!"

"I think you must have dozed off too, dear!" said Professor Trelawney.

"I would certainly not presume to predict anything quite as far-fetched as *that!*"

Harry climbed back down the ladder and the spiral staircase,
wondering...had he just heard Professor Trelawney make a real prediction?
(*Prisoner of Azkaban* 324-325)

Harry is left questioning if Trelawney's prediction was real. This question is answered one year later in *Goblet of Fire* when Voldemort is rejuvenated, proving Trelawney's prediction true.

Wiccans claim to work with "Spirit Guides" or "Spirit Twins" and readers of the Potter series see no such proclamations by Professor Trelawney after making an accurate prophecy (Divination in Magic). The fact that she can't even remember her own predictions furthers the idea that her brand of Divination is a sham. It is nonsense fortune telling. She believes in her farfetched predictions of death and dramatic readings of palms. Trelawney cannot even understand the truth that came from her own mouth. As she responded to Harry's question about the Dark Lord, "I would certainly not presume to predict anything as far-fetched as that!" (*Prisoner of Azkaban* 325). Harry recounts his experience with Professor Trelawney to Dumbledore:

"Was it—was she making a real prediction?"

Dumbledore looked mildly impressed.

"Do you know, Harry, I think she might have been," he said thoughtfully. "Who'd have thought it? That brings her total of real predictions up to two. I should offer her a pay raise..." (*Prisoner of Azkaban* 426)

Even Dumbledore, the omniscient headmaster, is surprised by her prediction. This is an interesting feat considering he was the person to whom she made her only

other true prediction. The centaur Firenze finally discredits Trelawney's brand of magic altogether:

"I know that you have learned the names of the planets and their moons in Astronomy," said Firenze's calm voice, "...Our findings teach us that the future may be glimpsed in the sky above us..."

"Professor Trelawney did Astrology with us!" said Parvati excitedly... "Mars causes accidents and burns and things like that, and when it makes an angle to Saturn... that means people need to be extra careful with how things—"

"That," said Firenze calmly, "is human nonsense."

"Sibyll Trelawney may have Seen, I do not know," continued Firenze... "but she wastes her time, in the main, on self-flattering nonsense humans call fortune-telling." (*Order of the Phoenix* 602-603)

Rowling quickly prevents readers from getting a false impression that the centaur Firenze can definitively tell the future:

He... finished by telling them that it was foolish to put too much faith in such things anyway, because even centaurs sometimes read them wrongly... His priority did not seem to be to teach them what he knew, but rather to impress upon them that nothing, not even centaurs' knowledge, was foolproof.

"He's not very definite on anything, is he?" said Ron in a low voice... (*Order of the Phoenix* 604).

Rowling effectively uses Trelawney's supposed abilities as a significant plot device and source of comic relief while simultaneously revealing that her brand of magic is in Firenze's words, "nonsense" (*Order of the Phoenix* 603). Rowling includes Divination in the series due to its traditional use in English magic, but she doesn't leave readers thinking Divination is a plausible reality in any way. Therefore, fans and critics alike are without cause for concern over the questionable occult practices of this quirky professor.

The use of magic for evil in the Potter series and its relation to Wicca's brand of witchcraft has been called into question by fundamentalist Christians. Wiccans claim to use their magical powers exclusively for good in *white* covens or witch assemblies. It is their charge that they must "use these powers for good amongst the circle and its friends" (Carr-Gomm 187). Wiccans admit darker magic does exist but condemn such acts:

There are obviously other, more selfish aims, such as the acquisition of money, power, etc.... if such gifts are not earned they will often turn against the person who requests them. 'Black' magic, when used purely for selfish ends, corrupts the user and can lead to psychological disintegration.

(Carr-Gomm 187)

The Harry Potter series also clearly demonstrates evil uses of magic. He-Who-Should-Not-Be-Named—the Dark Lord Voldemort—and his followers, the Death Eaters, usually perform these evil acts. The self-proclaimed Wiccan writing in *The Book of English Magic* refers to corruption and "psychological disintegration" as consequences for using magic for "*selfish ends*" (187). However, in both cases this

delineation between the uses of *white* and *black/dark* magic and their consequences is less about the actual spells and more about the intent of the user behind them. The Jewish Torah and Christian Old Testament contain similar ideas. One notable example is the human tongue and its power for good or for evil. Psalm 37:30 states, “The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks justice.” Several passages later Psalms 52:2 states, “Your tongue plots destruction, like a sharp razor, you worker of deceit.” Again, the author is not saying the object itself is good or evil; rather that it is capable of either action depending on the intent of the user. This example alone should suffice in setting those who exclusively have moral reservations about magic in the Potter series at ease. Therefore, according to Wiccan standards, the simple existence of magic in the Potter series is not good or evil. Instead, it exists as a powerful object, much like a firearm; it can be used to hunt prey for life-giving nourishment or to injure or kill one’s adversaries out of anger or selfishness. Again, the moralist should ultimately have a clear conscience about the magic in the series by simply reading the books and seeing that the white hats (those with overall good intentions behind their magic) win in the end. However, the observant religious reader could be muddled by this logic. The reader’s inability to label magic itself as good or evil poses several new questions for the religious reader: Is this the same type of magic outlawed in the Torah and Old and New Testament scriptures, does reading about Harry Potter’s magic put me at odds with my religious doctrine, does Harry Potter’s magic encourage readers to join the occult, and if the magic turns out to be okay, why are the bad guys able to use it?

The disparity in types of magic makes all the difference to Christian readers who are trying to obey Deuteronomy 18. Many who have read and loved the books are still unsure if the magic they are reading about is condemned by their respective religion or set of values. Others have not read the books at all for fear of breaking decrees about avoiding sorcery or occult practices (Breimeier). Luckily, Rowling makes a clear distinction in the type of magic used in the Potter series. She separates what is known as *invocational* magic or sorcery from the longstanding English fantasy tradition of *incantational* magic. Rowling shows readers the traditional, edifying *incantational* magic of English literature in story form.

Invocational is a word that means “to invoke” or more literally “to call in” (Granger *How Harry Cast* 3). This sort of magic is what is commonly referred to as sorcery. Scriptures of traditional revealed religions all warn against “invoking” various powers for personal gain and power. Revealed tradition, history books, and fantasy fiction all “touch on sorcery...in order to show us that the unbridled pursuit of power and advantage via black magic promises a tragic end” (Granger *How Harry Cast* 3). Christopher Marlowe’s *The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus* shows readers just how the spirits invoked have their own agenda, which usually ends in the demise of the conjurer. It is because the spirits, just as the conjurers, have their own self-interest at heart. They use the conjurers to benefit themselves. Wiccans even make a similar distinction between the spiritual and psychic realms. They define a *spell* as, “a ritual for raising psychic power and directing it to a specific practical purpose” (Carr-Gomm 189). Luckily for fundamentalist Christians, there is not *invocational* magic in the Harry Potter book

series. Although evil wizards use hateful spells, curses, and hexes such as *Avada Kedavra*, there is not a single instance in the whole series of evil spirits or conjuring.

The Potter series uses magic via spells and wands in what is referred to as *incantational* magic. “*Incantational* means literally ‘to sing along with’ or ‘to harmonize’ ” (Granger *How Harry Cast* 4). The distinction is between what is considered psychic and what is considered spiritual. Both psychic and spiritual realms are regarded as supernatural realms, which are home to supernatural beings. All traditional faiths hold this division in common. John Granger, self-professed Christian and author, clearly separates the two, stating:

The psychic realm—accessible through the soul and including the powers of the soul, from the emotions and sentiments to the reason and intellect—is home to demonic and angelic created beings and is predominantly a fallen place... The spiritual realm is “God’s place”—the transcendent sphere within and beyond creation and the restrictions of being, time, and space. (Granger *How Harry Cast* 4)

Therefore, invocational magic is summoning fallen beings of the psychic realm.

Christians unanimously forbid invoking the said powers of the psychic realm.

Conversely, one of the functions of traditional English literature has been to nurture the spiritual life echoed by incantational magic (Granger *How Harry Cast* 5).

C. S. Lewis, a famous Christian and author of children’s fantasy literature, illustrates the separation of incantational and invocational magic in his novel *Prince Caspian* from his Narnia series. As a fight for Narnia ensues between Prince Caspian and his evil uncle King Miraz, the creatures of “Old Narnia” and Prince Caspian

begin to falter. At a war council they decide to blow Queen Susan's horn, a magical horn, which is fabled to bring aid to the person who uses it. By sounding the horn, its user is showing faith in the magic of Aslan, creator of Narnia and Emperor over the Sea, and is harmonizing with the music he used when he sang the world into existence. Help shortly arrives in the form of the former kings and queens Peter, Edmund, Susan, and Lucy.

Nikabrik the dwarf decides on a different plan of action. He decides to find a hag and conjure the dreaded evil White Witch in search of aid to their cause. He thinks she will want to help the Narnians in their battle in exchange for a chance at life back in Narnia. She is a known hater of Aslan and his goodness. When Caspian and company discover Nikabrik's plan, they are appalled. Caspian and Nikabrik begin to fight even though they are on the same side against King Miraz. Their skirmish results in Nikabrik's death and an end to the sorcery. Lewis, like Rowling, uses incantational magic exclusively in his books series. Rowling models much of the magic in her series after Lewis' example. Fundamentalist Christians who read and regard the *Narnia* series as Christian literature should see this connection. Rowling does not go against the Christian fantasy tradition set before her. Instead, she shapes her work in the same fashion.

A logical follow-up question to the separation of invocational and incantational magic is: If incantational magic in the Potter series is good, why can it be used for evil? Again, it is a choice of free will similar to the moral argument about the use of magic in the first place. It exists for the use of good or evil just as human's actions can be lent to good or unfortunately evil. Therefore, the battle is between

good and evil: those standing for courage, truth, and equality against those who seek to escape power and promote private gain.

Lewis, a champion of Christian literature, clearly draws the line between good incantational magic and evil invocational magic. The magic of the Potter series, like that of the Narnia series, is restricted only to incantational magic. Each story conforms to the religious decrees against invocational magic and the English literary tradition of incantational magic. Critics such as Jack Chick who accuse the Potter series of laying the groundwork for “drawing [kids] into witchcraft” (“The Nervous Witch”) are mistaken in both their understanding of witchcraft and their own English literary traditions. Religious and irreligious readers alike should avoid their ignorant and bloated cautionary tales.

Chapter 2: Death and Love

To begin a discussion of the significance of Harry Potter's story to Christianity—which for years has cast Harry aside, banned him, and looked on with condescension to those who found him quite fascinating—is most certainly to start with the end, death. In 2007 Rowling appeared on NBC's *Dateline* and discussed the theme of death and how the loss of her mother shaped the Potter series: “Six months in [to writing *Sorcerer's Stone*] my mother dies... From that moment on death became a central, if not *the* central, theme of the seven books. The theme of how we react to death, how much we fear it... All my characters are defined by their attitude to death and the possibility of death.” Readers learn in the very first chapter of *Sorcerer's Stone* just how serious Rowling is about death, and how Harry's life is forever changed in the wake of tragedy.

Lily Potter's death is the sole reason The-Boy-Who-Lived ever actually lived. Harry's memories of her death grow over time as he learns more about the events surrounding it. Even before Hagrid explains that he is a famous wizard, Harry has dreams about the supposed “car crash” that killed his parents and the “blinding flash of green light and burning pain on his forehead” (*Sorcerer's Stone* 29) that resulted from the crash. While the “car crash” explanation is revealed to be a farce, one created by his hateful relatives, the Dursleys, in an attempt to prevent Harry from knowing of his magical heritage, the readers of the series are reminded of the true story over and over again throughout the series. The most horrifying details come

from Harry's nightmarish episodes during his numerous battles with dementors in *Prisoner of Azkaban*, while the complete story is recounted by Lord Voldemort in *Deathly Hallows* just after Harry and Hermione narrowly escape Voldemort's wrath in Godric's Hollow, the site of Harry and Voldemort's fateful first encounter. Voldemort revisits his memory:

She [Lily Potter] had no wand upon her either.... How stupid they were, and how trusting, thinking their safety lay in friends, that weapons could be discarded even for moments....

He forced the door open.... And there she stood, the child in her arms. At the sight of him, she dropped her son into the crib behind her and threw her arms wide, as if this would help...

"Not Harry, not Harry please not Harry!"

"Stand aside, you silly girl... stand aside, now."

"Not Harry, please no, take me, kill me instead—"

"This is my last warning—"

He could have forced her away from the crib, but it seemed more prudent to finish them all....

The green light [from the killing curse] flashed around the room and she dropped like her husband...

He pointed the wand very carefully into the boy's face: He wanted to see it happen, the destruction of this one, inexplicable danger. The child began to cry...

"Avada Kedavra!"

And then he broke... (*Deathly Hallows* 344-345)

Interestingly, Rowling brings Voldemort's initial downfall at the hands of an infant. The curse that was meant to kill Harry rebounded and destroyed Voldemort. However, as Dumbledore so eloquently explains to Harry, it was not Harry who brought about Voldemort's destruction; it was his mother's love. Dumbledore states:

“Your mother died to save you. If there is one thing Voldemort cannot understand, it is love. He didn't realize that love as powerful as your mother's for you leaves its own mark. Not a scar, no visible sign... to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us some protection forever. It is in your very skin. Quirrell full of hatred, greed, and ambition, sharing his soul with Voldemort, could not touch you for this reason. It was agony to touch a person marked by something so good.”

(*Sorcerer's Stone* 299)

The love that first saved Harry repeatedly saves him many times—in his face-off with Quirrell/Voldemort over the Sorcerer's Stone, in the graveyard after capturing the Triwizard Cup, and lastly, and most importantly, upon Harry's submission to Voldemort in the Forbidden Forest in the final installment, *Deathly Hallows*. For Christians looking upon this single passage inside this complex, epic tale there should be a resonance of Jesus' message. Jesus says to his disciples in John 15:13, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” Lily Potter's death most certainly fits Christ's description.

Rowling does not stop communicating to readers about death after *Sorcerer's Stone* nor does she change her tone or backtrack. She outlines important messages in

each of her remaining six books about death and how Lily's love continues to protect Harry, even in her absence. Rowling continues to build on the significance of understanding love and death that she established in *Sorcerer's Stone*. As John Granger states, she especially notes the importance of this love when it is sacrificial (Granger *How Harry Cast* 65).

Each of the Potter books teaches readers numerous lessons about death and how it is ultimately defeated by love. Rowling includes these messages through the actions, thoughts, and words of various characters. I shall outline Rowling's key messages using different examples from each book in the series.

Death and Love in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*

During Harry's first year at Hogwarts, Headmaster Albus Dumbledore teaches him lessons about death and love. The first heart-to-heart conversation between Dumbledore and Harry is shared in front of the Mirror of Erised. As Harry gazes into the mirror, he sees his parents, James and Lily, smiling and waving back at him. Harry becomes obsessed with this image and even takes Ron to show him the mirror. However, when Ron peers into the mirror, he sees something different. Ron's reflection is of himself dressed in splendid robes while holding the House and Quidditch Cups (awarded to Hogwarts' inter-house points total champion and Hogwarts' inter-house Quidditch champion, respectively). Ron asks Harry, "Do you think it shows the future?" only to be deflated when Harry responds, "How can it? All my family are dead" (*Sorcerer's Stone* 211). Harry sneaks out a third time to gaze into the mirror, and he is startled to hear Dumbledore's voice call from behind him in the seemingly empty classroom:

“So—back again, Harry?”

Harry felt as though his insides had turned to ice. He looked behind him. Sitting on one of the desks by the wall was none other than Albus Dumbledore...

“I—I didn’t see you, sir.”

... Harry was relieved to see that he [Dumbledore] was smiling.

“So,” said Dumbledore, slipping off the desk to sit on the floor with Harry, “you, like hundreds before you, have discovered the delights of the mirror of Erised.”

“Now, can you think what the Mirror of Erised shows us at all?”

... Harry thought. Then he said slowly, “It shows us what we want... whatever we want...”

“Yes and no,” said Dumbledore quietly. “It shows us nothing more or less than the deepest, most desperate desire of our hearts... However, this mirror will give us neither knowledge or truth. Men have wasted away before it, entranced by what they have seen, or been driven mad, not knowing if what it shows is real or even possible.

“The mirror will be moved to a new home tomorrow, Harry, and I ask you not to go looking for it again. If you ever *do* run across it, you will now be prepared. It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live, remember that...”

(Sorcerer’s Stone 212-214)

The headmaster's statement about dwelling on dreams and forgetting to live is the first time he imparts wisdom to Harry. Harry grieves for parents who he has never known, and Dumbledore explains to him that seeing them in the mirror gives Harry "neither knowledge or truth." However, Dumbledore's stern warning to "not to go looking for it again" advises Harry to resist fruitless and idle longings. This message from the headmaster is Harry's first lesson in the finality of death, one that he will continue to be reminded of throughout the series.

Harry's second conversation with Dumbledore in *Sorcerer's Stone* is about the power of his mother's love. As previously quoted, the headmaster explains to Harry that it was Lily Potter's love that protected him from Quirrell/Voldemort and that although her love leaves no outward signs, it still offers some protection to its recipient. Dumbledore continues in this conversation by telling Harry that Mr. and Mrs. Flamel are going to destroy the Stone. Harry is shocked by this revelation because he knows that without the Stone's Elixir of Life both the Flamels will die. Dumbledore explains:

"They have enough Elixir stored to set their affairs in order and then, yes, they will die."

Dumbledore smiled at the look of amazement on Harry's face.

"To one as young as you, I'm sure it seems incredible, but to Nicolas and Perenelle, it really is like going to bed after a very, *very* long day. After all, to the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure."

(*Sorcerer's Stone* 297)

As Harry recounts his altercation with Quirrell/Voldemort and his conversation with Dumbledore to Ron and Hermione, he quotes the last bit of Dumbledore's explanation: "To the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure." Just as Harry first learned the hard truth from Dumbledore about death's irreversibility, he also learns a second lesson about how to respond to death. Dumbledore's definition of death as "the next great adventure" teaches Harry not to fear death. Instead, Dumbledore offers a description that, "to the organized mind," sounds almost enjoyable. Harry's verbatim quotation of Dumbledore's statement shows that he takes the headmaster's words seriously. This is the beginning of Harry's path in overcoming the fear of death. After risking his life to prevent Voldemort's return to power, he comes to realize that there are things worth dying for.

Death and Love in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*

Harry's biggest struggle in *Prisoner of Azkaban* is with dementors, large hooded creatures with hands that are "glistening, grayish, slimy-looking, and scabbed, like something dead that had decayed in water" (*Prisoner of Azkaban* 83). They are considered among the darkest and most detestable beings in Harry's world. Dementors exist as blind monsters that "feel their way toward people by feeding off their emotions" (*Prisoner of Azkaban* 371). Professor Lupin, Harry's Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher in *Prisoner of Azkaban*, tells Harry:

"Dementors are among the foulest creatures that walk this earth. They infest the darkest, filthiest, places, they glory in decay and despair, they drain peace, hope and happiness out of the air around them. Even Muggles [non-

magical humans] feel their presence, though they can't see them. Get too near a dementor and every good feeling, every happy memory will be sucked out of you. If it can, the dementor will feed on you long enough to reduce you to something like itself...soul-less and evil. You'll be left with nothing but the worst experiences of your life.” (*Prisoner of Azkaban* 187)

Dementors bring out the “worst experiences of your life,” and for Harry that means his mother and father's deaths. Harry fears dementors above all else, even the Dark Lord Voldemort. Professor Lupin comments on Harry's ultimate fear of dementors. “Well, well... I'm impressed... That suggests that what you fear most of all is—fear” (*Prisoner of Azkaban* 155).

Dementors also possess a weapon that is even worse than their presence; it is called the Dementor's Kiss. Lupin explains:

“They call it the Dementor's Kiss... It's what dementors do to those they wish to destroy utterly. I suppose there must be some kind of mouth under there, because they clamp their jaws upon the mouth of the victim and—and suck out his soul.”

“What—they kill—?”

“Oh no... Much worse than that. You can exist without your soul, you know, as long as your brain and heart are still working. But you'll have no sense of self anymore, no memory, no...anything. There's no chance at all of recovery. You'll just—exist. As an empty shell. And your soul is gone forever...lost.”

(*Prisoner of Azkaban* 246-247)

With Lupin's inquiry, Rowling continues to build upon the ideas that there is a soul and that there are things far worse than dying.

Rowling also builds upon her theme from *Sorcerer's Stone* about the finality of death. Throughout *Prisoner of Azkaban* Harry struggles to overcome the nightmarish effect that the dementors have on him. He turns to Professor Lupin for help after seeing Lupin use a spell to ward a dementor off on the Hogwarts Express. Lupin agrees to teach Harry some defenses, and the two set up a series of anti-dementor training sessions.

“The spell I am going to try and teach you is highly advanced magic... It is called the Patronus Charm...”

“When it works correctly, it conjures up a Patronus... which is a kind of anti-dementor—a guardian that acts as a shield between you and the dementor... The Patronus is a kind of positive force, a projection of the very things that the dementor feeds upon—hope, happiness, the desire to survive—but it cannot feel despair, as real humans can, so the dementors can't hurt it. But I must warn you... Many qualified wizards have difficulty with it.”

(Prisoner of Azkaban 238)

Through a series of attempts to produce the Patronus, Harry wavers in his ability to think of his happy thought. Even though he wants to overcome the effects of the dementor, he cannot help but think about his mother's voice. “Any second now, he might hear his mother again... but he shouldn't think that, or he *would* hear her again, and he didn't want to... or did he?” *(Prisoner of Azkaban 238)*. Harry is caught in a situation similar to the one he experienced in front of the Mirror of Erised. His

longing to hear and know his parents, even if in this case it is reliving the horror of their deaths, keeps him from being able to fully focus on his happy thought. “Terrible though it was to hear his parents’ last moments replayed inside his head, these were the only times Harry had heard their voices since he was a very small child”

(*Prisoner of Azkaban* 243). Harry’s struggles to embody Dumbledore’s lessons continue to reappear throughout the series. However, in this instance Harry resolves to follow Dumbledore’s teachings about death. Harry thinks to himself during Lupin’s lesson:

He’d never be able to produce a proper Patronus if he half wanted to hear his parents again...

“They’re dead,” he told himself sternly. “They’re dead and listening to echoes of them won’t bring them back. You’d better get a grip on yourself if you want that Quidditch Cup.” (*Prisoner of Azkaban* 243)

Dumbledore’s lesson to Harry about the finality of death is a difficult one for him to learn and fully accept. It is not easy for him (or any human) to wholly comprehend what “final” truly means. That’s why Rowling continues to reinforce this idea.

Prisoner of Azkaban does not end without a tête-à-tête between Harry and Dumbledore. After the surprising climax of the novel, the two are left alone in Dumbledore’s office to again discuss death:

Harry looked up at him [Dumbledore]. Dumbledore wouldn’t laugh—he could tell Dumbledore...

“I thought it was my dad who’d conjured my Patronus. I mean, when I saw myself across the lake...I thought I was seeing him.”

“An easy mistake to make... I expect you’ll tire of hearing it, but you do look *extraordinarily* like James. Except for the eyes... you’ve got your mother’s eyes.”

“It was stupid, thinking it was him,” he muttered. “I mean, I knew he was dead.”

“You think the dead we loved ever truly leave us? You think that we don’t recall them more clearly than ever in times of great trouble? Your father is alive in you, Harry, and shows himself most plainly when you have need of him. How else could you produce that *particular* Patronus? Prongs rode again last night.” (*Prisoner of Azkaban* 427-428)

Rowling revisits the idea she first introduced in *Sorcerer’s Stone*, which is that death, while final, does not prevent the departed from living on within those they loved. Therefore, they never truly leave. Rowling continues to communicate to readers that this love serves as a measure of protection over the departed’s loved ones. With this sentiment she echoes Hebrews 12:1 and “the Christian belief that in Love, which is Christ, the saints are a ‘cloud of witnesses’ ever encompassing those joined with him in his Church” (Granger *How Harry Cast* 66).

Death and Love in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*

Rowling treats death and love during Harry’s battle with Lord Voldemort at the end of *Goblet of Fire*. After Harry and Cedric Diggory (Harry’s classmate and fellow Triwizard competitor) make their way through the maze during the third task of the Triwizard Tournament, they decide to simultaneously grab the Triwizard Cup to ensure that both of them are equally victorious for their school, Hogwarts. Upon

touching the Cup, Harry and Cedric are immediately transported to a graveyard where a drastically weakened Voldemort, who is in the form of a rudimentary, yet corporeal infant-like figure, and his servant Wormtail (Peter Pettigrew) await their arrival. Wormtail follows his master's command and immediately kills Cedric. Harry is stunned, and Wormtail binds him and begins casting spells to regenerate Voldemort:

And then Wormtail lowered the creature [Voldemort] into the cauldron... Harry heard its frail body hit the bottom with a soft thud.

"Bone of the father, unknowingly given, you will renew your son!"

The surface of the grave at Harry's feet cracked... Harry, watched as a fine trickle of dust rose into the air at Wormtail's command and fell softly into the cauldron...

"Flesh—of the servant—willingly given—you will—revive—your master."

He [Wormtail] stretched his right hand out in front of him... He gripped the dagger very tightly in his left hand and swung it upward... Harry... heard something fall to the ground, heard Wormtail's anguished panting, then a sickening splash, as something was dropped into the cauldron.

"B-blood of the enemy...forcibly taken...you will...resurrect you foe."

Harry could do nothing to prevent it...He saw the shining silver dagger shaking in Wormtail's remaining hand. He felt its point penetrate the crook of his right arm...

He [Wormtail] staggered back to the cauldron with Harry's blood. He poured it inside.

He [Harry] saw, with an icy surge of terror, the dark outline of a man, tall and skeletally thin, rising slowly from inside the cauldron...

Lord Voldemort had risen again.... (*Goblet of Fire* 641-643)

Wormtail's incantations during Voldemort's black resurrection become a vital part of Harry's understanding of Voldemort. Harry remembers this incident when Dumbledore teaches him to follow Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* example to "know your enemies and know yourself." Wormtail taking Harry's blood ensures that Voldemort can physically touch Harry (a problem in *Sorcerer's Stone*), and strengthens the already important connection that existed between the two of them. Rowling unravels the repercussions of this action throughout the remaining three books in the series because the love that protected Harry for so many years now flows in Voldemort's veins.

In the graveyard Voldemort summons his Death Eaters immediately after being robed and given his wand. Most of them return and form a circle around Harry and Voldemort. Voldemort explains to them his past thirteen years and how he has been rejuvenated. He enlightens his followers on his ability to return: "I, who have gone further than anybody on the path that leads to immortality. You know my goal—to conquer death" (*Goblet of Fire* 653). Rowling sets up Voldemort, whose name literally means, "flight from death," as the example of the wrong way to view death (*Granger Looking For God* 119).

Afterward, Voldemort turns to Harry and confesses: "...How foolish it was to suppose that this boy could ever be stronger than me... Harry Potter escaped me by lucky chance. And I am now going to prove my power by killing him, here and now.

in front of you all... I will give him his chance... and you will be left in no doubt which of us is the stronger” (*Goblet of Fire* 858).

Voldemort orders that Harry be cut loose and that his wand be returned to him. A duel between the two ensues. After a few taunts from Voldemort, Harry resolves to face his death bravely instead of dying as a coward: “...He was going to die upright like his father, and he was going to die trying to defend himself, even if no defense was possible” (*Goblet of Fire* 662). Rowling uses Harry as an example of the right way to face death. His bravery in the face of imminent death is seen as noble, unlike Voldemort who cowardly fears death and goes to any lengths to ensure self-preservation.

After Harry’s determination to fight in the face of overwhelming odds, he goes on the offensive and shouts, “*Expelliarmus!*” (the spell for disarming an opponent) while Voldemort screams the unblockable killing curse, “*Avada Kedavra!*” (*Goblet of Fire* 663). As the two spells collide in midair, something occurs that surprises both Harry and Voldemort. Their wands become connected as if by magnetic force, and they are lifted into the air. When Harry realizes he must concentrate on pushing this connection toward Voldemort, a web of crisscrossing beams splinters out from the connection and forms a dome around the two. Harry begins to hear the eerie music of the phoenix song, one that he had heard before in the Chamber of Secrets. It is the sound of hope to Harry, and he slowly forces the connection toward Voldemort until it touches the tip of Voldemort’s vibrating wand.

The beam touching Voldemort’s wand issues echoing screams and enacts what Dumbledore later calls the *Priori Incantatem* effect, which causes Voldemort’s

wand to perform its spells in reverse chronological order. Ghost-like forms of the victims of Voldemort's most recent murders begin to emerge from the wand tip, starting with Cedric and continuing to Harry's parents, James and Lily Potter.

Later, Harry explains these events to Dumbledore and Sirius. Sirius is stunned that ghost-like bodies appeared from Voldemort's wand. Dumbledore quietly explains that they were "...a kind of reverse echo. A shadow..." (*Goblet of Fire* 697). Through the confusion of the reappearance of Cedric, Lily, and James, Rowling continues with the idea of death's finality. Dumbledore explains to Harry, Sirius, and readers alike, that, "no spell can reawaken the dead" (*Goblet of Fire* 697). The lesson that Harry first struggled to comprehend in front of the Mirror of Erised is presented to him again, and he is forced to come to terms with it. Clearly Rowling does not take this particular quality of death lightly and continues to reinforce it.

Rowling also reinforces another lesson Harry learned in *Sorcerer's Stone*. When Dumbledore inquires, "Harry, these echoes, these shadows...what did they do?" (*Goblet of Fire* 698), Harry describes how the shadow of Lily told him to grab the portkey and allow it to return him to school. He explains that the shadow figures blocked Voldemort's view while Harry ran to retrieve the portkey. Again, readers are reminded of Dumbledore's words, "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). The shadow was not Harry's mother, but it was an echo of her love for him that continued beyond the grave. Rowling continues to suggest this idea that though certain loved ones are gone, their love continues to protect those still living.

Harry's incredible ordeal in the graveyard is met with some surprising reactions. One important reaction is that of Professor McGonagall. As Barty Crouch Jr. is being forced to explain the Dark Lord's plot to capture Harry, Professor McGonagall insists that Harry leave and begins to take him up to the hospital wing to rest. However, Dumbledore, in his incredible wisdom, intervenes and forces Harry to remain for the duration of the story.

"Come along... hospital wing..."

"No," said Dumbledore sharply.

"Dumbledore, he ought to—look at him—he's been through enough tonight—"

"He will stay, Minerva, because he needs to understand," said Dumbledore curtly. "Understanding is the first step to acceptance, and only with acceptance can there be recovery. He needs to know who has put him through the ordeal he has suffered tonight, and why." (*Goblet of Fire* 680)

Rowling communicates to readers that the most effective way to come to acceptance is to know why, to understand. Only with understanding can there be recovery.

After Barty Crouch Jr.'s explanation about how and why, Harry is, "so tired every bone in his body was aching, he wanted nothing more than to sit here, undisturbed, for hours and hours, until he fell asleep and didn't have to think or feel anymore" (*Goblet of Fire* 694). He just wants sleep and hates the idea of having to answer to any sort of questioning about the events in the graveyard. "He [Dumbledore] was looking at Harry, who avoided his eyes. Dumbledore was going to question him. He was going to make Harry relive everything" (*Goblet of Fire* 694).

Sirius is appalled at Dumbledore's tactics and asks, "We can leave that till morning, can't we, Dumbledore? ... Let him rest" (*Goblet of Fire* 694). However, Dumbledore again resists any attempts to coddle Harry, and he gives his explanation in full:

"If I thought I could help you... by putting you into an enchanted sleep and allowing you to postpone the moment when you would have to think about what has happened tonight, I would do it. But I know better. Numbing the pain for a while will make it worse when you finally feel it. You have shown bravery beyond anything I could have expected of you. I ask you to demonstrate your courage one more time. I ask you to tell us what happened."
(*Goblet of Fire* 695)

As Harry begins his explanation of the events that transpired in the graveyard, he relives the whole painful ordeal in his mind. However, he starts to understand Dumbledore's reasoning behind making him immediately talk the situation out. To Harry, the therapy-like session became, "... a relief; he felt almost as though something poisonous were being extracted from him... he sensed that once he had finished, he would feel better" (*Goblet of Fire* 695). Rowling uses this scenario as the positive example of how to grieve.

Harry, someone who had just witnessed his classmate's murder and narrowly escaped being murdered himself, is forced to immediately talk through his situation. Consequently, he's able to find some healing instead of being coddled and numbing the pain, which would only lead to a worse outcome later on.

Just as Rowling juxtaposes Harry and Voldemort's two very dissimilar approaches to dealing with death, she also juxtaposes Harry's positive example of

how to grieve with Winky's negative example of how to grieve. The house-elf struggles to deal with the loss of her master, Barty Crouch Sr. when Harry, Ron, and Hermione find her in the kitchens:

Winky was sitting on the same stool as last time, but she had allowed herself to become so filthy that she was not immediately distinguishable from the smoke-blackened brick behind her. Her clothes were ragged and unwashed. She was clutching a bottle of butterbeer and swaying slightly on her stool, staring into the fire. As they watched her, she gave an enormous hiccup.

“Winky is getting through six bottles a day now,” Dobby whispered to Harry.

“Well, it's not strong, that stuff,” Harry said.

But Dobby shook his head. “'Tis strong for a house-elf sir.”

(Goblet of Fire 536)

Winky completely plummets into her despair. She is unable to be helped by anyone, including Dobby and the other house-elves. And sure enough, her misery is furthered by the fact that she cannot reveal what is making her so upset. Winky will not speak of her master's secret. She only scolds Harry for asking about it. Furthermore, her silence proves to be destructive as she tries to numb herself with alcohol abuse. Dumbledore's warning to Harry that numbing the pain makes revealing it later even worse also directly applies to Winky. He is proven right again when the secret that Barty Crouch Sr. and Winky shared is revealed to all—that Barty Crouch Jr. is alive and well and that Barty Crouch Jr. killed Barty Crouch Sr. The pain of the secret is

too much for Winky to stand, and she completely breaks down. ‘Nooooo!’ wailed Winky. ‘Master Barty, Master Barty what is you saying?’ ... There was complete silence now, except for Winky’s continued sobs” (*Goblet of Fire* 690-691). Rowling parallels the two examples of how to grieve in order to instruct readers on the repercussions of the two very different approaches.

Rowling packs several new ideas about love and death in *Goblet of Fire* while also reiterating the importance of the previous lessons she has communicated to readers. Through the *Priori Incantatem* effect, she reaffirms the notion of the finality of death, while also giving readers hope in the love of the departed. Rowling gives insight into an honorable approach to death through Harry’s example. She also displays the flaws in Voldemort’s attempts to flee from death through self-preservation. She educates readers on how to confront tragedy and the natural grieving process that ensues. Her juxtaposition of Harry and Winky serves as a guideline and warning for readers encountering calamity.

Death and Love in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix is a tale of the struggle Harry endures while trying to overcome the crushing abuses suffered at the hands of his oppressors. Harry is expected to silently endure slander in the *Daily Prophet*, a run-in with the Ministry of Magic, tolerating the abusive and insufferable Dolores Umbridge, uncertainty in his relationship with Dumbledore, an encounter with the Death Eaters and Lord Voldemort, and distrust in himself. John Granger refers to *Order of the Phoenix* as Harry’s “dark night of the soul, or nigredo, in which everything in his world is either turned on its head or taken from him” (*How Harry*

Cast 170). *Order of the Phoenix* serves as a transition for Harry. It is his transition to adulthood in a harrowing rite of passage. As Granger states, “*Order of the Phoenix* is the story of a boy who is burnt to a crisp and then rises from the ashes a new man, conscious of his prophesied destiny beyond his birthright to conquer death by love” (*How Harry Cast 173*).

Rowling resumes her theme on death with a crude interaction between Harry and Alastor “Mad-Eye” Moody. Harry spends part of the summer at the Order of the Phoenix headquarters in Number Twelve Grimmauld Place watching different members of the Order come and go with only business on their agenda. Then, Moody pulls Harry aside one night after dinner. He shows Harry a photograph of the original Order of the Phoenix, the members who fought Lord Voldemort during his first reign of terror. There Harry sees his parents again:

Harry’s heart turned over. His mother and father were beaming up at him, sitting on either side of... Wormtail: He was the one who had betrayed their whereabouts to Voldemort and so helped bring about their deaths...

Harry looked up into Moody’s... face. Evidently Moody was under the impression he had just given Harry a bit of a treat...

He did not know why he had received such a shock; he had seen his parents’ pictures before, after all, and he had met Wormtail... but to have them sprung on him like that, when he was least expecting it... No one would like that, he thought angrily...

And then, to see them surrounded by all those other happy faces... all waving happily out of the photograph forevermore, not knowing that they

were doomed... Well, Moody might find that interesting... he, Harry, found it disturbing.... (*Order of the Phoenix* 173-175)

Harry is disgusted by Moody's lack of tact. Who gets nostalgic and goes on about how all of his/her former friends were brutally murdered or turned out to be traitors? And in an odd fashion Moody made sure that Harry specifically saw his parents.

Harry leaves the room extremely agitated. But just as he heads upstairs, he stumbles across someone crying in the drawing room.

Someone was cowering against the dark wall, her wand in her hand, her whole body shaking with sobs. Sprawled on the dusty old carpet... clearly dead, was Ron...

Crack. Dead twins. *Crack.* Dead Percy. *Crack.* Dead Harry...

"I see them d-d-dead all the time!" Mrs. Weasley moaned... "All the t-t-time! I d-d-dream about it..."

Sirius was staring at the patch of carpet where the boggart, pretending to be Harry's body, had lain. Moody was looking at Harry, who avoided his gaze.

Harry, closing his bedroom door behind him some ten minutes later, could not think Mrs. Weasley silly. He could still see his parents beaming up at him from the tattered old photograph, unaware that their lives, like so many of those around them, were drawing to a close. The image of the boggart posing as the corpse of each member of Mrs. Weasley's family in turn kept flashing before his eyes. (*Order of the Phoenix* 175-178)

Something changes in Harry after seeing the imitation corpses flash on the drawing room floor. He begins to understand what Moody had intended to teach him through the picture of the original Order of the Phoenix, and why Moody's gaze weighed so heavily on him in the drawing room. In a few short pages Harry's disgust at Moody's tactless nostalgia becomes the beginnings of his understanding that everyone is vulnerable, and no one is ensured survival in Lord Voldemort's second rise to power. In the face of this evil Harry's resolve is recalibrated. Moody meant to remind Harry of the grim truth: This is war, and war means casualties.

Just as Moody reminds Harry, Rowling also reminds readers that in the battle of good versus evil there are casualties. However, these scenes ultimately communicate a deeper message: some things are worth dying for. Harry is given renewed purpose as he looks over the faces of those who have fallen before him. Their deaths—his parents' deaths—should not be in vain. They laid down their lives for a greater purpose than themselves. Rowling highlights this nobility in death as a positive. It is a carryover from Harry's mindset during Voldemort's black resurrection. If Harry is to die in the war against evil, it will be bravely like his father.

Later, in the climax of the book, Harry sees in his dream that Lord Voldemort is torturing Sirius. Throwing all caution to the wind, Harry and a group of friends rush to the Ministry of Magic to save Sirius. However, when he arrives, he realizes that the dream was a ploy. It was Voldemort's attempt to have Harry track down the prophecy in the Department of Mysteries. Harry and his friends are saved from the Death Eaters by the Order of the Phoenix. However, the Order suffers a great loss. Sirius is stunned by a spell and falls to his death through the ancient archway on the

dais. “It seemed to take Sirius an age to fall. His body curved in a graceful arc as he sank backward through the ragged veil hanging from the arch” (*Order of the Phoenix* 806).

Sirius’ death devastates Harry. He is sure that it is his fault. Harry understands that his inability to block out the shared mental connection with Voldemort left him vulnerable to Voldemort’s mind games. The reality of the situation begins to set in as he is alone in Dumbledore’s office:

The silence and the stillness... was unbearable to him. If his surroundings could have reflected the feelings inside him, the pictures would have been screaming in pain. He walked around the quiet, beautiful office, breathing quickly, trying not to think. But he had to think.... There was no escape....

It was his fault Sirius had died; it was all his fault. If he... had not been stupid enough to fall for Voldemort’s trick... if he had only opened his mind to the possibility that Voldemort was... banking on Harry’s *love of playing the hero*....

It was unbearable, he would not think about it, he could not stand it.... There was a terrible hollow inside him he did not want to feel or examine. a dark hole where Sirius had been, where Sirius had vanished.

(*Order of the Phoenix* 821)

Harry is alone, trying to grapple with the weight of this meaningless death. How could he have accidentally led Sirius to his death? The arbitrariness of it all is too much for him to handle. Moody had reminded him that every war has its

casualties, but nothing could have prepared him for this. And just as Harry's guilt begins to overwhelm him, Dumbledore appears bearing yet another difficult bit of wisdom:

"I know how you are feeling, Harry," said Dumbledore very quietly.

"No, you don't," said Harry, and his voice was suddenly loud and strong. White-hot anger leapt inside him. Dumbledore knew *nothing* about his feelings....

"There is no shame in what you are feeling, Harry... On the contrary... the fact that you can feel pain like this is your greatest strength."

Harry felt the white-hot anger lick his insides, blazing in the terrible emptiness, filling him with the desire to hurt Dumbledore for his calmness and his empty words.

"My greatest strength, is it?" said Harry... "You haven't got a clue.... You don't know...."

"What don't I know?" asked Dumbledore quietly.

It was too much. Harry turned around, shaking with rage....

Harry roared, and he seized one of the delicate silver instruments from the spindle-legged table beside him and flung it across the room. It shattered into a hundred tiny pieces against the wall. (*Order of the Phoenix* 824-825)

Harry berates Dumbledore and smashes his belongings, and yet, Dumbledore refuses to rise in anger. Dumbledore understands Harry's pain and his need for release. He doesn't, however, give in to Harry's demands to be let go. Dumbledore forces Harry to talk through the difficult situation just as he did in *Goblet of Fire*. He

explains to Harry that Sirius' death was ultimately his fault, not Harry's, and he communicates exactly what the prophecy said.

Dumbledore begins by again explaining to Harry why his ability to feel sadness is his greatest strength and how this ability is intimately connected with the prophecy:

“He [Voldemort] did not know that you would have ‘power the Dark Lord knows not’—”

“But I don't!” said Harry... “I haven't got any power he hasn't got. I couldn't fight the way he did tonight, I can't possess people or—or kill them—”

“There is a room in the Department of Mysteries... that is kept locked at all times. It contains a force that is at once more wonderful and more terrible than death, than human intelligence, than forces of nature. It is also, perhaps, the most mysterious of the many subjects for study that reside there. It is the power held within that room that you possess in such quantities and which Voldemort has not at all. That power took you to save Sirius tonight. That power also saved you from possession by Voldemort, because he could not bear to reside in a body so full of the force he detests. In the end, it mattered not that you could not close your mind. It was your heart that saved you.” (*Order of the Phoenix* 842)

Love is the power that is kept in the room in the Department of Mysteries. It is what melted Harry's knife as he tried to pry his way into the locked room. This concentration of love, which Dumbledore calls “more wonderful and more terrible

than death,” allows access only to the pure of heart. Love is the ability that Dumbledore considers to be greater than any of Voldemort’s powers. This same love is what Harry held in such great quantities that Voldemort could not bear to possess him:

Let the pain stop, thought Harry. Let him kill us.... End it.

Dumbledore.... Death is nothing compared to this....

And I’ll see Sirius again....

And as Harry’s heart filled with emotion, the creature’s coils loosened. the pain was gone, Harry was lying facedown on the floor.... (*Order of the Phoenix* 816)

Rowling saves Harry, again, using love. Every instance of danger is thwarted by his ability to love, to be loved, or to feel pain because of the loss of a loved one. Love continues to overcome evil, pain, and even death. Readers who pronounce Jesus Christ as their Lord and savior should immediately identify with this important Christian principle in the text because as 1 John 4:8 states, “God is love.” Furthermore, they should recall 1 Corinthians 15:57 “Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory [over sin and death] through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Again, Rowling’s message parallels with Christianity’s message: love triumphs over death.

In the closing pages of *Order of the Phoenix* Harry and readers alike are reminded of the theme of the permanence of death. When Harry sees the two-way mirror Sirius gave him, he thinks of the Gryffindor house ghost, Nearly Headless Nick. He begins looking for Nick to question him on Sirius’ ability to return as a ghost. However, Nick has sad news for Harry. “ ‘He will not come back.’ repeated

Nick quietly. ‘He will have... gone on... I was afraid of death,’ said Nick. ‘I chose to remain behind... I know nothing of the secrets of death, Harry, for I chose my feeble imitation of life instead’ ” (*Order of the Phoenix* 861). Nick leaves Harry hopeless, but readers shortly find that Harry is capable of more than anger and despair.

Harry is reeling from his conversation with Nick when he encounters Luna Lovegood. Luna is looking for some of her stolen possessions, and during their ensuing conversation, readers find a much different version of Harry from the one who was previously raging in Dumbledore’s office. Readers see a Harry who is compassionate: “An odd feeling rose in Harry—an emotion quite different from the anger and grief that had filled him since Sirius’s death. It was a few moments before he realized that he was feeling sorry for Luna” (*Order of the Phoenix* 862). During their conversation, Luna also reminds Harry of a question Lupin had first posed in *Prisoner of Azkaban* about the existence of a soul. As Luna discusses her mother’s death, she asks an essential question:

“...It’s not as though I’ll never see Mum again, is it?”

“Er—isn’t it?” said Harry uncertainly.

She shook her head in disbelief. “Oh, come on. You heard them, just behind the veil, didn’t you?” ...

They looked at each other. Luna was smiling slightly. Harry did not know what to say, or to think. Luna believed so many extraordinary things... yet he had been sure he had heard voices behind the veil too....

She walked away from him, and as he watched her go, he found that the terrible weight in his stomach seemed to have lessened slightly.

(Order of the Phoenix 863-864)

Nearly Headless Nick tells Harry that Sirius would have certainly “gone on,” and Harry is distraught. But Luna reminds him that “gone on” does not mean that Harry will never see Sirius again. Indeed, as in Christian teaching, the dead are just “behind the veil.” Rowling clearly indicates that an afterlife exists.

Rowling reinforces many lessons about love and death through what are some of Harry’s darkest experiences in the entire series. And her most important message to readers is unyielding: love conquers death.

Death and Love in *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince*

Albus Dumbledore’s death scene is the climax of *Half Blood Prince* as well as Rowling’s primary tool of instruction on the subject of death. Dumbledore serves as Harry’s best example throughout life, teaching him how to live in goodness and truth all the way up to the moment of his death. The circumstances surrounding his death reveal how it is simultaneously heroic, merciful, fearless, selfless, and sacrificial.

As Harry and Dumbledore leave the stygian lake, Dumbledore is severely weakened. The potion protecting the Horcrux has taken its toll on him, and he must be aided in walking by Harry. However, upon learning that Hogwarts is in danger, Dumbledore immediately goes to its rescue:

“What has happened?” asked Dumbledore. “Rosmerta, what’s wrong?”

“The—the Dark Mark, Albus.”

And she pointed into the sky, in the direction of Hogwarts. Dread flooded Harry...

“We need to return to the castle at once,” said Dumbledore.

“Rosmerta”—and though he staggered a little, he seemed wholly in command of the situation—“we need transport—brooms—”...

...Dumbledore kicked off from the ground and rose up into the air. As they sped toward the castle, Harry glanced sideways at Dumbledore, ready to grab him should he fall, but the sight of the Dark Mark seemed to have acted upon Dumbledore like a stimulant: He bent low over his broom, his eyes fixed upon the Mark, his long silver hair and beard flying behind him on the night air.

(Half Blood Prince 583-582)

Dumbledore’s bravery in the face of danger is impressive. However, as readers learn in *Deathly Hallows*, it was more than just danger. Dumbledore was knowingly flying to his death. His bravery reminds readers that some things are worth dying for, which in this case is the protection of innocent lives.

Through his death scene, Dumbledore also teaches Harry how to be merciful. As Draco has Dumbledore cornered on the tower, wandless and seemingly vulnerable, he is met by the headmaster’s words of compassion. Dumbledore offers forgiveness to his assailer, even at the point of death.

Dumbledore still showed no sign of panic or distress. He merely looked across at his disarmer and said, “Good evening, Draco.”

Malfoy stepped forward, glancing around quickly to check that he and Dumbledore were alone...

“I—I’ve got a job to do.”

“Well, then, you must get on and do it, my dear boy,” said
Dumbledore softly.

There was silence... Draco Malfoy did nothing but stare at Albus
Dumbledore, who, incredibly, smiled.

“Draco. Draco, you are not a killer.”

“How do you know?” said Malfoy at once...

“Perhaps you ought to get on with the job alone,” suggested
Dumbledore. “What if your backup has been thwarted by my guard? ... After
all, you don’t really need help.... I have no wand at the moment.... I cannot
defend myself.”

Malfoy merely stared at him.

“I see,” said Dumbledore kindly, when Malfoy neither moved nor
spoke. “You are afraid to act until they join you.”

“I’m not afraid!” snarled Malfoy, though he still made no move to hurt
Dumbledore. “It’s you who should be scared!”

“But why? I don’t think you will kill me, Draco. Killing is not nearly
as easy as the innocent believe....” (*Half Blood Prince* 584-586)

As Draco continues to stall, Dumbledore remains kind. He never begs to live,
but instead embraces the ramifications of the situation and offers Draco forgiveness.
He does not want Draco to become a murderer on his account. And as the noises of
the skirmish below them continue to escalate, Dumbledore offers Draco a way out.

“There is little time, one way or another,” said Dumbledore. “So let us
discuss your options, Draco.”

“My options!” said Malfoy loudly. “I’m standing here with a wand—I’m about to kill you—“

“My dear boy, let us have no more pretense about that. If you were going to kill me, you would have done it when you first disarmed me, you would not have stopped for this pleasant chat about ways and means...”

“Come over to the right side, Draco... you are not a killer....”

“But I got this far, didn’t I?” he said slowly. “They thought I’d die in the attempt, but I’m here... and you’re in my power.... I’m the one with the wand.... You’re at my mercy....”

“No, Draco,” said Dumbledore quietly. “It is my mercy, and not yours, that matters now.”

Malfoy did not speak. His mouth was open, his wand hand still trembling. Harry thought he saw it drop by a fraction. (*Half Blood Prince* 591-592)

Draco is stunned by Dumbledore’s poise and mercy. Readers see Dumbledore, a man who is completely vulnerable to attack, offer Draco a way out. Rowling does not use Dumbledore’s attempts to help Draco as a ploy for Dumbledore to save himself. Instead, readers are again reminded of two important lessons that Harry has learned: 1) there are things worse than dying and 2) it is our choices, far more than our abilities, that determine who we are. Dumbledore respects Draco’s life and innocence and does not wish for either to be destroyed because of Lord Voldemort. He does not want Draco to become a murderer because of Draco’s fear of Voldemort. As readers learn in *Deathly Hallows*, Dumbledore wishes to keep Draco’s soul intact. “That

boy's soul is not yet so damaged... I would not have it ripped apart on my account" (*Deathly Hallows* 683). Instead, Dumbledore forgives Draco and offers him the choice to do right, the choice to join the "right side" instead of becoming a killer. Dumbledore is kind to his enemy just as Christ calls Christians to be in Luke 6:27-28. "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you" (As Quoted in Granger *How Harry Cast*).

Dumbledore also demonstrates selflessness and sacrifice in his death. In addition to showing mercy to Draco, Dumbledore selflessly sacrifices his wand. He uses his last moment to bind and freeze Harry instead of defending himself. This action ensures Harry's safety at the expense of his own life:

The door burst open and somebody erupted through it and shouted,
"Expelliamus!"

Harry's body became instantly rigid and immobile, and he felt himself fall back against the tower wall, propped like an unsteady statue, unable to move or speak. He could not understand how it had happened—*Expelliarmus* was not a Freezing Charm—

Then, by the light of the Mark, he saw Dumbledore's wand flying in an arc over the edge of the ramparts and understood... Dumbledore had wordlessly immobilized Harry, and the second he had taken to perform the spell had cost him the chance of defending himself. (*Half Blood Prince* 584)

Dumbledore's selflessness and sacrifice extend even beyond Draco and Harry. As readers learn in *Deathly Hallows*, Dumbledore's actions on the tower ensure Snape's survival as well. Narcissa Malfoy asks Snape to make the Unbreakable Vow

to guarantee Draco's safety. Because Snape agreed to make the Unbreakable Vow, he is bound by his life to help Draco in murdering Dumbledore. Ron explains the consequences of such a vow to Harry. " 'Well you can't break an Unbreakable Vow...' "I'd worked that much out for myself, funnily enough. What happens if you break it, then?' 'You die,' said Ron simply" (*Half Blood Prince* 325-326).

Dumbledore knows that the curse on Marvolo Gaunt's ring has left him with very little time to live; and instead of wasting his impending death, he labors to protect Draco, Harry, and Snape. Through the selfless actions surrounding Dumbledore's death, he simultaneously prevents Harry from falling under attack, ensures Draco's safety and innocence, saves Snape's life by allowing him to fulfill the Unbreakable Vow and retain his role as a double agent, and lulls Lord Voldemort into a false sense of security. Not bad for a man who has a terminal illness.

Dumbledore's death gives Harry a distinct Christ-like figure to model himself after in his quest to destroy Lord Voldemort. Even Dumbledore's words to Draco echo Jesus' to Judas in the Garden of Gethsemane. The mercy and love that Jesus shows his assailers in Matthew 26-27 is evident in *Half Blood Prince*. So too is the parallel between their sacrificial deaths.

Death and Love in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*

Deathly Hallows contains Rowling's first explicit reference of Christian doctrine. She opens the series finale with a quotation from William Penn's *More Fruits of Solitude*, in which he explains the omnipresence and immortality of the dead:

Death is but crossing the world, as friends do the seas; they live in one another still. For they must needs be present, that love and live in that which is omnipresent. In this divine glass, they see face to face; and their converse is free, as well as pure. This is the comfort of friends, that though they may be said to die, yet their friendship and society are, in the best sense, ever present, because immortal. (*Deathly Hallows*)

Penn's quotation prepares readers for Rowling's last and (to Christians) most important lessons about death and the transcendence of love.

In the church graveyard scene, Harry and Hermione come across the tombs of the Ariana and Kendra Dumbledore and Lily and James Potter. Each tombstone has an inscription that is important to understanding the meaning of the Potter series. First, the Dumbledores' stone includes the quotation, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (*Deathly Hallows* 325). Readers might recognize this as a direct quotation from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount as recorded in Matthew 6:21. Harry, however, does not. He is puzzled by the meaning of the words, but knows that they must have some significance: "He did not understand what these words meant. Surely Dumbledore had chosen them, as the eldest member of the family once his mother had died" (*Deathly Hallows* 326).

As Harry and Hermione continue through the graveyard, Hermione finally spots what they have been searching for, Lily and James' graves. Naturally Harry is emotional at his first encounter with his parents' graves. However, the inscription on the tombstone again puzzles him:

“ ‘The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death’...” A horrible thought came to him, and with it a kind of panic. “Isn’t that a Death Eater idea? Why is that there?”

“It doesn’t mean defeating death in the way the Death Eaters mean it, Harry.” said Hermione, her voice gentle. “It means... you know... living beyond death. Living after death.” (*Deathly Hallows* 328)

Hermione is correct in her explanation, and the words are from the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:26: “The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.” Questions about these scripture references led Rowling to comment, “I think those two particular quotations he finds on the tombstones at Godric’s Hollow, they sum up—they almost epitomize the whole series” (Adler). Rowling’s inclusion of these particular scripture references, coupled with the ongoing theme of love’s triumph, indicate that death’s conqueror will be love, which to Christians is synonymous with Christ.

Rowling’s next theme on death is Harry’s sacrificial offering of his life. Harry makes the walk to his death just as Christ did. John Granger explains this path as the “Via Dolorosa,” which is literally, “ ‘Street of Sorrows’ ... an actual avenue in Jerusalem along which Christians believe their Savior carried his Cross to Golgotha, or Calvary” (*How Harry Cast* 227). The parallels are striking between Christ’s journey to the cross and Harry’s journey to the Forbidden Forest. First, neither Harry nor Jesus were excited about having to take the path leading to their death. Christ’s famed scene in the Garden of Gethsemane includes him asking if there is any alternative, stating, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done” (Luke 22:42). He’s even recorded as

sweating blood. “And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:42). Harry also agonizes over his impending death:

...He reached the edge of the forest, and he stopped.

A swarm of dementors was gliding amongst the trees; he could feel their chill, and he was not sure he would be able to pass safely through it. He had no strength left for a Patronus. He could no longer control his own trembling. It was not, after all, so easy to die. Every second he breathed, the smell of the grass, the cool air on his face, was so precious: to think that people had years and years, time to waste, so much time it dragged, and he was clinging to each second. At the same time he thought that he would not be able to go on, and knew that he must. The long game was ended, the Snitch had been caught, it was time to leave the air. (*Deathly Hallows* 697-698)

On Via Dolorosa the crowd laments over Jesus, and his mother Mary and other women comfort him (Luke 23:27). Harry has similar comfort as he ends his journey. Harry remembers the Snitch that Dumbledore left him. He now knows the engraved words “*I open at the close*” mean his end, his death. He tells the Snitch he is about to die, and it opens, revealing the cracked Resurrection Stone. Harry turns it over three times in his hand and four memory-like images appear before him. They are the images of Sirius, Lupin, James, and Lily:

“You’ve been so brave.” [said Lily]

He could not speak. His eyes feasted on her, and he thought that he would like to stand and look at her forever, and that would be enough.

“You are nearly there,” said James. “Very close. We are... so proud of you.”

“Does it hurt?”

The childish question had fallen from Harry’s lips before he could stop it.

“Dying? Not at all,” said Sirius. “Quicker and easier than falling asleep.”

... A chilly breeze that seemed to emanate from the heart of the forest lifted the hair at Harry’s brow. He knew that they would not tell him to go, that it would have to be his decision.

“You’ll stay with me?”

“Until the very end,” said James.

“They won’t be able to see you?” asked Harry.

“We are part of you,” said Sirius. “Invisible to anyone else.”

Harry looked at his mother.

“Stay close to me,” he said quietly.

... Beside him, making scarcely a sound, walked James, Sirius, Lupin, and Lily, and their presence was his courage...

He stumbled and slipped toward the end of his life, toward Voldemort.

(Deathly Hallows 699-701)

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus refuses to allow his disciples to fight to defend him: “Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant and cut off his right ear. So Jesus said to Peter, ‘Put your sword into its

sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?’ ” (John 18:10-11).

Similarly, Harry refuses to defend himself. “His hands were sweating as he pulled off the Invisibility Cloak and stuffed it beneath his robes, with his wand. He did not want to be tempted to fight” (*Deathly Hallows* 703). Harry confronts his death just as Jesus did. They both go willingly, without a fight, as a complete sacrifice.

In death, Harry visits King’s Cross and has a nice chat with Dumbledore, who explains the whole of the situation to Harry. The name of the location is very interesting since it references Christ’s title as “King of the Jews” as he died on the cross. The similarities between Harry and Jesus’ deaths point to Rowling intentionally making a connection between the two. Also, in King’s Cross Harry notices the silence of the scene is disturbed by a noise like crying: “He had spotted the thing that was making noises. It had the form of a small, naked child, curled on the ground, its skin raw and rough, flayed-looking, and it lay shuddering under a seat where it had been left, unwanted, stuffed out of sight, struggling for breath” (*Deathly Hallows* 706-707). Harry feels as if he should help it, even though it disgusts him. However, Dumbledore explains that he cannot help it. Splitting his soul by taking innocent lives has left Voldemort splintered and in a torturous state in the afterlife. The disgusting figure that Harry feels obliged to help is the physical manifestation of the portion of Voldemort’s soul that was accidentally imprinted on Harry via his scar. And yet, Harry remains whole and happy in King’s Cross. He feels so comfortable that he regrets having to leave at all: “It was warm and light and peaceful here” (*Deathly Hallows* 722).

Rowling's juxtaposition of Voldemort's agony and Harry's peacefulness in King Cross bears a striking resemblance to Jesus' teachings. "For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?" (Mark 8:35-37). As Dumbledore explains to Harry, "Voldemort knows and understands nothing. *Nothing*" (*Deathly Hallows* 709). Voldemort's inability to love, feel remorse, or understand the consequences of his actions is not only what makes him Lord Voldemort, but also what separates him from humanity and serves as his greatest weakness: "He was in such a hurry to mutilate his own soul, he never paused to understand the incomparable power of a soul that is untarnished and whole" (*Half Blood Prince* 511).

In Harry and Voldemort's final duel, Voldemort's spell rebounds and destroys him. His lack of understanding of the things which he "does not value, he takes no trouble to comprehend. Of house-elves and children's tales, of love, loyalty, and innocence... They all have a power beyond his own, a power beyond the reach of any magic, is a truth he has never grasped" (*Deathly Hallows* 709-710). Harry faces Voldemort with a Christ-like purity. He follows the example Dumbledore set before him on the tower in *Half Blood Prince*. Harry speaks truth and offers Voldemort a chance to repent, which Voldemort, in his lack of understanding and inability to love, declines to accept: "'It's 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...'" (*Deathly Hallows* 741).

Rowling offers Harry as an example for readers to live by, and Christians particularly should be in support of this example. Dumbledore teaches Harry to live in love instead of in fear of death, as Voldemort does. “*Evil*, as defined by philosophers and many Christian thinkers, is not something existent in itself; rather, it’s an absence or a negation. Death as an evil is life turning up missing from where it should be” (Granger *Looking for God* 71). Therefore, Voldemort’s most evil act was his inability to love. From that void came his murderous intentions and obsessions with self-promotion and self-importance. As he told his Death Eaters in *Goblet of Fire*, his goal was “to conquer death” (653). And yet, as Dumbledore explains, Voldemort “fears the dead. He does not love” (*Deathly Hallows* 721). Voldemort’s very obsession with avoiding death actually leads him to live in death, that is, the absence of love. And if Christ is love, Christians must believe in the same teachings as Dumbledore because as Jesus said, “Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die” (John 11:25-26). In other words, everyone who lives in love shall never die, or shall conquer death. This was Voldemort’s goal. However, conquering death turned out to be Harry’s destiny. As Dumbledore explains, “the legend said that the man who united all three objects [Hallows] would then be truly master of death” (*Deathly Hallows* 717). Because Harry lived in love, and ultimately had the ability to sacrifice his life for others, he is, according to Dumbledore, “the worthy possessor of the Hallows” (*Deathly Hallows* 720). He is the true master of death because he learned not to fear death.

Rowling’s Potter series repeatedly reiterates Christian teachings through the words, actions, and thoughts of the characters. Christian groups who foolishly make

unfounded claims that the series is un-Christian or anti-Christian have either never read the Potter books, or are completely forgetting or misinterpreting their own religious doctrine. This is not to say that the series is an explicitly Christian series. Instead, Rowling's examples and lessons about death, grieving, sacrifice, and the transcendent power of love serve as edifying literature for all readers, Christians and non-Christians alike.

Conclusion

The 21st century is age of great skepticism about religious belief. In a 2010 interview with Oprah Winfrey, J.K. Rowling discussed her struggle to believe. Oprah questioned Rowling about believing in a God, to which Rowling responded, “Yes. I do. I struggle with it.” In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Rowling examines this struggle to believe. Through Harry’s struggles in *Deathly Hallows*, Rowling delivers a powerful message about the importance of belief and its difficulty.

In *Deathly Hallows*, Harry’s struggle to believe involves the memory of Albus Dumbledore, the late Hogwarts headmaster. Harry wonders about believing and trusting in Dumbledore. As conflicting evidence about the headmaster’s intentions mounts, Harry begins to question the plan to destroy Voldemort that Dumbledore had left for him. Throughout the beginning of the novel, Harry doubts he’ll ever see Dumbledore again:

A flash of the brightest blue. Harry froze, his cut finger slipping on the jagged edge of the mirror again. He had imagined it, he must have done. He glanced over his shoulder, but... There was nothing blue there for the mirror to reflect.

He had imagined it, there was no other explanation; imagined it, because he had been thinking of his dead headmaster. If anything was certain, it was that the blue eyes of Albus Dumbledore would never pierce him again.

(*Deathly Hallows* 29 Quoted in Granger *How Harry Cast* 197)

Rowling takes Harry through a series of revelations in returning to his belief in the late headmaster. First, Rowling presents the ideas of unexamined belief and unexamined disbelief through the characters of Elphias Doge and Rita Skeeter, which mimics the Christians call to faith. She juxtaposes the unexamined belief and disbelief through Doge's eulogy and Skeeter's new book *The Life and Lies of Albus Dumbledore*. At the Weasley wedding, Harry listens to a conversation between Doge and a Skeeter supporter, Aunt Muriel. Muriel presents what seems like overwhelming evidence that Dumbledore was not the man Harry knew.

“Don't believe a word of it!” said Doge at once. “Not a word, Harry! Let nothing tarnish your memories of Albus Dumbledore!”

Harry looked into Doge's earnest, pained face and felt, not reassured, but frustrated. Did Doge really think it was that easy, that Harry could simply *choose* not to believe? Didn't Doge understand Harry's need to be sure, to know *everything*? (*Deathly Hallows* 152-153 Quoted in Granger *How Harry Cast* 198).

Rowling structures Harry's belief in such a way that it is a choice. His struggle has nothing to do with his personal doubts or confidence.

Again, Rowling presents the ideas of choice and belief. Later, Harry and Hermione argue about Dumbledore's true intentions for Harry:

“Harry, do you really think you'll get the truth from a malicious old woman like Muriel, or from Rita Skeeter? How can you believe them? You knew Dumbledore!”

“I thought I did,” he muttered

“But you know how much truth there was in everything Rita wrote about you! Doge is right, how can you let these people tarnish your memories of Dumbledore?”

He looked away, trying not to betray the resentment he felt. There it was again: Choose what to believe. He wanted the truth. Why was everybody so determined that he should not get it? (*Deathly Hallows* 185 Quoted in Granger *How Harry Cast* 199)

In both instances Harry questions how he can choose what he believes. For Harry, the establishment of proof is the only sure belief. Harry thinks he must trust what is definitively proven true, not what he chooses to believe. Again, this follows the Christian’s call to believe in God even though exhaustive knowledge about God and his plans are not given.

As the evidence piles up about Dumbledore’s questionable past, Harry’s doubts increase. He becomes angry with Dumbledore:

And his fury at Dumbledore broke over him now like lava, scorching him inside, wiping out every other feeling. Out of sheer desperation they had talked themselves into believing that Godric’s Hollow held answers, convinced themselves that they were supposed to go back, that it was all part of some secret path laid out for them by Dumbledore; but there was no map, no plan. Dumbledore had left them to grope in the darkness, to wrestle with unknown and undreamed-of terrors, alone and unaided: Nothing was explained, nothing was given freely. (*Deathly Hallows* 351 Quoted in Granger *How Harry Cast* 200)

Harry becomes suspicious of his memories of Dumbledore. He commences to quit trusting in the teachings about love, trust, and loyalty that had aided him in so many instances.

Later, after reading a portion of Rita Skeeter's *The Life and Lies of Albus Dumbledore*, Harry is distraught:

He flung his arms over his head, hardly knowing whether he was trying to hold in his anger or protect himself from the weight of his own disillusionment. "Look what he asked from me, Hermione! Risk your life, Harry! And again! And again! And don't expect me to explain everything, just trust me blindly, trust that I know what I'm doing, trust me even though I don't trust you! Never the whole truth! Never!" ...

"I don't know who he loved, Hermione, but it was never me. This isn't love, the mess he's left me...."

He closed his eyes... and hated himself for wishing that what she said was true: that Dumbledore had really cared. (*Deathly Hallows* 362 Quoted in Granger *How Harry Cast* 200)

Harry leaves the forest in agony, and when he is at his darkest moment, a light shines upon him, reminding him of goodness and truth. While keeping watch, he is guided to Gryffindor's sword by the doe. Even in his broken faith, he immediately recognizes it as a symbol of good. Readers later see that image was in fact the Patronus of Severus Snape, which had transformed into a doe due to his love for Harry's mother, Lily. And with the encounter Harry begins to follow his heart, what

he knows within himself, what Dumbledore would call love. He begins to use his instinct to love to guide him in his choice to believe.

However, this choice is not an easy one. Harry is forced to continue in his resolve again and again. It is through his temptation with the Deathly Hallows and the heroic actions of Dobby that his faith is finally confirmed. When Dobby rescues Harry and his friends from the Malfoy manor, Harry finally sees the power of choosing to believe in goodness.

Dobby comes to serve the true master that freed him, Harry Potter, in the face of his wicked former masters, the Malfoys. It is through Dobby's great love for Harry that Dobby overcomes his fear and exercises his new freedom in his first return trip to the Malfoy's home. He saves Harry and sacrifices his life in the process. Dobby dies in Harry's arms with his dearly loved master's name as his last words, "Harry... Potter..." (*Deathly Hallows* 476).

With Dobby's sacrifice serving as a guide, Harry understands that he must relinquish the temptation of the Hallows and choose to believe in Dumbledore:

Just as Voldemort had not been able to possess Harry while Harry was consumed with grief for Sirius, so his thoughts could not penetrate Harry now, while he mourned Dobby. Grief, it seemed, drove Voldemort out... though Dumbledore, of course, would have said it was love...

Dobby would never be able to tell them who had sent him to the cellar, but Harry knew what he had seen. A piercing blue eye had looked out of the mirror fragment, and then help had come. *Help will always be given at Hogwarts to those who ask for it....*

And still his scar prickled, and he knew that Voldemort was getting there too. Harry understood and yet did not understand. His instinct was telling him one thing, his brain quite another. The Dumbledore in Harry's head smiled, surveying Harry over the tips of his fingers, pressed together as if in prayer.

You gave Ron the Deluminator. You understood him.... You gave him a way back....

And you understood Wormtail too.... You knew there was a bit of regret there, somewhere....

And if you knew them... What did you know about me, Dumbledore?

Am I meant to know, but not to see? Did you know how hard I'd find that? Is that why you made it this difficult? So I'd have time to work that out?
(*Deathly Hallows* 478, 483 Quoted in Granger *How Harry Cast* 205)

And with Harry's thoughts on Dumbledore and his grief blocking Voldemort, Harry chooses. He makes the decision to follow the plan laid out for him by Dumbledore instead of racing Voldemort to the Hallows:

Harry hesitated. He knew what hung on his decision. There was hardly any time left; now was the moment to decide: Horcruxes or Hallows?

"Griphook," Harry said. "I'll speak to Griphook first."

His heart was racing as if he had been sprinting and had just cleared an enormous obstacle. (*Deathly Hallows* 484 Quoted in Granger *How Harry Cast* 205)

Harry makes his choice to believe, not in ignorance, but with the knowledge of his choices. Choices, as Dumbledore explained to Harry in *Chamber of Secrets*, are what determine who he is. Harry decides to follow the path Dumbledore had laid out for him and vanquish the Dark Lord through love, not might. Aberforth Dumbledore, Albus' brother, tests Harry's choice. Aberforth knew Albus personally, and unlike Rita Skeeter or Elphias Doge, knew the truth behind Albus' faults. Harry, however, does not wish to be swayed in his choice to believe in the headmaster's plan. He decides to continue in his trust despite what Aberforth might say:

“I can't leave,” said Harry. “I've got a job—”

“Give it to someone else!”

“I can't. It's got to be me, Dumbledore explained it all—”

“Oh, did he now? And did he tell you everything, was he honest with you?” ...

Harry kept quiet. He did not want to express the doubts and uncertainties about Dumbledore that had riddled him for months now. He had made his choice while he dug Dobby's grave, he had decided to continue along the winding, dangerous path indicated for him by Albus Dumbledore, to accept that he had not been told everything that he wanted to know, but simply to trust. He had no desire to doubt again; he did not want to hear anything that would deflect him from his purpose. (*Deathly Hallows* 562-563)

As readers see, Harry's choice to trust in Dumbledore ends up being the thing that saves him. In his battle to destroy Voldemort, the piece of Voldemort's soul attached to Harry forces Harry to go to his death, as outlined by Dumbledore. This

choice to trust in Dumbledore and believe that he has acted in goodness is what saves Harry's life and the future of Harry's world. Harry's belief helps him remain whole. As readers see, he needs this belief in Dumbledore's goodness so that he can go willingly to his death, as a sheep lead to the slaughter. Harry's choice is one that the Bible outlines for Christians as well. Hebrews 11 reminds Christians of the promises God has kept for those who chose to believe in him. In Jeremiah 29:11, Christians are given God's ultimate guarantee. " 'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future' " (NIV).

Rowling's struggle to believe in story form argues for the choice of religious belief. Harry learns that those who believe, like Dobby, are better for having believed than those who do not (Aunt Muriel, Lord Voldemort). Religious critics who argue Rowling's series is an introduction to the occult have not read or understood the many layered meanings that exist in the novels, none of which are more important than the significance of believing, as outlined in the series finale, *Deathly Hallows*.

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