

God, the Devil, and Harry Potter: A Christian Minister's Defense of the Beloved Novels

By John Killinger

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"The Potter stories, far from being 'wicked' or 'Satanic,' ... are in fact narratives of robust faith and morality ...

"What Ms. Rowling has furnished us, besides what the Brits call 'a good read,' and a whopping good one, ... is a modern interpretation of the gospel, the wonderful news that 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself' and making sure that the goodness of creation would never be obliterated by the forces of darkness and evil."

Since their first publication, J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter novels have brought joy to children and adults alike. Many conservative Christians in the United States, however, have decried the books as wicked, as preaching witchcraft and the occult, and as glamorizing dishonesty. A minister in New Mexico held a "holy bonfire" on the Sunday after Christmas 2001, at which he publicly torched the Potter books, declaring them "an abomination to God and to me."

John Killinger, a Congregationalist minister and an academic in the field of contemporary literature, beautifully demolishes the objections of right-wing Christians to this bestselling children's series. He compellingly argues that, far from corrupting children's morals, the Potter stories actually influence young readers to follow the teachings of Jesus. He cites passage after passage to illustrate how the world of Harry Potter would be inconceivable apart from the strictures of Judeo-Christian theology and the way human existence should be approached by every follower of Jesus. Additionally, he reflects on the possibility that Harry Potter, like Dostoevsky's Prince Myshkin and others, is a witting or unwitting Christ figure who actually battles the forces of darkness for the souls of the faithful.

All through this extraordinarily well-written, compelling, and very entertaining little book, the author points out that stories like this are worth more than any sermon toward producing people who truly follow the lessons of Jesus.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Some Christians find fault with Harry Potter's magical world of witches and wizards. Presbyterian minister Killinger comes to the aid of "the boy who lived," arguing that he is an "often unwitting Christ figure" whose story draws on Christian themes and teaches useful lessons. Killinger finds many parallels in the history of Christian storytelling, both inside and outside of the Bible, to J.K. Rowling's grab bag of characters, motifs and creatures. But his interpretations are strained, often well beyond the breaking point. One can imagine that Rowling is alluding to the philosophical concept of "quiddity" with the name "Quidditch"-though why exactly that should matter Killinger never makes clear. But when he suggests that the lightning-bolt-shaped scar on Harry's forehead recalls a few Old Testament scholars' belief that the divine name YHWH originally meant "lightning," he is simply indulging in etymological conspiracy theories. Potter fanatics will be alarmed that Killinger gets the composition of Voldemort's wand wrong (it is made of yew, not oak), but most everyone else will have stopped reading by then anyway. Killinger's fellow mainline Protestants are not troubled by Harry Potter, and conservative Christians will hardly be reassured by Killinger's fondness for Jungian archetypes and parapsychology. Francis Bridger's *A Charmed Life* has already covered this territory, with far greater success.

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Review

Advance Praise for *God, the Devil and Harry Potter*

"At last! A sensible Christian reading of Harry Potter. ... Remember, even Jesus himself was accused of necromancy by his enemies!" --Harvey Cox, Victor S. Thomas Professor of Divinity, Harvard Divinity School, author of *Common Prayers: Faith, Family, and a Christian's Journey Through the Jewish Year*

"A great read ... A wonderful antidote to some of the sheer silliness and malice of other religious commentators on the Potter books." --Joseph C. Hough, Jr., President, Union Theological Seminary, New York

"Augustine said that Christian truth is ever ancient and ever new. John Killinger has placed Christian truth in a significant new setting, the struggle of good and evil in the Harry Potter novels. His book is a must-read for all who seek to understand these best-selling novels and how the Gospel intersects with them. Creativity abounds, not just in Rowling's novels, but also in Killinger's analysis." --Dr. William B. Oden, resident bishop of The United Methodist Church, Dallas, Texas

"John Killinger brings the mind of a theologian and the heart of a writer to the task of successfully uncovering deep Christian values and traditions in the Harry Potter stories. For fans of Harry Potter, Killinger's scholarship can only deepen their enthusiasm. For Harry Potter's naysayers, Dr. Killinger's book adds convincing new arguments to the discussion."

---Robert D. Black, executive producer of *30 Good Minutes* and president of Chicago Sunday Evening Club

"It is always such a joy to read a book written by John Killinger. He is a breath of fresh air in a world of oppressive conservatism which sees evil in so many good things. His latest book, *God, the Devil, and Harry Potter: A Christian Minister's Defense of the Beloved Novels*, is a delightfully playful and enjoyable

diagnosis of the popular Harry Potter series. I am sure others will find the same refreshing experience as I did in this wonderful defense of Harry Potter against the modern-day Inquisition.” --Fr. Joseph F. Girzone, author of the Joshua series and *Trinity: A New Living Spirituality*

About the Author

John Killinger, who holds doctorates in both theology and literature, has taught courses in the theological aspects of contemporary literature at Vanderbilt University, the University of Chicago, City College of New York, and Stamford University. An ordained clergyman, he has been a minister in parishes in Virginia and California, and presently serves as the minister of the Little Stone Church, a resort parish on Mackinac Island, Michigan. Among his many publications are several books in the field of literary criticism, including *Hemingway and the Dead Gods* and *The Failure of Theology in Modern Literature*. He has also written two novels, *Jessie* and *The Night Jessie Sang at the Opry*, which feature Christ as a woman in modern times.

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