

Christian Theology and Harry Potter

Spring, 2011

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Instructor Contact Information:

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Office Hours: By appointment.

*E-mail is the best way to reach me. I promise to respond in a timely manner.

Course Description:

Is Dumbledore a God-figure, or is he Merlin recreated in our times? Is he neither because the Harry Potter books are just a children's series intended for entertainment rather than allusion to other literary works? Is the reading of theological archetypes into Rowling's series present or imposed upon the text? To start thinking about these questions, our class is going to look at a whole range of ideas from Christian theology that together create the underpinnings of what Christians think about God, and we will then look at them alongside the Harry Potter books. The central goal of this course is to ask whether the Harry Potter books espouse a Christian theological worldview, and if so, to what extent. Our study may show that they do. It may reveal that they do not. Regardless of the outcome, it will be our task to probe this question in detail.

In order to accomplish this goal of the class, we will look at voices from all sides of the debate, from Christians opposed to the books to those in favor of them to atheists who believe the series has nothing whatsoever to do with religion, never mind Christianity specifically. We will analyze their arguments before undertaking our own study of the theology of the books. We will discuss topics such as how an all-good, all-knowing, and all-powerful God can allow evil (theodicy), how sin relates to salvation (soteriology), and the significance of sacrifice. We will read theological sources on such topics while reading—or for many of us, re-reading—the Harry Potter books, so that we may bring these topics into direct discussion with Rowling's work. By the end of the course, we should be able to better analyze to what end Rowling uses topics from Christian theology throughout her writing.

Required Textbooks:

Primary Sources:

Rowling, JK. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*

Ibid. *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*

Ibid. *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*

Ibid. *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*
Ibid. *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*
Ibid. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*
Ibid. *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*
Essentials of Christian Theology, Serene Jones and Paul Lakeland, Eds.
Constructive Theology, William C. Placher, Ed.

Secondary Sources (compiled in a coursepacket):

Wandinger, Nikolaus, Christoph Drexler and Teresa Peter. "Harry Potter and the Art of Theology 1: A Theological Perspective on J.K. Rowling's novels-Part One: Healing, Grace, and Original Sin." *Milltown Studies* 52 (Winter 2003), 1-26.

Ibid. "Harry Potter and the Art of Theology 2: A Theological Perspective on J.K. Rowling's Novels-Part Two: Sacrifice and Mission." *Milltown Studies* 53 (Summer 2004), 131-153. Christopher Hitchens, "The Boy Who Lived," in *The New York Times*, August 12, 2007.

Alistair McGrath. *Christian Theology: An Introduction*. 3rd Edition.

Daniel Migliore. *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*.

Neal, Connie. *What's a Christian to do with Harry Potter?*

Abanes, Richard. *Harry Potter and the Bible: The Menace Behind the Magick*.

Smithouser, Jill, "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows." Book Review. Focus on the Family website. <http://www.pluggedinonline.com/articles/a0003326.cfm> Killinger, John. *God, the Devil, and Harry Potter*.

Granger, John. *Looking for God in Harry Potter*.

HarperCollins Bible (NRSV).

Ted Peters, "Six Ways of Salvation: How Does Jesus Save?" *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* Fall 2006, Vol. 45:3

Philosophy of Religion, Louis Pojman, Ed.

Nicholas Wandinger, "Harry Potter and the Art of Theology Revisited

Ibid. "'Sacrifice' in *Harry Potter* from a Girardian Perspective"

Paper by Oona Eisenstadt from the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, 2008

Danielle Elizabeth Tumminio, "On Teaching Theology and Harry Potter"

Danielle Elizabeth Tumminio, *God and Harry Potter at Yale*

Course Policies and Procedures:

The course will be conducted according to these policies and procedures:

1. Attendance is essential. If you must miss a class, you will have to speak to me to assess an appropriate way to make up missed work outside of class.
2. You must be prepared for class. To do this, I expect that you will have read the assigned reading, complete reading responses, and be ready to discuss the readings in class.
3. Participation does affect your grade. Constructive participation will enhance your grade. This includes: listening actively, making suggestions, and asking

questions to generate discussion. **Cell phones and pagers must be turned off during class.**

4. All essays must be double-spaced and typed in 12-point Times New Roman font. These essays must be **e-mailed to me by midnight on the day they are due. When you e-mail the essay, please be sure to request a return receipt so that you know it was delivered.** Essays will be returned to you via e-mail with comments. **Late essays will be penalized one letter grade for every day that the assignment is not submitted,** including the days on which they were due and those when we do not meet.
5. I must approve essay topics and outlines in advance. I will not grade any research paper whose topic and outline was not approved. The two papers for this course should be 8-10 pages in length.
6. **Cheating or plagiarism will result in failure of the course and a report to your College Dean.**
7. Your final course grade is not negotiable. If you are concerned about your progress during the course, we can speak about ways to improve your work.
8. Weekly reading responses must be handed in via e-mail by the midnight prior to class. You are allowed to miss two reading responses with no penalization to your grade. Reading responses should be no more than one page, double-spaced.

Grade Determination:

Your performance on each of the following tasks will earn a score out of 100 and then will be weighted according to the following percentage listed here:

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| • Essays | 50% |
| • In-class presentation | 20% |
| • Weekly Reading Responses | 20% |
| • In-class work and participation | 10% |

Class Schedule:

Week 1: Introductions. Review syllabus and course objectives. Go over themes of the course and expectations of students.

Oona Eisenstadt, American Academy of Religion Paper
Danielle Elizabeth Tumminio, "On Teaching Theology and Harry Potter"

Week 2 Readings: Introduction to Theology & Three Perspectives on Harry Potter

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone
Daniel Migliore, "The Task of Theology," in *Faith Seeking Understanding* 1-16

Constructive Theology "Introduction" (1-18)

Introduction to Richard Abanes, *Harry Potter and the Bible: The Menace Behind the Magick*

Introduction to Connie Neal, *What's a Christian to do with Harry Potter?*

Christopher Hitchens, "The Boy Who Lived," in *The New York Times*, August 12, 2007.

Week 3 Readings: The Problem of Evil

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets.

Alister McGrath, "Theodicy" in *Christian Theology* (292-5)

Daniel Migliore, "The Providence of God and the Mystery of Evil" in *Faith Seeking Understanding* 117-138

Philosophy of Religion, J.L. Mackie: "Evil and Omnipotence" (160-166)

Philosophy of Religion, John Hick: "Evil and Soul-Making" (152-155)

Philosophy of Religion, Edward H. Madden and Peter H. Hare: "A Critique of Hick's Theodicy" (156-159)

Week 4 Readings: Sin

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban

Wandinger, Drexler, and Peter, "Harry Potter and the Art of Theology 1"

Constructive Theology, Chapter 3, "Sin and Evil" (117-160)

Essentials of Christian Theology, Chapter 4, "What's Wrong with Us?" (133-182)

John Granger, "Despair and Deliverance" in *Looking for God in Harry Potter*

Week 5 Readings: Christology

***Outline of First Paper Due**

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire (first half)

Constructive Theology, Chapter 4, "Jesus Christ," 161-200

Essentials of Christian Theology, Chapter 5, "Does Jesus Make a Difference?" (183-220)

John Granger, "One Person, Two Natures," in *Looking for God in Harry Potter*

NRSV, Mark 14:32-43; Luke 22:31-53; Matthew 22:36-56; John 16:25-18:1

Week 6 Readings: Eucharistic Theology and Theological Anthropology

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire (second half)

NRSV, Matthew 26:20-29; Mark 14:17-25; Luke 22:14-23

Constructive Theology, Chapter 2, "Human Being" (77-116)

Tumminio, "Flesh of the Servant Willingly Given" in *God and Harry Potter at Yale*

Week 7 Readings: Eschatology and Prophecy

***First Paper Due**

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix (first half)

NRSV, the Book of Revelation, focusing specifically on 13:16-18; 14:9-11; 15:2-4; 20:4

Essentials of Christian Theology, Chapter 9, “Where Are We Going: Eschatology” (327-365)

Tumminio, “Something Wicked This Way Comes” in *God and Harry Potter at Yale*

Week 8 Readings: Sacrifice

Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix (second half)

NRSV, Genesis 22 and Leviticus 1-7; Matthew 26:47-28:20; Mark 14:43-16:8; Luke 22:54-24:50; John 18-21

Tumminio, “Walking Towards Death Arms” in *God and Harry Potter at Yale*

Wandinger, Drexler, and Peter. “Harry Potter and the Art of Theology 2: A Theological Perspective on J.K. Rowling’s Novels-Part Two: Sacrifice and Mission.” *Milltown Studies* 53 (Summer 2004), 131-153.

Wandinger, “‘Sacrifice’ in *Harry Potter* from a Girardian Perspective”

Week 9 Readings: Revelation

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince (first half)

Alister McGrath on Revelation: 200-217

Essentials of Christian Theology, Chapter 1, “How Do We Know What To Believe: Revelation and Authority” (11-33)

Philosophy of Religion: C.S. Lewis: “On Obstinacy in Belief” (352-358)

Philosophy of Religion: Blaise Pascal: “The Wager” (359-363)

Week 10 Readings: Salvation

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince (second half)

Alister McGrath on Atonement Theology: 410-417

Daniel Migliore, “Violence and the Cross” in *Faith Seeking Understanding* (187-191)

John Granger, “Baptism into a Sacramental Death” in *Looking for God in Harry Potter* (181-197)

Ted Peters, “Six Ways of Salvation: How Does Jesus Save?” (223-235)

Week 11 Readings: Love and Death

***Outline for Second Paper due**

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows (first half)

NRSV, John 3

NRSV, Genesis 22 revisited

Essentials in Christian Theology, Chapter 8, “What about *Them*? Christians and Non-Christians” (297-326)

Philosophy of Religion, Bertrand Russell, "The Finality of Death" (314-316)
Philosophy of Religion, John Hick, "Immortality and Resurrection" (317-322)

Week 12 Readings: Love, Grace, and Resurrection

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows (second half)

Killinger, John, "And now abideth faith, hope, and love," in *God, the Devil, and Harry Potter* 158-187

Alister McGrath on grace, merit, and the Pelagian Controversy: 440-452

Daniel Migliore, "Dimensions of the Resurrection Christ" in *FSU* (191-197)

NRSV, Revelation 21

Week 13: Wrap-Up, Discussion of Final Papers, Final Reflections

****Second Paper Due***