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Harry Potter and God (The Associate Editor's Desk)

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Gerhard Pfandl

On July 21, 2007, at one minute past midnight, the seventh and last Harry Potter book, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, went on sale. Released globally in 93 countries, *Deathly Hallows* broke sales records as the fastest-selling book ever, selling more than 11 million copies in England and in the United States in the first 24 hours following its release. The previous record, nine million in its first day, had been held by *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, volume six of the series.

The Harry Potter books are available in 66 languages in more than 200 countries, and to date about 340 million copies have been sold. What is it in these books that makes children who haven't read a book in their lives, suddenly read every page of every book J. K. Rowling produces? And many read them more than once. Parents report reading levels jumping four grades in two years. What is it that makes these books the biggest phenomenon in

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publishing history?

Harry Potter is a young boy in need of friends. His parents were killed by the evil sorcerer Lord Voldemort, and he grows up with an aunt, an uncle, and a cousin who mistreat him throughout his childhood. While living with these relatives, he receives a message that he is to attend Hogwart's School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, where he discovers that he has supernatural powers. The books recount his experiences and adventures at Hogwart's School. Millions of children identify with Harry the orphan because he is marginalized yet admirable.

The books have been praised to highest heaven and condemned to the lowest hell. The division of opinions is not simply between committed and nominal Christians, but goes right through the conservative evangelical camp. The evangelical magazine *Christianity Today* has defended the books, and some churches have even used Harry Potter to teach Sunday school.

On the other side of the fence, Jack Brock, pastor of the Community Church in Alamogordo, New Mexico, organized a public book burning of Harry Potter books. An Adventist school in Australia banned the books from its premises and was praised and condemned on a nationwide TV news station. Richard Abanes, who wrote the book *Harry Potter and the Bible*, considers the books harmful to children primarily because they introduce them to the occult. Furthermore, he asserts that there is no place for God in these books: "Harry Potter lives in a world free of any religion or spirituality of any kind. He lives surrounded by ghosts but has no one to pray to, even if he were so inclined, which he isn't" (*Time*, July 23, 2007).

Scripture warns us about the activity of spiritualism in the time of the end. The apostle Paul wrote, "The Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1, NKJV). And he adds: "The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders" (2 Thess. 2:9, NKJV).

The Book of Revelation tells us that, prior to Armageddon, the spirits of demons will work through the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet (16:13, 14); and Ellen White wrote: "Through the two great er-

rors, the immortality of the soul and Sunday sacredness, Satan will bring the people under his deceptions. While the former lays the foundation of spiritualism, the latter creates a bond of sympathy with Rome."¹

About 30 years ago, the New Age movement swept across the Western World, and it is still with us, as the many books on this topic in any bookstore testify. Through the New Age movement, Satan reaches out to the adults. Through the Harry Potter books, he is reaching out to the children. This seems to be one of the reasons for the tremendous success of these books—a supernatural power is directing this success.

In the Harry Potter books, Satan



sometimes surreptitiously, sometimes openly, introduces his teachings. In speaking of the evil Lord Voldemort (Satan), one of the characters in the book *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* says, "I met him when I traveled around the world. A foolish young man I was then, full of ridiculous ideas about good and evil. Lord Voldemort showed me how wrong I was. There is no good or evil, there is only power, and those too weak to seek it."

There is no good or evil, there is only power. What a message! What counts is power! If you have power, you can force other people to do what you want them to do. This is the same message children see on TV time and again. If you have a gun, you have power. If you have money, you have power. If you are a Harry Potter, you have power.

But the most devastating message in these books is that witchcraft can be something positive. In Deuteronomy 18:10, 12 God says, "Anyone . . . who practices witchcraft . . . [is] an abomination to the Lord" (Deut. 18:10, 12, NKJV). The Harry Potter books teach that witchcraft can be acceptable and good.

Since children have been reading the story of Harry Potter, they have become more interested in paganism and the occult, which is not surprising. A spokesperson for the Pagan Federation told Associated Newspapers: "Parents should not be

alarmed by their children's sudden interest in magic. Paganism is recognized as a valid religion. In no way is it a cult and certainly it offers nothing untoward."²

Just as Ellen White predicted, "Under a religious guise, Satan will seek to extend his influence over the Christian world."³ We know the Harry Potter books are pure fantasy, but smaller children cannot tell the difference between fact and fiction. One of the side effects of Pottermania is that witchcraft has suddenly become less objectionable. And real witches and wizards celebrate their positive portrayal in Harry Potter.

Considering the situation we need to ask ourselves, what can I, what can we as a church, do? First, we need to understand that the Great Controversy is a battle for the mind—yours, mine, and that of our children. And the mind is influenced by what it sees and hears. Just think of the influence of violence on TV on our children and young people. "I saw it on TV" is a frequent excuse of juvenile delinquents.

Second, we need to determine that we will not invite Satan into our homes and schools.

To flirt with spiritualism is to invite disaster. In the 1860s, Moses Hull, an eloquent minister, thought he could outfox Satan. He loved to debate and defeat spiritualists. Ellen White warned him against it, but he did it anyway and ended up a spiri-

tualist himself. He became one of their lecturers and authors. Playing around with spiritualism can be deadly. There should be no place for spiritualistic material, books, games, or videos in our homes or schools.

Just as we try to shield our children from drugs, alcohol, and nicotine, so we need to explain to them why spiritualistic material is not good for them, however appealing it may be.

Paul says, “whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things” (Phil 4:8, NKJV). Very little in the Harry Potter books is true, noble, just, pure, or lovely. “It is only a fairy tale,” some may say. True, but does imaginary witchcraft and wizardry influence the reader’s mind? You bet it does!

It is a law, says Ellen White, both

of the intellectual and the spiritual nature, that by beholding we become changed. “The mind gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is allowed to dwell. It becomes assimilated to that which it is accustomed to love and reverence.”⁴

Astrology, Marian apparitions, New Age, witchcraft, Satanism, channeling, black magic—the list goes on and on. All these different forms of spiritualism show that Satan is extremely active because he knows his time is short.

The good news in the whole story is that Satan has no power over God’s people. Jesus defeated Satan 2,000 years ago, and he cannot harm any of God’s children, unless they invite him into their lives.

REFERENCES

¹ *The Great Controversy*, p. 588.

² *South Pacific Division Record* (Dec. 1, 2001).

³ *The Great Controversy*, p. 464.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 555.

