



# **CATHOLICS AND HARRY POTTER**

**Webinar Transcript**

# INTRODUCTION

**Brandon Vogt:** Well, let's start off with some introductions. I'm **Brandon Vogt**, the founder of ClaritasU, which is an online training site for Catholics, helping them get clear and confident about hot button issues.

Joining me is **Nancy Brown**. Nancy is the author of I think the only sort of positive Catholic book on *Harry Potter*. It's titled, *The Mystery of Harry Potter*, a Catholic family guide. Nancy is also the author of a book titled, *The Woman Who Was Chesterton*, which is the first and only biography of G.K. Chesterton's wife named Frances. It's a fantastic book. Nancy, thanks for joining us!

**Nancy Brown:** Thanks for having me, Brandon. I'm so glad to be here.

**Brandon Vogt:** We're also joined by **Julian Ahlquist**. Julian is a founding faculty member of Chesterton Academy. That's part of the Chesterton Schools Network, a collection of I think now between 16 and 20 high schools, that are all based around a classical Catholic curriculum, with a heavy Chestertonian influence. Julian was one of the founding faculty members. He now teaches philosophy at the school there in Minnesota.

Julian is also the owner of Thomism.org, which is dedicated to the philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas.

You'll find all sorts of cool articles and connections on there including why supercalifragilisticexpialidocious is actually a hymn or a petition to the blessed Virgin Mary. If you want to know more about that, go to Julian's website. Julian, thanks for joining us!

**Julian Ahlquist:** No problem. Thank you!

**Brandon Vogt:** I should mention too that all three of us are very closely connected to the **Society of G.K. Chesterton**. In fact, we actually did this panel discussion at the most recent American Chesterton Society Conference, which was in Kansas City just a couple months ago.

We presented this panel discussion to a couple hundred people. It wasn't recorded though, so we wanted to do sort of a redux, a round two, so that we could have a more enduring version of this discussion.

If you want to learn more about the Society of G.K. Chesterton, go to the website [Chesterton.org](http://Chesterton.org). There you'll find out more about this marvelous writer, author, and a man that we all hope will one day be recognized as a saint. Again, [Chesterton.org](http://Chesterton.org) is the website for that.

## Why This Webinar?

**Brandon Vogt:** Okay, so why this webinar? Why a webinar on Catholics and *Harry Potter*? Well, as many of you know, *Harry Potter* seems never to leave the news cycle. Most recently there was a big dustup because a Catholic school in the Nashville area removed the *Harry Potter* books from its library. Now it's a complex story. Essentially, they were moving the library from one location to the other and decided during the transition to remove a handful of books. I think the new library was just physically smaller and the *Harry Potter* books were among those that were removed. So it was a little more complicated than just a straight up ban. In any case, the media took off. The headlines said, “*Catholic School Bans Harry Potter.*”

The pastor of the school, Fr. Reehill, said that he had conferred with exorcism experts before making this decision and said, "The curses and spells used in the books are actual curses and spells, which when read by a human being, risk conjuring evil spirits into the presence of the person reading the texts.”

Naturally that quote itself ignited another round of discussion and debate. Since then, lots of Catholics have been chattering about *Harry Potter* throughout social media, but what this latest dust up made me realize was that there's not really a solid, comprehensive, deep dive look at the *Harry Potter* series from a Catholic perspective.

I mentioned earlier Nancy's book, *The Mystery of Harry Potter*, which I think is the best Catholic book on the topic, but Nancy published her book before the full series had come out. She later released an appendix, but there's not really anything that's been produced from a Catholic perspective *after* the full series has been

finished, that analyzes its virtues and drawbacks thoroughly. So that's what we want to do on this webinar.

## Our Views on Harry Potter

**Brandon Vogt:** I just want to lay our cards on the table right up front here. The three of us here—myself, Nancy, and Julian—we're mostly in agreement regarding the books.

Basically here's our perspective: **we're not totally, unqualified pro, and we're not totally, unqualified con.** On the one hand, we don't think that the books are inherently evil, so we don't think that the books should ever be banned. We think the books are mostly good and they typically have wonderful effects on the children and adults who read them.

On the other hand, we don't think that the book should be obligatory. We don't think everyone should necessarily read them or that they should be praised without qualification, as if there's nothing wrong with the series whatsoever. We don't think every child should read them, especially children with sensitivities or past history with witchcraft or the occult, or those in family environments that are sensitive to dark powers.

What we're convinced of is that ultimately **parents** are the ones best positioned to determine whether and how their kids should read the books.

Now, parents should take in all of the feedback and advice from exorcists, from priests, from teachers, from reviewers, and commenters, all that stuff, bring in all that data. Then it's the parents themselves who are best in position to decide. They know their kids, they know their children's sensitivities, enough to make the call about whether to read the books.

So that's the purpose of this webinar, to give you all the information that you need to make that judgement. Whether you're a parent, a priest, a pastor, a teacher, a catechist, whatever your relationship is, maybe you're even thinking about whether you yourself should read the books, we want to give you all the facts, both pro and con, lay out the best cases on either side, and then let you make the decision. We're not going to make it for you.

## Harry Potter Basics

**Brandon Vogt:** So let's start with a very brief introduction to *Harry Potter*. I know we've got a mixed audience here. I've received emails throughout the week from some people who said, "Hey, I've never read any of the books. Can I still come to the webinar?" Yes, of course.

The *Harry Potter* books are a seven-book series written by J.K. Rowling, from 1997—that's when the first book was published—to 2007, so roughly a 10-11 year period. Those seven books were turned into eight films (the last book was split into two films) and it became the third-highest grossing film series of all time. The books themselves have sold 500 million copies, making it the best-selling book series in the history of the world.

We'll argue later that the *Harry Potter* series has become the main shared text of our generation, that there's basically no other story or series to which you can go to almost any generation and reference a character, a moment, an episode from one of the books and people will have a general sense of what you're talking about. It's the one cultural experience that many generations share together.

Now, before we start talking about the pros and cons of the *Harry Potter* books, I do want to issue a **spoiler alert**. It's going to be a little difficult to discuss some of the elements of *Harry Potter* without giving away key details of the plot. So if that's going to be a problem for you, I encourage you to either maybe pause the video and come back and read the transcript later, or maybe just go along with it. We'll try to reveal as little as possible, but just a general warning that we're probably going to give away some major plot details throughout the webinar.

## Personal Experiences with Harry Potter

**Brandon Vogt:** With all that said, how about we start off by sharing our personal experiences about how each of us came into *Harry Potter* and what our initial reactions were. Let's start with you, Nancy.

**Nancy Brown:** Sure. I first heard about *Harry Potter* maybe around the year 2000, when a faithful Catholic friend of mine told me, "Oh, have you heard of *Harry Potter*?" and I hadn't. She said, "Well, just stay

away from it. It's bad." I said, "Okay." Then maybe a year later, another Catholic friend of mine said, "Hey, have you heard about *Harry Potter*?" I said, "Oh yeah, a friend said stay away." She was like, "No, they're fine. They're good. I like them." How do you reconcile these opinions from two good, faithful, Catholic homeschool moms? I thought, well, the only thing I could do is read them myself.

**Brandon Vogt:** Excellent. How about you Julian? How'd you first get exposed to *Harry Potter*?

**Julian Ahlquist:** Yeah, so I heard about *Harry Potter* when I think I was in tenth grade, so that would've been around the year 2000. I heard the name Harry Potter and I thought, "Wow, that sounds dumb," but people were like, "No, man, it's good." I'm like, "OK, but I'm pretty sure it's not." But enough friends and family recommended it, so I finally read the first one, and by the end of it, I'm like, "Wow, this is good. I'm a fan." I was immensely inspired by it. I had this feeling even in high school that this is significant, that this series was going to be around for a while. This was around twenty years ago and almost every year since then, I've heard people either against it or least poo poo it, as in like, "What? *Harry Potter*? That was so yesterday."

I think in 2002, I encountered a person who seemed to be pretty smart saying like, "Oh yeah, that was so last year. That's irrelevant now." I'm like, "What?!" So yeah, a lot of people will try to poo poo it, but it seems to be sticking around. It's inching toward being a classic—maybe, possibly. At the very least, it's significant, so let's take it seriously. Whether it's evil, whether it's good, let's take it seriously.

I've been defending *Harry Potter* against accusations that it's anti-Christian for also about 20 years, since high school roughly. So there you go!

**Brandon Vogt:** I was kind of a late comer to the *Harry Potter* series. I didn't read it until I was in college. Since then I've spoken pretty positively and publicly about the series, and it was about 6–8 months ago that I launched this online campaign called, Catholic Dumbledore's Army. My argument, using this metaphor from the *Harry Potter* series was, it's time for a Catholic version of this group that Harry

Potter and his friends started that in the series they called Dumbledore's Army.

I thought it was a pretty innocuous metaphor, but man, I received hundreds of emails from people that I know, respect, and admire, warning me, seriously warning me, about even *mentioning* Harry Potter in any sort of positive way. Many of them would send me articles, would send me videos about why the *Harry Potter* series is so dangerous.

Frankly, I wasn't aware of any of this. I didn't know there was such a big group of Catholics that had serious problems with the books. A lot of that was new to me, but it caused me to wonder, "Okay, why is it that there is such a visceral divide when it comes to this series?" That caused me to do a lot of researching, both pro and con into the series.

## Why Catholics SHOULD Consider Reading Harry Potter

### *Positive Reasons*

**Brandon Vogt:** Well, with all that in mind, let's turn now to the content of this webinar. We've decided to split this webinar into two parts. The first part is going to be on **why Catholics SHOULD consider reading *Harry Potter***, not why all Catholics have to read *Harry Potter*, not why *Harry Potter* is the best series in the entire world, but why Catholics should at least consider reading *Harry Potter* because of its positive dimensions.

The second part will focus on **why Catholics SHOULD NOT read *Harry Potter***. There we'll focus on the criticisms. What are some apparent problems with it? What are the main objections people have raised, and what do we, the three of us, think about some of those? But let's start with the positive first.



## Reason #1: Encourages virtues that are in short supply among children today

**Brandon Vogt:** The first reason to consider the series is because it encourages virtues that are in serious short supply among children. When you read the books, you immediately see things like courage, fidelity, friendship, self-sacrifice, and fighting against sinful inclinations. These are among the major themes of the series; they're present in virtually every book.

J.K. Rowling said that to her, the moral significance of these tales was "blindingly obvious." She said that the key for the whole series was the choice between what is right and what is easy. Nancy, what do you think about the virtues on display in the Harry Potter series?

**Nancy Brown:** I think they are definitely there. Parents used to read fairy tales to their children to teach them moral lessons and to encourage them in their virtues. To reject *Harry Potter*, which in my opinion is a modern fairy tale, is to reject things like *Jack and the Giant Slayer*, and *Hansel and Gretel*, and *Sleeping Beauty*. These stories teach us that dark times are coming and how can we prepare. The *Harry Potter* books are a fictional equivalent of fairy tales of the past.

They're also something like Paul Thigpen's book, *Manual for Spiritual Warfare*. You could say *Harry Potter* is the fictional version of that because it teaches you how to prepare yourself for a spiritual battle.

**Brandon Vogt:** Yeah, I love that comparison. The *Manual for Spiritual Warfare* contains a lot of principles for living a morally heroic life, but I think I stand with Aristotle. He said the best way to be good is to find the good man and emulate him. Look around for somebody who's morally praiseworthy, morally imitable, and then copy him. Do what he does.

This is why fairy tales, moral biographies, and the stories and parables in the Bible are so perennially popular because they show us how to act. They don't just teach us—they show us. I think that's part of the secret of success for the *Harry Potter* series. As you follow these young kids throughout their seven years at Hogwarts, they're time after time put into really difficult moral



scenarios, and we see them time and again improve. Their moral behavior changes over time and they become imitable examples of how to behave. Julian, what did you have to say on this one?

**Julian Ahlquist:** Well, briefly I'll mention two notable Catholic sources that I'll refer to more later as well, namely the Vatican newspaper and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Both have praised the series multiple times for its promotion of virtues like heroism, friendship, perseverance, loyalty, self-sacrifice, love, and a bunch of other virtues as well. But I'll say more about that later.

## **Reason #2: Offers reflections on important, but little-discussed topics that children deal with**

**Brandon Vogt:** Okay. So that's the first positive dimension, that the books encourage virtue, especially virtues in short supply among contemporary children's literature today.

The second reason to consider reading the books is that they offer reflections on very important and deep spiritual questions, ones that are little discussed and dealt with among children today.

Just to tick off a few of them: death is a common thread that runs throughout all the books, and how to deal with death, especially the death of loved ones, the loss of parents in particular.

There are questions about identity. You have this divide in the wizarding world between muggles (non-wizarding people) and the wizarding folk, and questions emerge about whether this identity is significant or meaningful.

You also see questions surrounding choice and free will.

Most importantly, most obviously by the time you finish the series, are questions about the power of love, especially its power over death and evil, which to us Christians should ring a lot of bells. Nancy, you picked up on some of these themes in your own book, right?

**Nancy Brown:** Yeah, definitely. Love, sacrifice, spiritual warfare, dealing with death and grief. What does grief look like? Friendship. What does it mean to lay down one's life for one's friends? All of that is definitely in there.

**Julian Ahlquist:** Interestingly, when Harry Potter is cursed by Voldemort (the evil, villainous wizard) on more than one occasion, Harry begins noticing that he himself is exhibiting certain powers or similarities to Voldemort, and he fears that maybe he's going to become him or become evil like him. Dumbledore assures Harry Potter that, "It is our choices that determine who we are far more than our abilities." In other words, we have free will. Just because it seems like we're becoming evil, no, we can resist it. We can resist evil. I think that's one of the greatest quotes in the series that I often think about: "It is our choices that determine who we are far more than our abilities."

**Brandon Vogt:** As a parent reading these books with my kids, I've found that they're a goldmine of opportunity to open up discussions about these really deep questions and topics. Things like free will, death, love, sacrifice, etc. It's hard to bring these up in other contexts. You can't just like, while you're driving in the car, say, "Hey, what do you think about free will?" It's tough to get into deep conversations like that. But this series seems to provoke those questions really easily. I mean *Harry Potter* is not *Captain Underpants*. This is not a real shallow, flat series, full of simplistic, juvenile laughs. This is a really deep and serious series for kids that can bring them to the deep questions of life. So that's a second reason to consider reading the books.

### **Reason #3: Re-enchants our flattened-out, secular world**

**Brandon Vogt:** Here's a third reason: the *Harry Potter* series reenchants our flattened-out, secular world. Many *Harry Potter* commentators have observed that the series deals a major blow to materialism, the belief that reality is nothing more than the physical, just the material elements around us. Materialism says there's no real transcendent purpose or drama going on. Reality is just basically the physical world.

But the *Harry Potter* series plants its flag on quite the opposite hill. It inculcates belief in the transcendent just as well, I think, as the *Narnia* series and *Lord of the Rings*.

John Granger is widely known as the Hogwarts Professor and is probably the greatest scholar of the Harry Potter books. He's Eastern Orthodox. Here's what he says about the books:

“*Harry Potter*’s Christian content and the fact that he takes us out of our materialist prisons are what keep his readers coming back again and again...People long to be part of a cosmic struggle between good and evil, which is why *Harry Potter* is so popular with both children and adults.”

**Nancy Brown:** Yeah, I definitely agree with that. The books are a reminder to believers and nonbelievers that there is a supernatural world, a transcendent world. It's a crack in the shield of a nonbeliever. It opens them to a world beyond what they can see.

It's Chesterton's Ethics of Elfland, his chapter in *Orthodoxy*. Both C.S. Lewis and G.K. Chesterton had what they called a baptism of their imagination from reading George MacDonald when they were young. Chesterton read a book called, *The Princess and the Goblin*, as he described in his autobiography, and he said that book opened him up to the idea that there was *more*, that there's this other world beyond the one we see, and that was important for his growth when he was a young boy.

Lewis said he read George MacDonald as well. It was just coincidental, but his book that he read was called *Phantastes: A Fairy Romance*, and Lewis describes that experience in his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*. He had the exact same experience as Chesterton and I think that's what *Harry Potter* can do for children today, who likely aren't going to read George MacDonald. *Harry Potter* can do the same thing. It can be that baptism of the imagination.

**Julian Ahlquist:** Speaking of Chesterton, there's another line in *Orthodoxy*, his most famous book. There he says:

“The only words that ever satisfied me as describing Nature are the terms used in the fairy books, 'charm,' 'spell,' 'enchantment.' They express the arbitrariness of the fact and its mystery. A tree

grows fruit because it is a magic tree. Water runs downhill because it is bewitched. The sun shines because it is bewitched.”

So Chesterton says that a sense of wonder at God's creation, and then by extension beyond it, can be fostered and periodically rekindled by imagining things using magical terminology. Again, he uses words like charm, spell, enchantment, and even bewitched.

## **Reason #4: Series is deeply Biblical and loaded with Christian symbolism**

**Brandon Vogt:** Alright, so here's the next reason to consider the books: they are deeply biblical and loaded with Christian symbolism. Many people unfamiliar with the books are surprised to hear this, but J.K. Rowling said, “The *Harry Potter* books have always in fact dealt explicitly with religious themes and questions.” She says that she did not reveal them or make them too explicit because it would have given too much away to fans who would have seen the parallels and then seen what was coming down the line.

Let me just tick off a few of these biblical and Christian parallels. John Granger, that Eastern Orthodox *Harry Potter* scholar, has observed that in each of these seven books, Harry Potter at the climactic moment of the book is either saved or aided by a magical entity that has traditionally been associated with or used to symbolize Christ. You have things like the philosopher's stone, a phoenix, a stag, unicorns, hippogriffs, et cetera. All of these are either associated with, or represent or symbolize Christ.

Throughout the series we also learn about the salvific power of love, this love that is literally flowing through Harry's blood. Brief spoiler alert here! We learn pretty early in the story that Harry's mother sacrifices herself to protect Harry. The evil wizard, Voldemort, is trying to kill Harry, but his mother steps in the way and absorbs the spell and dies because of it. In that very act, this love somehow enters into her bloodstream and is conveyed to Harry. This saving blood becomes salvific, not only for Harry, but eventually the whole wizarding world. All of these themes of the saving blood and the family love for Christians, I mean they should be alarm bells going off in our heads.

You also have the Death Eaters, which are Voldemort's followers, the main bad wizards. They're positioned against the good wizards who are presumably known as the Life Eaters. For Catholics, especially, who consume the Bread of Life at every Mass, we're a Eucharistic people, this pairing of the Death Eaters and the Life Eaters is but another example of spiritual warfare in the series.

Then finally, and this is the most explicit example, there are actual Bible verses that appear in the *Harry Potter* series, for example on the tombstones of Albus Dumbledore's relatives. Dumbledore is the headmaster at Hogwarts and one of the most exalted figures. On his family's tombstone it reads, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." That biblical verse is quite meaningful in the series and in context.

Then on the tomb of Harry Potter's parents, who died before the books began, it reads, "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death."

Now J.K. Rowling has said, "These biblical verses epitomize the whole series." These biblical verses epitomize the whole series. In other words, the whole story revolves around what these biblical verses are saying and what they mean.

Nancy, say a little bit more about the Christian symbolism of the books.

**Nancy Brown:**

Sure! Well, the first thing I noticed when I was reading it was, they get to school and then it gets to be winter break, but it's not winter break. It's Christmas holidays. I thought, well that's unusual. Then at Easter, there's Easter holidays. There are churches and they're singing Christmas hymns. If you watch the movies, even the ghosts are singing, "Merry Christmas."

Also, the characters are given a choice. They have free will. They're given this choice of how they're going to behave, who are they going to follow. Are they going to follow the good guys or the bad guys? That's pretty much the whole series.

The funny thing is that people claim that the *Harry Potter* series is a hidden book of the occult, but it's really a hidden book of Christianity. I really believe that J.K. Rowling has pulled off the biggest coup of our age. She's handed the world a huge Christian

tale, disguised in this story about witches and wizards. No one suspects that's what it is, but I think it is.

**Julian Ahlquist:** Yeah, it's not really disguised anymore if you read her interviews. J.K. Rowling has clearly stated that she's a Christian and that the story is about Christianity. Right?

**Nancy Brown:** Yes.

**Julian Ahlquist:** She even said that in her youth, she regularly attended church, even when the rest of her family didn't, which is unusual. She said that the inspiration for the series was Christianity.

Especially in the last book, the Christian symbolism becomes really obvious. In fact, some people criticize it because it's *too* obvious. They think it's too heavy-handed, which is not the worst criticism a Christian can receive. Harry allows himself to die to save everybody else, similar to how Christ took sin upon himself to kill it, as it were. Harry bears part of the evil of Voldemort within himself and sacrifices himself to destroy it. Then of course, Harry also resurrects. The whole chapter around these events is titled, interestingly, “Kings Cross,” so Christ the King, cross, the crucifixion. Again, it's almost heavy-handed. It's almost too explicit, but I'm okay with it.

## Reason #5: Very pro-life, pro-family

**Brandon Vogt:** Alright, we've got just a few more positive things then we'll get to the criticisms of the series. Next on the positive list is that the series is remarkably pro-life and pro-family. I mean, go to your local Barnes and Noble and look at the wall of contemporary young adult fiction. I think the *Harry Potter* series stacks up as well if not better than all of it out there, by this criteria that it's pro-family and pro-life.

The whole story revolves around a culture of life, which is represented by Harry and his mother (who gives her life for the sake of her son) versus a culture of death (symbolized by Voldemort and all of his Death Eaters). Clearly, from beginning to end, it's a struggle between those who support life and those who get behind death.



Also, one of the most delightful set of characters in the books is the Weasley family. The Weasleys are a poor family, but they have seven children. My good friend, Haley Stewart, has written pretty persuasively on her blog that she thinks they're an Irish Catholic family. She highlights little clues throughout the books to make that case.

Whether that's true, they're certainly a poor family, deeply in love with each other, who encourage each other toward virtue. The Weasleys kind of take in Harry like their adopted eighth child. The family dimension is so clearly on display. The Weasleys are like the family you desperately want to be a part of. It's just such a positive depiction of a good, holy, well-integrated family.

Finally, what's also notable is there are no divorced marriages in the entire series, I think. I've surveyed them all and I'm pretty sure this is true, that all of the characters have or had (in the cases of those who have died) a mom and a dad—all of them. There are no broken families, no situations where you have divorced parents. This holds for the good side *and* the bad side. Even the bad characters have intact families. Again, I don't know of any other book or series in contemporary literature that puts that displays that as the norm or ideal. Pro-life. Pro-family. Nancy, I know you wanted to say some more about that.

**Nancy Brown:** Yeah, as soon as Harry meets Ron Weasley, he wants to be part of that family. They do take him in, and they treat him like their son. Molly Weasley, the mother, is a great example of Christian motherhood and gracious hospitality. Arthur Weasley the father, is probably the best fictional father to come along in a really long time.

Also, the series ends with—spoiler alert!—the main characters all getting married and founding families. At the conclusion of the story, Harry, who marries into the Weasley family, starts his own family. So though he lost his family in the beginning of this series, he found a new family at the end. It's kind of like he's gone full circle and it's just a really great depiction of family life.

**Julian Ahlquist:** Yeah. Some secular people actually complain about *Harry Potter* in its promotion of traditional values. We have the regional director for the Council of Secular Humanism, who complained saying that it reinforces traditional gender roles. He says women are always portrayed in secondary positions of power and authority. The men



are all aggressive and adventurous. Men are self-confident, women are more self-conscious. Men are breadwinners, women maintain the household. Men act in leadership roles, women act to support men's leadership, et cetera, et cetera. Basically, a bunch of unintended compliments right there.

## Reason #6: Produces a huge surge in reading among children

**Brandon Vogt:** All right, so all the things we've listed so far are what we might call *internal* merits of the book, things that are good within the books' content itself. There are two more things I wanted to briefly cover though, and these are *external* reasons to read the books, based on the effects that the books have on people.

The first, and this is pretty well documented, is that the *Harry Potter* series has produced a surge in literacy and reading among children. A lot of studies in both England and America have confirmed that children who read *Harry Potter* books end up reading *more* books and *longer* books afterward.

In fact, this was my own story. I actually wasn't much of a reader growing up. I think I read maybe a single book throughout high school. In college, I studied engineering, so all math, science, didn't really like literature books. But while I was in college, I read the *Harry Potter* books and just breezed through the whole thing, all four thousand plus pages, and it was reading that, that set me up to read the *Lord of the Rings*, which is now my favorite book—I think it's the greatest book ever written, at least among titles not inspired by God. But I don't think I ever would have read *Lord of the Rings* had I not read through this big, thick series of *Harry Potter*. For me, it was the gateway to reading, and we've seen that's the case with a lot of kids.

So maybe you're a parent, your kids aren't too interested in reading, or they're struggling with reading. I'm not saying this series is a magic pill, but for a lot of kids it's really opened up the world of reading for them.

**Nancy Brown:** Yeah. Not only do they read all these stories, but they really invest in the stories, and they learn that some stories take longer to unfold, which makes them more willing to take in a longer story. I

mean, what we're used to in this generation is Twitter, and just short soundbite and short stories, too. But *Harry Potter* is definitely a long story. You have to invest in it.

**Julian Ahlquist:** Yeah. At our panel discussion at the Chesterton Conference on *Harry Potter*, there a high-school English professor who teaches at a Catholic school, and he had some non-Catholic students. He said he used *Harry Potter* to explain bits of Catholic theology, and multiple of these non-Catholic students ended up converting to Catholicism because of that, because they could relate to *Harry Potter* and they could see now the connections between God and theology.

In his books, John Granger also talks about converts to Catholicism due to *Harry Potter*. In fact, I remember he talked about a lady who converted to Catholicism because of *Harry Potter* and even started going to Daily Mass as a result.

**Brandon Vogt:** Now, again, we're not saying *Harry Potter* is the greatest evangelistic tool ever, or that it will automatically produce better readers or more converts. But it certainly has the potential and it has done that for a lot of people.

## **Reason #7: *Harry Potter* is the shared text of our generation**

**Brandon Vogt:** The last reason to consider reading *Harry Potter* is that it's become the shared text of our generation.

*Religion News Service* recently had a piece wondering whether *Harry Potter* had replaced the Bible in this role, as the shared text of our generation. In today's world, you can reference parables of Jesus, or certain characters from the Old Testament like Solomon, and few people will know what you're talking about. But if you mention Dumbledore or Hagrid or Harry or Ron, virtually everybody, even those who haven't read the books, will know what you're talking about.

The reason that's important is because as Catholics, we follow in the tradition of someone like St. Paul who went up on the Areopagus in Athens, Greece, and when he was sharing the Christian message with these pagans in Greece, he used their

culture to make his case. He referenced their poets, mentioned their philosophers, took account of their local religiosity. So, he used the culture around him as a bridge to proclaim the faith. I think that's what we can do with *Harry Potter*.

Julian just shared a few examples of this happening, and I've mentioned that's how I've been using *Harry Potter* with my kids. We read them together and it provokes these deeper theological and philosophical questions. But the series has become the shared texts of our generation, and if only for that reason we should at least be familiar with it.

## Why Catholics SHOULD NOT Consider Reading Harry Potter

### *Criticisms*

**Brandon Vogt:** Okay, onto the critics! So, I just want to say a quick thing before we get to some of these criticisms. Each of us panelists has received numerous emails and messages from friends, family, and strangers warning about the dangers of *Harry Potter*, and we all three agree that there *are* some potential pitfalls in *Harry Potter*.

We said at the beginning that we don't offer just an unqualified, uncritical endorsement of the series. There are things you should be aware of.

I also want to emphasize that as we go through these criticisms, especially ones coming from particular people, we're not saying that the people who make these criticisms are malevolent or trying to cause trouble or they're lying or anything like that. We're trying to represent their criticisms as fairly as we possibly can. Okay? So, with those caveats in mind, let's go through some of the criticisms.

## Objection #1: *Harry Potter* promotes occult magic

**Brandon Vogt:** The most common objection, without a doubt, is the suggestion that the *Harry Potter* series either promotes or leads to the occult, that it promotes the occult magic. Critics say it promotes witchcraft, it leads to people to practice witchcraft and sorcery. This is undoubtedly the most common criticism you'll hear. So maybe we'll start with you, Julian. I know you've done a lot of research into this. What do you say in response?

**Julian Ahlquist:** A lot of stuff actually. Many critics, definitely not all, but many in my experience will insist that the term “magic” can only refer to occult magic. They don't want to distinguish between different forms of magic, even in fiction. But a word obviously has many uses throughout history, but some people will absolutely refuse to acknowledge those differences.

In fact, I've encountered Catholics and other Christians who will insist on condemning stage magic as well. You know, they will say certain stage magicians use real witchcraft because they can't possibly accomplish some of the tricks just with illusions or whatever.

So anyway, there's a way to distinguish fantasy magic from occult magic. One way you could go about this is distinguishing **incantational** magic versus **invocational** magic. Invocational magic has to do with trying to call upon some sort of spirit to cause an effect in the world. And that's generally understood as bad, at least in the context of magic.

When you're talking about incantational magic, though, that's where you just say a word or phrase, and then something happens. Maybe it's because of a spirit, but maybe not.

There are some Wiccans, actual witches in real life, that have apparently said that *Harry Potter's* magic is the same as theirs, but many other Wiccans, in fact most that I've come across on the internet, certainly deny this.

They say, "*Harry Potter's* spells are nothing like ours." And the reason for this they say, in *Harry Potter*, the spells are not prayers. They are not invoking a spirit.

It's problematic that so many Catholics who nonetheless still condemn the magic depicted in *Harry Potter* often strangely accept the magic depicted in fairy tales, in King Arthur, in the *Wizard of Oz*, in *Narnia* and *Lord of the Rings*, et cetera.

You know, it seems to lead to some inconsistency. For example, in Grimms' Fairy Tales, with Sleeping Beauty (or Briar Rose, the original name) you don't have just fairies, but wise women who bestow magical gifts onto the princess. Right? So that seems like you have some sort of witches or something. Is that problematic?

Also, in Grimms' Fairy Tales, there's a story called "Sweetheart Roland" where the human protagonist finds a magic wand and uses it to shape shift and even eventually kill the antagonist with it. And it's never portrayed as evil. Right? So again, the use of a magic wand to do a bunch of stuff by the good guy. What do we do with that?

Also, of course, we have Arthurian literature, literature about King Arthur. The Catholic medieval culture is the source of the legends of King Arthur and the stories have the most famous good magic-wielding, spell-casting wizard in the history of fiction. Of course, I'm talking about Merlin. Also, it's possible the universe of King Arthur is the same one as *Harry Potter*, because there's a reference in *Harry Potter* to the order of Merlin. Dumbledore belongs to the order of Merlin. Is it in the same Arthurian universe, just at a different time period? If it is, what do we do? Do we condemn King Arthur as well?

In one legend also, Merlin has a female apprentice named Nyneve, who is described as a good sorceress who use spells, divination, etc. to help the Knights of the Round Table. Again, she's described as the good sorceress.

Of course, we also have Excalibur, a magic sword used by King Arthur, et cetera.

So as we see with the Arthurian legends in the Middle Ages, the portrayal of good magic, good magicians, good wizards, good

sorceresses, etc., is part of a longstanding Catholic literary tradition.

You also have Shakespeare. Consider the wizard Prospero from his play, *The Tempest*, who is generally portrayed as a good character. We have lots of magic in a *Midsummer Night's Dream*, including fairies and magic going on all over the place. What do we do with that?

And then very briefly, there's *Wizard of Oz*. We had a good witch of the East, Glinda, who works magic. (Now to be fair, there are some Catholics I've met that condemn *Harry Potter*. . . who *also* condemn the *Wizard of Oz* for the same reason, so I'll mention that.)

Then of course we have C. S. Lewis and the *Chronicles of Narnia*. Those books contain all kinds of good magic. There's a "deeper magic" mentioned in the books, which connects to Aslan, the Christ figure. We've got a character named Coriakin, who is another "good" magician. Even one of the human characters, Lucy Pevensie, finds a spell book and casts the spell from it to make hidden things visible. When Aslan appears, he doesn't berate her. He actually compliments her for that.

Finally, we have J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. Obviously, the wizard Gandalf casts a bunch of spells, but usually, Catholics are willing to defend Gandalf. (I have heard some defenses of him go something like this: in the story, he's a sort of angelic being and not human, and thus he's allowed to do magic for some reason. But I don't understand why that is.)

The problem is that Tolkien describes all this as magic. So, if you take the hard-line position that all magic is bad, even if it's in fiction, then you have some difficulties. Gandalf would then have to be bad in order to remain logically consistent. But it's not just Gandalf: we've also got the skills of the elves in *Lord of the Rings*, and they are not angelic beings, right? They're not angels. They're flesh and blood. They're clearly rational animals as Aristotle and Aquinas would say. So, they're human in sort of the broad philosophical, theological sense, and yet their powers are also described as magical.

Now, again some might say, 'Well, elves are a different race, so it's okay for them to use magic They're not really human.'" But the thing is, in *Harry Potter*, the witches and wizards are depicted as a



different race. Rowling has made this clear, time after time. So, if you're saying elves can do magic cause they're a different race, well, why can't the witches and wizards in *Harry Potter* also do magic because they are a different race?

**Brandon Vogt:** Let's pause right there for a second, Julian, because I want to emphasize a point. For those of you who have not read the *Harry Potter* books, there's a very clear fact, made repeatedly and explicitly, that there are certain people who, because of innate gifts, are able to do magic. These are known as wizards or witches. Those born *without these gifts* are known as Muggles, and they don't have the capacity for magic. Even if they read a million books, and studied under the top wizards, they just couldn't do it.

This explains why a lot, if not the overwhelming majority of young kids who read *Harry Potter* don't end up trying magic because they know they're Muggles. They realize they weren't born of magical parents so magic is just not something they're able to do or learn.

In the *Harry Potter* books, magic isn't presented as a sort of Gnostic, special knowledge that you could research, learn, attain, and perform. It's either that you were born with it, or you weren't. Since all readers of the books are Muggles, there's not a real temptation to try the spells for the overwhelming majority of people.

**Julian Ahlquist:** Yep. Again, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has a lot to say on this exact matter. They say the magical elements in *Harry Potter* are benign, serving to support the plot, not endorse the evils of sorcery. The USCCB also says:

“As with many a time-honored tale—ranging from *The Wizard of Oz* to *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, penned by devoutly Catholic novelist J.R.R. Tolkien—the element of sorcery in Rowling's story serves merely as a fictional device and a stimulant to the imagination.”

The USCCB also says:

“... the magical elements in [*Harry Potter*] ... should be viewed as time-honored storytelling devices, like those employed throughout the history of Western fantasy literature from



childhood fairy tales (Cinderella's pumpkin being turned into a carriage) to Arthurian legends and Shakespeare.”

And lastly, one more quote from the Catholic Bishops:

“A reference by Voldemort about the “old magic” wrought by the sacrificial love of Harry's mother (who died protecting him in his infancy) seems to echo the salvific “Deeper Magic” spoken of in C.S. Lewis' Christian-allegorical *The Chronicles of Narnia*.”

Alright? So that's the USCCB weighing in.

Now, there are Christians, and they're usually Protestants, who not only condemn *Harry Potter*, but *also* these other magical stories like *Lord of the Rings*. I at least appreciate them being a little bit more consistent in their logic. In fact, you can go online and find lots of Christians brutally condemning *Lord of the Rings* and *Narnia* using the exact sort of language that some Catholics use to condemn *Harry Potter*. In fact, I have started noticing some Catholics start to move into condemnation of *Lord of the Rings* and *Narnia*. It's a little troubling, but that's where we are.

One other thing that I've heard time and time again is that sometimes when a Catholic goes into a bookstore, they see *Harry Potter* books next to a cult literature. What do we make of that?

Well, personally, I've never seen that, but maybe that's just by luck. But what I *have* definitely seen in bookstores a lot is occult literature placed right next to Arthurian literature and right next to fairy tales. You know, I researched a lot of King Arthur legends, and I'm a big fan of a lot of fairy tales. Oftentimes they're put right on the same bookshelf as Wiccan literature, which so annoying. But again, does that indicate these things are evil as well?

You will find many Wiccans singing the praises of *Narnia* and *Lord of the Rings*. They've even sometimes incorporated the stories into their weird spirituality. Many ex-witches who become Christian, usually Protestants, consequently hate Lewis and Tolkien. One ex-witch I read said something like, "Listen, I'm an ex-witch. I know that *Lord of the Rings* is from the pit of hell." Okay, right? It's the same sort of rhetoric that we hear about *Harry Potter*.

Also lastly, there's a *Lord of the Rings* Ouija board and tarot card deck that are available for purchase. I've never seen that for *Harry*

*Potter*, so yeah, that's all I'll say about that. I could go on, but let's move on.

**Brandon Vogt:** Okay. So that's the long answer to the biggest objection, which is that the *Harry Potter* series promotes the occult magic. I think Julian has helped us make some really important distinctions, for example, between light magic and dark magic. So it's not that all magic is evil. We have to distinguish between incantational magic, the kind where you just say a magic word and something happens, versus invocational magic where you're calling on dark powers or dark spirits to perform something on your behalf.

Also, through this long litany of books, showed how this light magic is prevalent in so many stories that we all love and promote and would never think of condemning, books like *Grimms' Fairy Tales*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Narnia*, *Lord of the Rings*, all that kind of stuff. We'll say a little bit more about the occult here later on, when we get to specific objections from specific people, but I think you now have general, comprehensive look at the objection.

## **Objection #2: The books glorify evil behavior**

**Brandon Vogt:** Okay. Here's the next objection: the books glorify evil. Usually when people make this criticism, they're not talking about the occult or magic. They're referring to *moral* evil.

For instance, I've read many critics say that the children in the series just set bad moral examples: they lie, they're mean to fellow students, they often disrespect the authority of adults or break the rules, etc. Critics argue that we shouldn't be promoting this stuff, since we don't want our kids reading and emulating what these characters do. What do you say to that, Nancy?

**Nancy Brown:** Well, I don't believe the books glorify evil. It's true there is evil in the books, and there's bad behavior in the books, but there's usually consequences to that bad behavior. My friend Regina Doman, who is a children's author herself, she said:

*"I constantly quiz our children about fiction, and in a few instances where I disagree with Harry's actions or think they might be misleading, I'll say things like, 'Should Harry have*

*done that? Wouldn't it have been better for him to ask a grownup for help?' My children give the right answers, and I feel comfortable that they're getting the right message."*

I think that's important because the situations that come up in *Harry Potter* offer so much fodder for conversations with our children. And once we have that shared text in our families, we can talk about these things over the dinner table, and talk about Harry's behavior: Was this good or bad? Should he have asked for help here?

If all of the characters were morally perfect at the beginning of a story, it wouldn't be a very interesting story. I mean, even in the Bible, King David starts out pretty bad. We might even say he was evil. Then Peter denies Jesus. But these stories don't glorify evil. They teach us what is the outcome of our behavior.

**Brandon Vogt:** I think it's important to emphasize there's considerable moral improvement among the characters throughout the series. In fact, you look at the Harry Potter of book one, and compare him to the final climactic Harry Potter of book seven, it's almost a different person, and so it's tracing moral development. I think the bad moral decision making is heavily present early in the books and gets better over time, like it does and in all of our lives.

This is why I'm a little bothered sometimes when I read critics who point out specific examples of bad decision-making in the series, and it's almost invariably in the early books. The critics will say, "Well, I haven't actually finished the series..." or some of these critical articles are written only after the first couple books came out. And I want to say, "Well, read the whole story!" It'd be like criticizing a novel by just focusing on chapters one and two and never seeing how the characters improve throughout the rest of the series.

Also, I think to your point, Nancy, there are a lot of just objectively bad decisions the characters make. But in almost every case, maybe even every case—you would have to do a deep analysis on that—it becomes clear in the story that things would have worked out *better* for them had they have made the right moral decision.

The bad moral decisions always come with consequences and they're never praised. They're present in the books, but they're not praised, just like in the Bible. The Bible contains a lot of bad moral decisions, but the Bible doesn't *teach* those. It doesn't *prescribe* them. It simply contains them. I think the same thing is true of the *Harry Potter* series.

**Julian Ahlquist:** Yeah. J.K. Rowling has said in an interview that yeah, Harry acts impetuous and reckless at first. He has some flaws, but he works them out and is gaining wisdom along the way. Right? So she's not condoning when he does something stupid. He's growing in virtue, right? Also, the USCCB has echoed the same thing. The USCCB says that Harry Potter breaks rules, but it's gradually curbed. And even the rules he breaks later on, like the school rules, are usually broken to save someone's life, right? So the story appeals to a higher sort of natural law rather than just following every single human law.

## **Objection #3: Pope Benedict XVI denounced the *Harry Potter* books**

**Brandon Vogt:** Okay. That's the second big objection, that the books glorify evil or they make bad moral decision making look appealing. Okay, here's the next big objection. This one is very common. I've gotten lots of emails about this, that Pope Benedict XVI himself has denounced the *Harry Potter* books.

Now, you might be scratching your head, since maybe you haven't heard of that before. So let me briefly lay out the story of what happened here.

In February 2003 (remember the books started coming out in 1997, and finished in 2007—so this was halfway through, after only four of the seven books had been published) there was a German lady named Gabriele Kuby who wrote a book, a very critical book about Harry Potter titled *Harry Potter: Good or Evil?* She mailed that book to the Vatican, specifically to Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the future Pope Benedict XVI.

I think she had known Ratzinger already. They're both fellow Germans. In any case, she mailed him the book, and she asked

him, I suppose, to read it or review it, or just said, I'm sending you a complimentary copy.

At the time, Ratzinger was the head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which is the Vatican's main group that focuses on questions of doctrine and orthodoxy. So she mailed her book along with a letter. We don't know what her letter said, but we do know that Cardinal Ratzinger sent a letter in return, a couple of weeks later, because Kuby, the author, has released this letter online and the letter is very short. Here's what it says.

*Esteemed and Dear Miss Kuby,*

*Many thanks for your letter of February 20th and the informative book which you sent me in the same mail.*

*It is good that you enlightened people about "Harry Potter," because those are subtle seductions which act unnoticed and by this deeply distort Christianity in the soul, before it can grow properly.*

*I would like to suggest that you write to Mr. Peter Fleetwood at the Pontifical Council of Culture directly and to send him your book.*

*Sincere greetings and blessings,  
Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger.*

Now, it seems that after she received the letter, Kuby then wrote a second letter to Ratzinger asking if he would permit her to share his comments publicly, and he agreed. He sent back a one-sentence reply that basically said, I agree. Her book then came out, *Harry Potter: Good or Evil?*, very critical of the series.

But then two years later, Joseph Ratzinger is elected Pope. He becomes Pope Benedict XVI, and soon after, Kuby released a new edition of her book with the Pope's quote on the cover, sort of insinuating or implying that the Pope had endorsed her book.

So the combination of all this stuff, the letter that he wrote her, the little pseudo-endorsement on the front of her book, led many people to conclude that Pope Benedict is against *Harry Potter*. In fact, LifeSiteNews ran what I think is a deeply misleading headline

that claimed “Pope Opposes *Harry Potter* Novels: Signed Letter from Cardinal Ratzinger Now Online.”

Now, there are couple things to keep in mind, very important nuances. One, if nothing else, this was *Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger* writing this letter. This was not Pope Benedict XVI at the time. I think any sane person would recognize that Cardinal Ratzinger was not intending this letter to be read as confirmation that the Pope or the Catholic Church had officially condemned *Harry Potter*, as this LifeSiteNews article implies.

But if that's the case, what did he actually mean by his letter? Let me read that key sentence again. He said:

*“It is good that you enlightened people about Harry Potter because those are subtle seductions, which act unnoticed, and by this deeply distort Christianity in the soul, before it can grow properly.”*

Now, what's unclear is what he meant by *those are subtle seductions*. What's he referring to? It doesn't seem grammatically correct that he's referring to the *Harry Potter* series. What most people believe is that he's referring to something Kuby had written in her letter, basically her *interpretation* of all the things that are wrong with *Harry Potter*, that maybe it leads to the occult, maybe it causes kids to be exposed to dark powers, etc.

So Ratzinger is saying, “Yeah, *those things* you mentioned, I'm not sure if they accurately represent *Harry Potter*, but *those things* in themselves are subtle seductions.”

The other interesting twist to this story is that Cardinal Ratzinger in his letter told her to send a copy to Monsignor Peter Fleetwood, who at the time was part of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Culture. That's kind of the main Vatican office that deals with cultural events, books, art, movies, and things like that. But he specifically mentioned Fleetwood because Fleetwood himself had read all of the *Harry Potter* books up to that point, and was recognized as a *Harry Potter* expert who had given talks on *Harry Potter* at the Vatican. So, he was like the Vatican's *Harry Potter* guru and Ratzinger presumably thought, well, hey, send it to him because he'd be the best one to engage your work and offer you a thorough response.



Fleetwood, however, after he read Kuby's book, took a very strong stance *against* it. He declared that the *Harry Potter* books clearly differentiate between good and evil. In fact, he said J.K. Rowling “is Christian by conviction, is Christian in her mode of living, and even in her way of writing.” He even went so far as to say, “I don't see any problems in the *Harry Potter* series.”

Fleetwood also clarified that Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger was not saying that *Harry Potter* was “subtle seductions,” which again doesn't really make grammatical sense, but was instead referring back to Kuby's list of questionable accusations that she was leveling against the books.

So, to sum this whole thing up, the Pope certainly *did not* condemn the *Harry Potter* books. Nor was Joseph Ratzinger, it seems, condemning the books. It seems evident that he had never read a single page of any of the *Harry Potter* books. Instead, he received a book from a nice fellow German lady, and offered a perfunctory, nice letter thanking her for the book and for her work, then passed the book to the one guy in the Vatican who really knew about *Harry Potter*. And that guy took a pretty strong stance *against* Kuby's book and thought the accusations were pretty much off-base. So, that's a story in a nutshell.

In the bonus resources section, at [brandonvogt.com/potter](https://brandonvogt.com/potter), we'll have more articles about this whole episode. But the key takeaway, again, is that neither the Pope nor the Catholic Church nor the Vatican has condemned *Harry Potter*. Julian, I know you wanted to add a little something extra on the end.

**Julian Ahlquist:** Yeah. So, something interesting is that during the pontificate of John Paul II, the Vatican newspaper ran a single article on *Harry Potter* and it was a neutral article. It was kind of a pro- and con-. It was two people arguing, you know, pro versus against whatever.

But then under the pontificate of Benedict XVI, there were multiple articles on *Harry Potter* and all them were enthusiastically pro-Potter. They praised its depiction of heroism and self-sacrifice. So, it's strange that if Benedict really thought *Harry Potter* was evil, that we only see pro-Potter articles published in the Vatican during his pontificate.

**Brandon Vogt:** I know, Nancy, you had another really interesting story in this regard. You want to share that?



**Nancy Brown:** Sure. So, I respect, Ms. Kuby and I'm grateful for her work, but at the time I was writing my book, I wasn't really sure what Cardinal Ratzinger had said, and whether he was really against *Harry Potter* or was he just warning parents to be careful.

So, when I finished writing my book, I wanted to know what the Pope and my local Cardinal would both say about my book. If they would have been against it, or disapproved of *Harry Potter* in general, I would not have published it.

I sent a letter to both of them, with the book. I received one back from Cardinal Francis George (Archdiocese of Chicago) thanking me for sending him the book.

Then I also received a letter from the office of Pope Benedict XVI. I haven't read this to anyone else before, but I'll read it to you. It says:

*Dear Mrs. Brown,*

*The Holy Father has asked me to thank you for your kind letter and the gift of the inscribed copy of your book. He is grateful to you for sharing your work with him. His Holiness will remember you and your family in his prayers, invoking upon you joy and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ. He cordially imparts his apostolic blessing.*

*Yours sincerely,  
Monsignor Gabriele Caccia*

So, it was a nice letter and when I received it, I thought, "Okay, good. Now, I can be at peace." Neither the Pope nor my local Cardinal has said, "Oh my gosh, don't publish that book! That's not what we think and that's not good!" I felt reassured when I got those letters that I was on the right track and we could still talk about *Harry Potter*.

## **Objection #4: Several Catholic exorcists have criticized the books**

**Brandon Vogt:** Okay. Well, moving on, some people will grant that, okay, Pope Benedict or the Vatican did not condemn the *Harry Potter* books,

but you know who has very openly and consistently criticized the books? Catholic exorcists. Probably the two most prominent ones are **Fr. Gabriele Amorth** and **Fr. Chad Ripperger**. We're going to talk about each one of them and their arguments against the books here in a second. But Nancy, I know you wanted to say something before we dived into their specific comments.

**Nancy Brown:** Yeah, sure. Naturally, we respect priests and exorcists. We listen to what they have to say, which should definitely be taken into consideration. However, we have to be careful not to treat their words as infallible and we should analyze what they have to say to see if it's true. We want to be honest, but also not put undue burdens on families. And we especially don't want to create a litmus test for determining who is a good or bad Catholic, and a lot of people do that based on *Harry Potter*.

**Brandon Vogt:** Yeah, I've seen that a lot, especially online. It's like, premise one, this one exorcist said *Harry Potter* is bad, and therefore, conclusion, if you like *Harry Potter*, you're either not Catholic or you're on the wrong side of things. You're unorthodox.

I think, as you say, we should respect exorcists, especially in this realm of dealing with the dark powers and take very seriously what they say. But that's just one piece of data among everything. And even with what they say, we should examine it to see if it makes sense.

So that's what we want to do here. I want to focus specifically on these two exorcists because they've been, I think, among the most prominent critics of *Harry Potter*, at least among Catholics exorcists.

I should add, though, not *all* exorcists are against *Harry Potter*. We'll talk about that here in a minute, about some exorcists that are a bit more positive or at least neutral toward the series.

## Fr. Gabriele Amorth

**Brandon Vogt:** But let's start off with Fr. Gabriele Amorth. Fr. Amorth has often been described as "the Pope's chief exorcist." He passed away pretty recently, I think within the last couple of years. But Fr. Gabriel said in a 2002 interview that "behind *Harry Potter* hides the signature of the king of the darkness, the devil."

Pretty blunt, pretty clear. He thinks the devil is behind *Harry Potter*. Julian, what did you make of that criticism?

**Julian Ahlquist:** Yeah. So you know, first of all, Fr. Gabriele Amorth was technically never “the Pope's chief exorcist.” There's technically no chief exorcist of Rome, but that title seemed to be cooked up by the media and sort of repeated *ad nauseum*. So, he's not chief exorcist. There are several exorcists in the Vatican at any given time and he happened to be one of them.

But again, Fr. Amorth's fundamental claim is that, basically, there's no such thing as good magic. So, if something's labeled magic, and it's portrayed as good, that's bad. But it raises the question: what do you do with *Lord of the Rings*? What do you do with fairy tales? What do you do with all these other stories? He never addressed how that works. Or maybe he does condemn them, too—I don't know, he never said.

It should be noted that Fr. Amorth, while he condemned the *Harry Potter* books, was okay with the *Harry Potter* movies. He says, yeah, that's fine that children can see the movies, you know, with their parents and everything. But it's very odd because he says the books are bad, so don't read them, but the movies? Yeah, they're fine. You can see them. It's odd because what he condemns in the books is also in the movies, namely all the magic stuff, right?

Also, it should be noted that Fr. Amorth's credibility, even among his supporters, was considerably hurt when he made the claim that *all* the Nazis in World War II were possessed by the devil. His literal quote is, “I am convinced that the Nazis were all possessed by the devil.” You know, certainly Hitler was possessed, but he says *all* of them, no matter what. So that gave at least some people pause with regard to his credibility and his tendency toward exaggeration.

It's also worth mentioning that Fr. Amorth has said that he has performed 160,000 exorcisms. He often performed exorcisms on people just in case they were possessed by the devil, even if they turned out not to be. So you could say he's sort of a, if you will, “shoot first ask questions later,” kind of guy, someone inclined to assume that the devil is at work in something until absolutely proven otherwise. Right? And maybe, I don't know, just food for thought, but perhaps this is the case with various other exorcists. They tend to adopt a mentality, due to their constant

confrontation with the demonic, that let's be very suspicious about something until completely proven otherwise. But you know, that's a theory. I can't say it for sure.

## Fr. Jose Antonio Fortea

**Julian Ahlquist:** Let's pause here for a second and mention another notable person, Fr. Jose Antonio Fortea. He is a Vatican exorcist, like Fr. Amorth. He's also a Church historian, probably the most accomplished Church historian regarding the history of exorcism. Fr. Fortea has said that the *Harry Potter* books are unobjectionable stories, and that he is neither in favor of condemning nor prohibiting them. And most importantly, he says, they are merely literary fantasies in the manner of stories that have existed in Europe since the Middle Ages.

**Brandon Vogt:** Yeah, and I want to interrupt you there, Julian, just to say this is basically our position, the three of us here. We're convinced that these books should neither be prohibited and condemned, nor that they should they be obligatory, that everybody should or has to read them. They can certainly be problematic for people, depending on the person reading them and their history, but despite that, we shouldn't require this blanket acceptance or this blanket condemnation. So, we agree with this Vatican exorcist, Fr. Fortea. That's basically where we stand.

**Julian Ahlquist:** Yeah. And Fr. Fortea, this Vatican exorcist, has cautioned parents against forbidding *Harry Potter* to their children. He says, "Prohibition has to be used carefully. If you forbid *Harry Potter*, why not Tolkien?" Right? So, he understands that there's kind of a fine line between *Harry Potter* and Tolkien, and all those other examples of magical literature.

Now, he does say, and we all totally agree with this here, that *Harry Potter* can incline some people toward the occult if they have that weakness, and so those people should avoid it.

One more exorcist to mention, **Fr. Jeremy Davies**, he's the exorcist of London. He said something very similar to Fr. Fortea. He says that *Harry Potter* is not in itself demonic, but again, be careful, because it can cause fascination with the occult. Again, we totally agree with that. And Fr. Jeremy Davies was actually an associate of

Amorth. They both co-founded the International Association of Exorcists together. So his voice is an important one.

So, again, it should be emphasized, that if you have a temptation to the occult, sure, avoid *Harry Potter*. . . but you should also avoid *Lord of the Rings*, avoid *Narnia*, avoid Arthurian literature, avoid fairy tales. They are all basically in the same boat, as many ex-witches will attest.

For example, here's one personal experience. I did door-to-door evangelization for a number of years, and my group eventually encountered a person who was into witchcraft, and he actually got into witchcraft because of *Lord of the Rings*.

Also, I had classmates at one point who were into occult stuff, and they loved *Lord of the Rings* too. And they actually hated *Harry Potter*. They actually dismissed *Harry Potter* as childish and even cartoonish. But *Lord of the Rings*, that was a more serious and mature thing, and they were all about that. So, avoid *Lord of the Rings* if you're tempted into the occult.

## Fr. Chad Ripperger

**Brandon Vogt:** Good. Okay, well let's turn our attention now to another prominent exorcist. His name is **Father Chad Ripperger**. He's still alive today. He's a very popular traditionalist teacher and exorcist. He has lots of talks on YouTube. I've listened to some of his stuff, to great edification. So please, please don't take this as just anti-Father Ripperger. I think he's doing great work for the Church, especially among traditional Catholics.

However, whenever I've mentioned *Harry Potter* publicly, on social media, my website, or wherever, I inevitably get a string of emails linking to the same YouTube video. I've included a link to the video here on our resources page so you can watch it yourself. It's a four-minute video that has 30,000 views, and it features Father Ripperger answering, in a Q&A session, a question about *Harry Potter*. So, he's giving a talk, and during the Q&A session afterward, someone asked him about *Harry Potter*, and this four-minute clip was his response.

Now again, this isn't a straw man. In my experience, this has been the most common link Catholics have shared with me to explain

why *Harry Potter* is bad. They say, “Just watch this clip and you'll see why we should not read *Harry Potter*, why we should ban it, condemn it, et cetera.”

Let me just preface this by saying, I do not find this clip persuasive in the least. And what I'd like to do here is to walk through the whole thing and show why. I'm going to play the actual audio clip, in its entirety, so we're not misrepresenting it. It's four minutes long, and I'm going to break it up into short chunks. We'll go through it rather quickly. But what I want to show is that as great as Father Ripperger is, and as much as I respect him, I just think in this case, on this issue, the reasons he gives for his position against *Harry Potter* are not good ones.

So let's listen. Here's the beginning of the clip.

**Fr. Ripperger:** Yeah. Okay. Because sometimes people actually will ask me about *Harry Potter*. Actually, every time I give a conference, they ask me about *Harry Potter*. J.K. Rowlings [sic] went to witch school before she wrote the book...

**Brandon Vogt:** Okay. I'm going to stop it right there, because that's a pretty bold, audacious claim to lead the clip with. Now, I want to give Father Ripperger the benefit of the doubt. This is in a Q&A session, so these are not prepared remarks. He's kind of on the spot, so maybe he said things that he would later regret and recant.

However, he does say in this opening clip that every time he gives a conference, people ask him about *Harry Potter*. So presumably he's answered this question a lot; he's talked about *Harry Potter* a lot. He's thought about this before. It's not the first time he's answering these questions. Okay.

Second, right on the bat, he makes this wild claim that J. K. Rowling, the author of the *Harry Potter* series, went to “witch school.” Now, I'm not entirely clear about what “witch school” actually means. What school? What type of training would you go to in order to become a witch? But I did do extensive research online, and I could not find a *single* example—not a single link, article, video—anywhere, of anyone, even among crazy conspiratorial sites claiming that Rowling went to some sort of witch school. So, in my research, this is not just a bad rumor, it's not even a rumor at all. I couldn't find *anybody else* making this



claim. So, from my perspective this is just a baseless accusation that, if wrong, borders seriously close to slander.

We actually know where J. K. Rowling went to school. She went to high school at this place called Wyedean School and College where her mother worked in the science department. And then she studied French and Classics at the University of Exeter. (She actually applied to Oxford and didn't get in.) Later, she went to the University of Exeter. But her training in French and Classics, by the way, explains a lot of the mythological and linguistic background of the stories. But again, it's a totally wild way to start off a criticism of *Harry Potter*, by suggesting its author went to witch school. I don't think that's verified or backed up anywhere.

Okay. Here's the next part of the clip.

**Fr. Ripperger:** ...The spells in the books are actual spells. How do we know that? Well, because witches tell us they're real...

**Julian Ahlquist:** Yeah. So, lots of witches also tell us that they're *not* real. In fact, in my research, overwhelmingly most Wiccans are saying, “No, no, *Harry Potter* is basically a cartoon compared to us.” In fact, I’ve found more witches saying, “Oh, *Lord of the Rings* is more of what we're about.”

In *Harry Potter*, no spell ever invokes the name of a demon, a spirit, or anything like that. Zero. The incantations are mostly just Latin words, sometimes tweaked a little bit for a little style or flourish. Now, you could maybe say that if you just said some random words but had the *intentionality* that it is a prayer to an dark power, then it would be an evil spell. Okay. Maybe that's a spell. But if you just say any random Latin word, like in *Harry Potter*, and don't intend to invoke a demon, well, okay, then it's not a prayer, and that's not a spell in the Wiccan sense.

Apparently, when asked if the magic in *Harry Potter* is real, Rowling actually said that some of it was based on “what people used to believe,” though she says most of it she made up. So, what are we to make of this? Now, one thing we could do is assume the absolute worst, that by this she means the spells in the books are totally real. Right? Or, we could take a more generous reading.

At the very least, the stuff that can be considered “magic” in the books also includes a bunch of stuff that are *not* spells. The spells



are actually a small portion of all the magic. So other magical stuff includes magical creatures, magical objects, magical uses of plants and other ingredients, as well as even certain magical abilities that don't have any incantations to them. And a lot of these things are just derived from various mythologies, certainly the creatures and whatnot. Tolkien did the exact same thing. Tolkien derived a lot of his magic stuff from preexisting mythology, as did C.S. Lewis, drawing it from a bunch of preexisting mythology that people used to believe in.

But the closest thing in *Harry Potter*, in terms of a spell that might be real, is the killing curse, right? *Avada Kedavra*. (I said it!) But this word, as Rowling confirms, is based on the word *abracadabra*. So, if you say *abracadabra*, you're basically doing a spell, at least in this sense, if you consider it a spell. Rowling claimed that *Avada Kedavra* is derived from an Aramaic prayer, meaning "let it be destroyed." Though, she says, it targeted destroying diseases, and not people. But the small segment she got from that supposed Aramaic prayer, and I haven't confirmed where this Aramaic prayer is, but the small segment she lifted from it doesn't have the name of any sort of spirit, demon, or anything. It's just an Aramaic phrase, so it's not a spell insofar as it invokes anything, unless you maybe intend to, but there's no evidence in the books that anybody who ever uses that spell is intending to summon a spirit. So, even if it is based off something that could remotely be called a spell, it's not really a spell, even in the book.

**Fr. Ripperger:** ...and there was a woman in Spain who decided to try the spell for fire, in one of the books, and it burned her house to the ground...

**Brandon Vogt:** Okay. Again, I think, at best, this claim is deeply misleading. I'm going to read to you the full statement regarding this case from ABC News, on July 11, 2003. Here's what it says:

*A woman set her Madrid home on fire this week as she cooked up a potion, in an attempt to imitate the fictional wizard, Harry Potter, emergency services say. Firefighters rescued and treated the 21-year-old for minor injuries, but half her home was destroyed. The ambulance service said that she had told them she was trying to emulate the boy magician, the hero of the books by J. K. Rowling, that had been a sensation among adults and children alike.*

Now this next line is important:

*For want of more magical ingredients, the woman cooked up a potion of water, oil, alcohol, and toothpaste, local media reported. It was unclear what spell she was trying to weave.*

So, let me reiterate, this was a young woman that made a potion of flammable items including oil, alcohol, and toothpaste, and then cooked them over an open flame, and she eventually set her house on fire. Okay? So, it's not like she just said some magical words, or repeated one of the spells from *Harry Potter*, and poof! Her house just burst into flames. I don't know how to say it any other way, but this was just a case of negligence or stupidity. These are not real spells that do actual real things in the real world. And so for Father Ripperger to denounce the books by this case where some lady made a potion and burned her house down, I think is again, at best, deeply misleading. Here's the next part.

**Fr. Ripperger:** ...and J. K. Rowlings [sic] has denied she's a witch. Okay, you walk like one, you quack like one, you write books like one, so, okay...

**Julian Ahlquist:** Once again, how is Rowling a witch? There's no evidence that she's performed any spell whatsoever. Right? Again, I wonder if this is a situation where, if you are an exorcist, and always confronted with the demonic, you might start to see demons everywhere that quite aren't there. Maybe. But again, I'm not sure how he could say that.

**Fr. Ripperger:** ...one exorcist told me—he's kind of done the footwork, whether it's true or not, I don't know—he said 60% of the names in *Harry Potter* are actual names of demons that exorcists have booted out of people...

**Brandon Vogt:** Okay. First, I just want to point out how he adds the caveat in the beginning that “one exorcist told me...whether it's true or not, I don't know.” But again, this is a *really serious* accusation, that more than half of the names in *Harry Potter* are the names of demons, that by reading the books you're promoting the names of demons. So, I'm not sure why Father Ripperger would publicly repeat this accusation if he didn't know it to be true. Again, at best, that's pretty irresponsible.

But, let's grant the claim for the sake of argument here. Julian, is it true that these names in the *Harry Potter* books are the actual names of demons?

**Julian Ahlquist:** Well, I know that Trent Horn from Catholic Answers addressed this point in his podcast episode on *Harry Potter*. He said he came up with a list of all the names used in the books, and found that most of the names are actually just common, human names, often English, but I think there's some French in there, too. So maybe there are demons named Ron or Harry—I guess it's possible. But it would be nice to have a list of the names of demons that have appeared in *Harry Potter*, if there are any. Like, where's the actual evidence, as opposed to the hearsay?

**Brandon Vogt:** I'm glad you mentioned Trent Horn. Trent's a good friend of mine. He's a staff apologist at Catholic Answers. He and I have interviewed each other multiple times. But Trent, on his own podcast called the Council of Trent, recently posted a lengthy podcast episode engaging this same video from Father Ripperger. And he offered a very thorough response to each of Father Ripperger's claims. I encourage viewers to download that. Again, I'm adding that link to the resources page at [brandonvogt.com/Potter](http://brandonvogt.com/Potter).

**Fr. Ripperger:** ...There is an exorcist that I know, who's a friend of mine, he and I are always comparing notes on Judas, because Judas is a hard guy to get out of people. He has had to exorcize three children just for reading the books...

**Brandon Vogt:** Okay. Now that *might* be true. I don't have any good reason to deny it. I'll trust Father Ripperger, and take him at his word. I don't know.

But the reality is, the demons, as we well know, can use *anything*, any book, any game, any movie, even religious things, in order to possess people. For example, I mentioned my friend Trent Horn's podcast episode, where he shows how numerous young people were drawn into darkness by reading books like *Lord of the Rings*, and then doing role-playing games that stemmed from the series. One of the most famous ones is *Dungeons & Dragons*, and there have reportedly been people that have gotten so deep into a game like *Dungeons & Dragons*, that it's spiraled them into such a dark place that they've committed suicide as a result. Now, this doesn't

mean that *Lord of the Rings* or *Dungeons & Dragons* is intrinsically evil, and should be completely shunned. It just means that in some cases, particularly when people are already predisposed to the occult, or to dark powers, that the *Harry Potter* books can perhaps be used by demons for their purposes. But of course, this is true for anything. The demons can use anything.

Now, I also want to add that, obviously, all demonic possession is bad. I don't want to celebrate the fact that there are only a few possessions related to *Harry Potter*. But it does seem to me worth noting that tens of millions of children have read the *Harry Potter* series without being possessed by demons, without flirting with the dark powers, without being interested in the occult. So again, if these books really *did* come from the demons, then they're doing a pretty horrible job of using these books, because it seems like the books don't inevitably lead to demonic possession and that it's only in an extremely small handful of cases, probably with people that were already predisposed to that stuff.

**Fr. Ripperger:** ...I had a case of possession. I wasn't the one to liberate them. I was just one of the... I started the case, but I had to pass it to someone else, because I had to move to another location... of a person who was possessed by five demons who claimed that they were the demons that inspired J. K. Rowlings [sic] to write *Harry Potter*...

**Julian Ahlquist:** All right. So, one thing that exorcists stress over and over again is that demons lie. Right? Now, obviously Satan, he's the father of lies, so we shouldn't listen to him or his followers, right? So, even granting that Father Ripperger's account is true, the question is, why believe the demons are speaking the truth in this case? They regularly speak lies an attempt to confuse exorcists or anyone else. So, why should we trust demons on this issue? I think we should at least be a little skeptical, because you know, they're demons.

**Nancy Brown:** Right. I mean, you hinted at this before, Brandon: why would demons inspire a book that's deeply Christian, quotes the Bible, celebrates Easter and Christmas, and celebrates good fighting and triumphing over evil? That's just doesn't make sense. So, I don't know. I find that hard to believe, that the demons inspired J. K. Rowling. I don't know why demons would say they did, assuming

Fr. Ripperger's account is true, but like Julian said, demons lie all the time.

**Fr. Ripperger:** ...So, I tell people, "Avoid it." All exorcists that are worth their weight...there's only one guy who says it's okay, but there's something wrong with that guy. But, all the other exorcists that I know, that are experienced, are very clear: stay away from it...

**Brandon Vogt:** I mean, this is a pretty unfair way to assess things. Father Ripperger simply dismisses any exorcists who disagree with his assessment on *Harry Potter* because there must be something wrong with them. Notice, he says there's only "one guy," one exorcist who disagrees with his position. But we've mentioned a handful of other exorcists, including a fellow Vatican exorcist and the exorcist of London, both of whom say there's nothing inherently objectionable about the book. So, there *are* other exorcists who think this way.

But again, just to dismiss them because they disagree with you, I think, just begs the question. It assumes that Father Ripperger is right about his take on *Harry Potter*, yet we've shown multiple times already that the factual claims he's basing that assessment on are just wrong at best, or, if nothing else, unsupported.

**Fr. Ripperger:** ...Demons are always looking to get glory. What's glory? Glory is a manifestation of excellence, as St. Thomas Aquinas defines it. It's a manifestation of excellence. And they get glory in this life by their name being pronounced. And I think, under certain circumstances, obviously, when you're talking about subjugating Satan, he's not getting any glory out of it. But when their names are pronounced and said, they can stand to their buddies and say, "Hey, look, my name's up there." Right? That's one of the reasons why every time you read those books, or you pronounce those words, without it being in the context, in the proper context, you're actually giving glory to them...

**Julian Ahlquist:** So yeah, briefly, what are those names of demons in *Harry Potter*? Let's hear them. Please come up with a list. Let's get them out there. But he's not providing actual, concrete evidence. I'm willing to hear the evidence. But let's get some concrete examples, right?

**Fr. Ripperger:** ...The other thing is too, is someone asked me to review the literature. I read the first book. And I'll be quite frank with you,

again, I went through a Great Books program. I went through a program where you had to read a book a week per class, and I had five classes. I can tell you that literature is *total garbage*. It's not even worth reading, on a literary level...

**Brandon Vogt:** Again. That's fine. We can respect Father Ripperger's literary opinion of *Harry Potter*, and obviously we can disagree, the three of us here. And you know, 100 million other people don't think the books are garbage. But you know, I don't see any reason why Fr. Ripperger's opinion on literature should be valued any more than another person's, especially since that's not his area of expertise. So again, I don't think this really helps his case against *Harry Potter* all that much. Okay, here's the next clip.

**Fr. Ripperger:** ...So, that being said, I would just suggest you avoid it, because of the fact is, is all those things. The other thing, too, is that there's a lot of glorification of certain disorders. Very subtle. Like, it's okay to lie. It's okay. There are certain things. It's okay to do evil things from time to time, in order to get a good thing to come as a result of it...

**Nancy Brown:** Well, I feel we've covered this already. I've reread *Harry Potter* over and over again, not because they're *evil*, but because they're *good*, because they're inspirational to me. They've helped me in my spiritual life, and they've taught me to pray more. So, there's my own personal evidence right there.

**Julian Ahlquist:** Yeah. And you know, sometimes the good characters do lie in the books, but usually it has bad consequences, or at least not ideal consequences. Sometimes they lie out of desperation, like lying to Nazis at your door who are looking for the Jews you're hiding, right? You could argue that is still bad, but at least it's readily forgivable. Right? You know, it's literature, it's complicated. It's debatable. But anyway, yeah, we've kind of addressed this already.

**Fr. Ripperger:** ... which is entirely the opposite. Because people say, "Well, what about Tolkien? Tolkien had magic. I mean, is it just because of magic?" No, it's not just because of the magic. It's the whole thing. But in Tolkien, the magic was a literary device. It wasn't something in which the person, when he heard Gandalf saying the magic, "I want to be like Gandalf, and do these magic things!" That's not what you would... You just didn't have that. It was just recognized that in this case, a certain thing beyond the



natural means was necessary in order to bring something about. Whereas, in the J. K. Rowlings [sic] thing, it's so imbued, and it makes it look so glorious, and all those things. It's really enticing. And that's another reason why I tell people, "Don't let your kids read it."

**Julian Ahlquist:** Yeah. So, in *Harry Potter*, magic is also a literary device, which is precisely what the USCCB has said, too. And, as many people will attest, many Wiccans and ex-witches, Gandalf's magic is also enticing enough to bring some people into witchcraft as well, as I've said many times.

**Brandon Vogt:** I think what becomes very clear when reading interviews with J. K. Rowling, about her intentions of writing the books, and we've hinted at this repeatedly throughout this webinar, that fundamentally, the books aren't about magic. The goal of the book is not to get people to do magic. J. K. Rowling has said it's fundamentally a *moral story* about this basic decision between doing what is right and doing what is easy. I mentioned earlier how these explicit biblical and religious references, the Bible verses on the tombstones, Rowling said they embody the whole series, or encapsulate the whole series. The whole thing revolves around them. So again, it seems clear to me, just as in *Lord of the Rings*, the magic is a literary device. It's not the point of the series to get people to do magic.

**Fr. Ripperger:** ...There's another reason too, and this is more of a subjective kind of a reason. The fact of the matter is, is that when you tell people you shouldn't let your kids read that, the purely visceral response you get as a result of that, tells me there's something diabolic about the whole thing...

**Brandon Vogt:** Okay. This is just another bad argument that if you attack something that people really love, and has a lot of meaning to them, especially when you're attacking it with poor reasoning, as Father Ripperger has done here, and they respond forcefully, then clearly the devil must be behind the thing that they love. I mean, that's just silly.

Imagine if somebody told you:

*Look, I know that the pro-life position is wrong and from the devil, because whenever I tell a pro-life person that abortion is*



*totally fine, I typically get a visceral response from the pro-life people, so that tells me there's something diabolic about the whole thing.*

Well, of course that'd be silly reasoning. But I think that's just like fans of *Harry Potter*, that they do get upset when people try to ban the *Harry Potter* books or disqualify them completely without caveat, like Father Ripperger seems willing to do here, especially when it's based on poor, or just flat out wrong reasoning. I mean, to me, it seems natural that people would get kind of heated about that. But I don't think that's evidence of the books themselves being demonically inspired.

**Fr. Ripperger:** ...The other thing is too, is it's a piece of junk literature. How that woman made over a billion dollars on that enterprise is beyond my comprehension. So, unless there's somebody who rose the thing to that kind of a level...

**Brandon Vogt:** Okay. So, when I first heard this, I thought Fr. Ripperger was simply rehashing what he said earlier, that this series is garbage literature and so he has no idea how this lady made a billion on it. But then at the end, he adds this line: “**unless there's somebody who rose the thing to that kind of a level...**” And based on his previous comments, it seems like he's saying the only reason *Harry Potter* has become so successful, given how bad the series is from a literature perspective, is that *demons* have propped it up, that the devil has sort of lifted it up to these heights of culture.

Now again, this is a pretty wild accusation, that the only way you can comprehend the success of *Harry Potter* is if the devil rose it to success. It seems like he's not even considering the possibility that the books are immensely popular because, maybe, they are well-written and enjoyable, and lots of kids and adults like them. It's breathtaking to think the only explanation is that the devil did it.

But of course, this same line of reasoning could apply to any piece of bad literature that becomes immensely popular. For example, take *Captain Underpants*. I think most of us here would agree, that *Captain Underpants* is far worse literature than *Harry Potter*, but that's a massively popular kid series. It has sold millions of copies, but it's very bad. It's awful. Yet we would never look at that series and say, “Well, you know, I can't imagine how that thing has sold millions of copies, unless some dark force propped it up.” None of

us would take that sort of reasoning seriously for *Captain Underpants*, and we shouldn't take it seriously either with *Harry Potter*.

So, that's the end of the Father Ripperger section. Again, I do not mean to cast any doubt on his overall credibility, or the great stuff he's done for the Church. I think he's bore tremendous fruit, he's a great teacher, all of those things. I respect him deeply as a priest and as an exorcist. But I think this little four-minute video is just breathtakingly bad. Every single reason, as we've seen, is either unsupported at best, or just demonstrably false.

## **Objection #5: The Catholic novelist Michael O'Brien says the series is a kind of anti-Gospel**

**Brandon Vogt:** So, if we're objecting to *Harry Potter* on the basis of this video, I think we're seriously misguided. But some people say, it's not just Cardinal Ratzinger and exorcists who are against *Harry Potter*. There is a very well-known and well-respected Catholic novelist named Michael O'Brien, who has written pretty aggressively against the *Harry Potter* series. Michael O'Brien's novels are among the bestselling Catholic novels of today. Many of them are published by Ignatius Press.

He's written at least one book directly against *Harry Potter*, and he sort of hinted at it in a couple of other places. I haven't read that book, but Nancy and Julian have. And so, I'm going to let them talk briefly about Michael O'Brien's objections to *Harry Potter*. Nancy, we'll start with you.

**Nancy Brown:** Sure. To introduce Michael O'Brien, I want to say that his book, *A Landscape with Dragons*, which was written before the *Harry Potter* series came out, was one that I used with my children in order to know what constitutes a good book to read to my children. And the second half of that book is actually a book list, containing books to introduce to your children that are good literature, that tell the story of good versus evil. And when I came upon *Harry Potter* and started reading it, based on everything I knew from what I had read in Mr. O'Brien's book, *A Landscape with Dragons*, I thought the *Harry Potter* books fit his criteria! So, I thought,

“Okay, well I'm on the right track.” So that was my first encounter with Michael O'Brien.

**Julian Ahlquist:** Yeah. So, I'll address his book directly on this topic, titled *Harry Potter and the Paganization of Culture*. It's pretty sizable, and so I can't definitely cover it all. So, I'm going to do some broad strokes, and I apologize, because I can't cover it in detail here.

So, generally speaking, his book makes a ton of bold claims, like that the series is a kind of anti-gospel, backed by evidence that is neither here nor there. Every scene he brings up in the books, he consistently takes a sort of farfetched, pessimistic interpretation. They're never quite providing actual proof of anything. And he actually, interestingly, admits his inability to give, as he puts it, an encyclopedic, or scientific presentation of his thought. Again, he admits that the interpretation he puts forward might simply be arbitrary.

To get around this problem, he uses words like subliminal, subconscious, subtle, and subtext, a bunch of “sub-” words, to sort of characterize the supposed evil in the books, something that is not rationally digestible, as he says, because most people's minds do not have the necessary tools of discernment—they lack the capacities to see the underlying narrative, and they fail to grasp the embedded data. That's basically word for word what he says.

When he tries to explain how, exactly, this works, he again presents nebulous evidence reinforced by more “sub-” words, to sort of deflect any possibility of logical criticism. But, again, he acknowledges, this is not hardcore, rational proof, but it's subliminal, that we should just trust him on that.

I'm going to give one example, because we're running short on time. So, in one scene of *Harry Potter: The Order of the Phoenix*, the good guys, the resistance fighters, are housed in the former house of an evil family—the Black family. And this was an evil, disturbed family, but you know, the good guys are taking shelter in it because it's an effective hideout. Yet it has spooky décor, and one brief description Rowling gives is that there are some candles that are serpent shaped. All right? So, O'Brien says, “Ah, see, serpent shaped candles! That suggests serpents can be a source of light, right? Evil can be a source of truth or something, right?” Now, maybe that's not what the books are saying, but maybe it is.

Maybe it's a subliminal message, right? Again, that's one example from O'Brien's book, but there are many others of this subliminal subtext theory, page after page of it, kind of like that, for better or for worse.

Another huge thing in the book is that he accuses the series as being Gnostic. Gnosticism is an early Church heresy. It's very confusing. There are many different branches. You have sort of an amorphous definition of Gnosticism, but roughly speaking, it kind of boils down to gaining secret knowledge to gain salvation. And Michael says this is found throughout all the *Harry Potter* books.

Now to be fair, I would say Voldemort is kind of Gnostic because he's trying to gain at least earthly salvation, earthly immortality, through his quest of secret forbidden knowledge. Whereas, Harry actually gives up his earthly life to prevent Voldemort from doing that. But Michael says, however, that even the good characters are pursuing difficult-to-achieve knowledge, secrets to help them out.

But is that intrinsically bad, to try to figure out some sort of secret that might help you? I mean, is that necessarily Gnostic or heretical? It seems to me that's a broad use of the term Gnostic that could cover a bunch of things that aren't bad, right? The irony is that Michael's book tends to end up sounding Gnostic itself because it's saying that normal people, common people, don't have the secret knowledge to understand why *Harry Potter* is bad.

This is a key premise for Michael's critique, that the evil in *Harry Potter* is secret. It's subliminal. Only the truly wise can understand it, right? Only the ones who know about the occult and know the subliminal messaging, right? But it's ironic that you need secret knowledge in order to be saved from *Harry Potter*'s secret knowledge.

O'Brien, in his book, also seems unclear whether *Harry Potter*'s magic is of the occult. Sometimes he says *Harry Potter*'s magic is innate, as in there by nature, and not from some external power source, like a Spirit. O'Brien actually approves of various superpowers of superheroes like Spiderman and Superman. He approves of other superheroes whose origin of their power is not mentioned, presumably because the power is generated through some sort of genetic source—it's an innate power. The question is, well, why condemn *Harry Potter*? Again, time after time, it's

shown repeatedly that witch's and wizard's power is innate. It's genetic, and thus not of the occult.

You might say, "Well, there's still a deeper source!" But the deeper source is mentioned, so that should be okay, too. Then of course, O'Brien defends Gandalf's magic saying, "Well, Gandalf's magic is fine because it was granted to him by Eru Iluvatar, which is basically God." Again, why can't we be at least hypothesize that the powers of *Harry Potter* maybe were given to him by God? It doesn't say either way, but should we assume the worst and say, "Oh, if it's not mentioned then it has to be from the devil"? Right? Why assume the worst?

Elsewhere in the book, O'Brien complains about occasional bathroom humor. He says, Ron eventually tells Malfoy to "eat dung," which is true, and he objects to that. I agree the occasional bathroom lingo shouldn't be praised, but I also don't think it's reason to shun the books.

Lastly, ironically O'Brien quotes the Catholic author, G.K. Chesterton a lot throughout this book and he tries to juxtapose Chestertonian thinking against Rowling. For what it's worth, J.K. Rowling is a huge Chesterton fan. She loves Chesterton. The British Chesterton Society at one point only had 70 members in the entire country, when the president of the Chesterton Society emailed Rowling, offering her a membership. She replied, "Oh, yes! Absolutely! I love Chesterton." This made J.K. Rowling one of the very few members of the British Chesterton Society at the time. It's very fascinating. Then related to that, Rowling has said her favorite poet is Hilaire Belloc, one of Chesterton's best friends and a prominent Catholic apologist.

Again, there's a lot of other stuff in O'Brien's book. A lot of minutia, some of which we've already addressed, but there you go.

**Brandon Vogt:** Excellent. Nancy, did you have anything else to add to that thorough engagement with Michael O'Brien's work?

**Nancy Brown:** No, I felt the same way. What I thought was, am I not smart enough to see what's in *Harry Potter*? I trust my judgment. I read it as I see it. And to me, it was a fairy tale. I just couldn't accept O'Brien's arguments.

## Objection #6: J.K. Rowling said Dumbledore is gay

**Brandon Vogt:** Well, I know we've gone on a long time, so let's take one final objection. I think we can handle this one fairly quickly and then we'll get to some of the Q&A here. This objection is more recent. Later on, in the life of the *Harry Potter* series, Rowling gave an interview where she either said directly or implied that Dumbledore, Albus Dumbledore, the headmaster of Hogwarts, one of the most beloved characters in the series, is in fact, gay. Julian, first tell us what Rowling actually said.

**Julian Ahlquist:** There's a couple of key things Rowling said in some interviews. She said Dumbledore fell in love with Grindelwald and that this added to his horror when Grindelwald showed himself to be what he truly was: an evil wizard. So you have this pre-Voldemort, evil wizard, whom Dumbledore fell in love with, and it ended in a mess. She's also said that Dumbledore lost his moral compass completely when he fell in love with Grindelwald, that he subsequently became very mistrusting of his own judgment in those matters, and even became quite asexual. She even said Dumbledore from that point on led a “celibate and bookish life.”

Now, interestingly, she's connecting Dumbledore's homosexuality with this disaster in his past, his relationship to this evil wizard, and because of that, Dumbledore end up living a celibate life. So, yes, he was homosexual, but he ultimately lived a life of celibacy.

**Brandon Vogt:** I like that last line, that he lived “a celibate and bookish life,” because I think for Catholics, what immediately comes to mind is *monk*—he lived a *monkish* life, as a celibate focused on books. You see it in the film series, too, where he's a kind of monk-like character, in his habits, dress, speech, everything.

Also, a few things were noticeable by their absence in Rowling's quotes. First, Rowling never says that he actually *acted on* those homosexual impulses, that he never had a sexual relationship with Grindelwald. Only that he fell in love with him.

In other words, she never explicitly says he was an actively gay character. I think that's super important because for us Catholics,



we read in the *Catechism* a very important distinction between same-sex attraction and homosexual behavior. Same-sex attraction is a disordered inclination where you're just attracted to a person of the same sex. But that's not an actual sin because it's not something you're choosing or you're willing.

The Catholic Church says that people with same sex attractions aren't inherently acting in a sinful way simply because they have these attractions. It's whether you choose to *act* on those attractions that matters. This also calls to mind Dumbledore's famous line about how it's your choices that define you, not your abilities.

Making this distinction is key because if we have this major, beloved literary character who was same-sex attracted yet lived a celibate, bookish, monkish life, one who had loving relationships with all sorts of people, including men and women, close friendships with them, and who served as a sort of spiritual father to a whole gaggle of children at Hogwarts school, then I think we have the *best depiction* in contemporary literature of the model for how the Catholic Church calls a same-sex attracted people to live.

In other words, they could point to Dumbledore and say, "That's it! That's what a healthy, well-integrated person with same-sex attractions should live like. That's what it looks like to do it well!" Dumbledore wasn't lonely. He didn't feel repressed or oppressed. He wasn't acting out in wild ways later in his life, after he had these episodes with Grindelwald. He was a well-integrated, holistically healthy, deeply grounded, spiritual person with loving relationships.

So, with all that said, and this might be controversial, but I actually think it's a *positive* that it's come out Dumbledore had same-sex attractions, and nevertheless lived a celibate life. Again, I think he's a model for all sorts of Catholics and other people who are looking for someone to relate to and aspire to.

# Conclusion

**Brandon Vogt:** OK, so that's the main content of the webinar. Just a couple of things in conclusion, and then I'm going to give Nancy and Julian a chance to give a quick last word here.

From my perspective, what I hope we've been able to do here is to give you all of the data for you to make a decision about whether the *Harry Potter* books would be good for you to read and/or your children to read. That's what this whole thing was about.

We're not telling you *whether* to read them. We're not saying you definitely should *stay away* from them, or that you definitely *have to read* them. We just wanted to paint the whole picture of the good parts about *Harry Potter* and the things to be a little wary of.

Also, if there's resistance to *Harry Potter* that's just unwarranted, that can do serious damage to our credibility as Catholics, as Christians, and even among the exorcists. I'm concerned about the reputation of all of these things. I don't want people to think Catholics are crazy because they ban *Harry Potter* for really bad reasons. I don't want people to think that, "Hey, I like *Harry Potter*, therefore I can't be Catholic. Or, I like *Harry Potter*, therefore I can't take exorcists seriously because they're saying these wildly off-base things about *Harry Potter*."

It's because of our love for the Church, our love for the Faith, our love for exorcists, that we want the truth to come out and we want to have the proper nuance on these things. If we just paint it as these binary black and white positions about *Harry Potter*, and our reasons are exposed as fallacious, then we have egg on our face and we all look bad. Catholics look bad. Christians look bad. Exorcists look bad.

So, that's kind of the main takeaway here: don't offer blanket approval or blanket condemnation of the books. Use everything you've learned here to make the decision. And ultimately, it's *parents* who are in the best position to say, "Here's where my child is at, here's their history, here are their proclivities. Can or can they not handle the *Harry Potter* series?"

Nancy, how about a final word from you?

**Nancy Brown:** Sure. Thanks, Brandon. That's exactly my position. The whole point of my book, *The Mystery of Harry Potter*, is that parents know their children best. As a parent, you know if this should be something that you should read in your family.

Another final point I'd like to make is that *Harry Potter* is being used as some sort of orthodoxy test. It's wrong to test people that way. It's hurtful and harmful. People have left the Church for less than that. I think that the biggest thing I'm hoping people will get from this is to stop using *Harry* as a litmus test. *Harry* isn't universally harmful to every single Catholic child. Catholic parents have the power given to them in the sacrament of marriage to know what's best for their children and their family. They shouldn't be vilified or, worse, ostracized for choosing to read *Harry Potter* if that's a good decision for their family.

**Julian Ahlquist:** I echo what you both have said. If you're convinced that *Harry Potter* is evil and you feel called to speak out against it, just make sure you do it prudently. Make sure you've done your homework, get the facts down, know what you're talking about. If it is evil, then make sure your condemnations of it are articulated well and persuasive. Otherwise, they might have the opposite effect.

What I'm seeing a lot is Catholics and Christians take the approach of condemning *Harry Potter* not out of a careful consideration, but merely to be supposedly on the safe side. The series is guilty until proven innocent. Many think maybe it's evil, maybe it's not, so let's err on the side of caution and condemn it, right? They assume nothing bad could happen if they take that supposedly safe route. But something bad *can* come from that, especially if you take a very public stance, as Brandon has said. For example, those who are *Harry Potter* fans who are spiritually and religiously on the fence. When I hear Christians insisting that Christianity is totally opposed to *Harry Potter*, then they may indeed just turn those people off to Christianity, right?

In fact, if they hear Christians adamantly declaring that *Harry Potter* is all about the occult, it will likely give those fans a fascination with the occult. It might have the opposite intended effect. If *Harry Potter* is not evil, but you are insisting that it is, you have potentially done a great disservice to the Church. I encourage everyone to tread thoughtfully and prudently on this issue. Thank you.

# Q&A with Attendees

**Brandon Vogt:** Excellent! Now, we had a ton of questions and comments. Interestingly, a lot of them were anticipating things we'd talk about later in the webinar. Early on, a lot of people mentioned the Father Ripperger stuff, Cardinal Ratzinger, Father Gabriele Amorth, or different objections to the books themselves, all of which we've discussed. But I just wanted to hit a few that we haven't covered yet.

First, a comment. This one's from Rosa Maria Stober. She says, **“Thanks again, Brandon Vogt! This was a fantastic presentation. Thanks to your guests, Nancy Brown and Julian Ahlquist. I was one of those Catholics that refused to accept the *Harry Potter* stories. Now, it is clearer to me the right and wrong involved within the stories. I really enjoyed listening to all of you.”** Well, thanks Rosa Maria! That was the intended effect. Great!

Nesty Gallucci says: **“I wonder if those who are very critical of the *Harry Potter* series have read the whole series?”** That's a point Nesty, that I made earlier. I think it's super important. A lot of the people that we've specifically quoted with objections either haven't read the stories at all or have only read one or two books.

Father Ripperger, whom we mentioned, had said he's only read one or two of the books. Correct me if I'm wrong guys, but I think when Michael O'Brien started commenting about *Harry Potter*, he hadn't read all the books or he hadn't completely read all of them. Certainly Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger when he wrote his little letter, I think it's extremely unlikely that he had read a single page of *Harry Potter*.

In regard to the moral objections, I mentioned at the beginning how critical it is to consider the series as a whole, that the characters display moral improvements throughout the series. So, you can't just condemn the books based on the first couple stories. Again, it's like condemning a novel based on the first couple chapters. It's irresponsible.

Okay. Jen Finke, who's also involved with the Chesterton Society, says, **“Can you supply a list of the resources, specifically the USCCB statements from the U.S. bishops that Julian is quoting?”** Jen, yes! Actually, on the bonus page at [BrandonVogt.com/Potter](https://brandonvogt.com/Potter), you'll find links to all the articles and videos that we've mentioned. All the USCCB reviews of the books that Julian mentioned are on there. So, go there for a clearing house of recommended resources.

Okay. Maybe Nancy, I'll shoot this one to you. Chris Walden asks, **“Could you go over the comment you regarding each book, having a helper that is a known image or metaphor for Christ? Could you go over some more examples or is this in one of the books or resources? Many thanks! Love the webinar.”**

**Nancy Brown:** These are things like a phoenix, for example. I've seen a stained-glass window picture in a Catholic church with a picture of the phoenix because that's a symbol of Christ, his resurrection...

**Brandon Vogt:** Sorry to interrupt, but can you clarify: what's special about the phoenix? What's notable about that creature?

**Nancy Brown:** The phoenix is a mythological bird that burns itself up, then is born again from the ashes. That's a symbol of Christ. A lot of the symbols from old days are things that Christians adopted. For example, a unicorn. A unicorn is seen as something that's innocent, something pure and white. That is also seen as a symbol for Christ.

Or the stag figure. I've seen that in a church too. We often see that in stained-glass imagery. Again, the stag is another symbol for Christ. These are things that occur in the *Harry Potter* books that are symbolic in there, but they're also symbolic of Christ. I don't know whether there is a listing somewhere. We could probably come up with a resource for you on that...

**Brandon Vogt:** I was going to say, John Granger in his book on *Harry Potter*, has extensive analysis of all these symbols. So, if you want a good book on that, Chris, check that out. I think the new version is called *How Harry Cast His Spell*. Again, that's on our resources page. It was originally published as *Looking for God in Harry Potter*, but he does a deep dive into all the Christ symbols and what they mean and where they show up.

Actually, on that note, how about this question? I'll leave it up to either one of you. Chris McElroy, he says, **“Are the phoenix bird tears and Harry Potter similar to the Catholic Church's anointing of the sick? Is there a comparison there?”**

**Nancy Brown:** Well, all I can think of is if the phoenix is a symbol for Christ, and Christ's water and blood came from his side at the crucifixion, and that has salvific power, then you have water there, that's healing, you could say. Maybe even holy water, in a sense. We're signing ourselves with holy water. So it's like a little mini-exorcism when we do that.

**Brandon Vogt:** You know, the Catholic Church has this tradition of the Sorrowful Mother, whether it be Mary, the mother of Christ, or Monica, the mother of St. Augustine. Remember it was Ambrose who told Augustine's mother, Monica, that by all of her tears that child would be saved. That it was through Monica's tears that Augustine's salvation and baptism were effected. So, maybe there's some connection there, but I'm not sure it was intended on Rowling's end.

Okay, next up Tom Duffy says, **“Hey, thanks for doing this. Nobody else is addressing the topic for from where I am. I think I'm more pro-Harry Potter after listening, but does it say anywhere in Catholic teaching that uttering or reading a spell without the intention to cast it could pose a spiritual danger?”**

**Julian Ahlquist:** Yeah, it seems there is disagreement. I've heard exorcists and even ex-witches say different things in response to that question. I think it's an unresolved issue. Maybe, maybe not. I don't know. It's a good question.

**Nancy Brown:** I don't believe you could say a word while being completely ignorant that it's a spell, and it still have a dark effect on you. I don't think God lets us work that way.

**Julian Ahlquist:** I mean, the only exception I can think is well, okay, if a devil hears someone utter a spell, even unintentionally, and he decides to act then, okay. Possibly. I mean, it's up to the demon, but then it's sort of arbitrary in that sense. I don't know. That's food for thought.



**Brandon Vogt:** I'm reminded of Catholic sacramental theology. When a priest confects the Eucharist and performs the consecration, it's not just the words behind it. It's the intention behind the words that produce the effect. Again, the same thing goes with baptism. It's not just some magical words that you can say this and make someone a Christian. You have to intend what the words are signifying. It's kind of the mirror side of the spells that you need both the *words* and the *intention*.

Okay, next up, a comment from Beverly Wetterich. She says, **“Really great info! Thank you! So happy that I can one day read the books to my grandchildren as I did for my children.”** Oh, that's great to hear, Beverly. Thanks!

James Lee Hawes says, **“I've read the series at least twice and several other works on the series, some by Catholic writers, and my take is this series is a great story of love, friendship, and the battle of good over evil. Father Ripperger used to be my pastor and heard my first confession in 30 years, which is why he has no hair. I disagree with what he says about the series as the man obviously sees demons hiding around every corner.”** Again, please, please don't misconstrue anything we said as maligning the character or motivations of Father Ripperger. I'm not making any sort of psychoanalysis of why he taught the things he did about *Harry Potter*. I just think those things aren't true.

Okay. How about maybe a couple more here? Claudia Pardot says, **“What about Susan Brinkman? She is a well-known Catholic speaker and she says that *Harry Potter* is evil.”** I don't have any experience with Susan's teachings. Do either of you?

**Julian Ahlquist:** Yeah, sounds familiar, but I can't remember what she says. I'll have to look into that. That's curious, but no, I don't remember.

**Brandon Vogt:** Now, I know when we did this first panel discussion live, lots of people wondered about the series from the perspective of a parent. I think, Nancy, you're the go-to source on this. Maybe this whole roundup of questions: **“How do you handle these books as a parent? At what ages should children read these books? How do you read and discuss these books with children?”**

**Nancy Brown:** I addressed all of that in *The Mystery of Harry Potter: A Catholic Family Guide*, which unfortunately is out of print. You can still get

it in the Kindle edition, though. I do go through the age question because the books do get more and more serious. There's more going on. It gets darker as the Hogwarts students get older. What I did with my children was this: Harry turns 11 in the first book, so we read that when they turned 11, so I waited until they were old enough. Then, as I say in the book, you want to wait until your children age as you read the older ones.

I definitely don't think that you should let them power through the whole series at the age of 11. The best way would be to read it as they age, and kind of go with Harry's age, ideally.

My book also has suggestions for questions that you can ask your kids after you read the books, and conversation starters, so that you can read them with the intention of having that shared story and being able to talk about the issues and the plot lines. I really try to help parents do that with the book. I thought it would really help enhance the story, because it did for us.

**Brandon Vogt:** Excellent! I'll echo everything Nancy just said. As a father of six young kids, our two oldest kids, 10 and 8, have started reading the *Harry Potter* series a little earlier than the Nancy's kids, but they've each read the first two books independently. Then we've also read the first book as a family. We've had a lot of great discussions about it. We're waiting to read the other books as a family, with about six months in between each of the books.

Again, this all goes back to our general principle: you as a parent know what your kids can handle and when it's appropriate. If you aren't totally certain about that, you at least know that fact better than anybody else. You're better able to make that judgment than your priest, an exorcist, people online, all that kind of stuff.

To be sure, you want to take into consideration what they say. Don't ignore it. Use it to make a decision. But don't let them tell you how to raise your kids and when to read books to them.

Okay, here's an interesting one. This one comes from Sheila McCloskey. She asks, **“Can we draw any conclusions about the visions of deceased witches and wizards? In other words, for example, Harry's parents and the *Priori Incantatum* and the Catholic teaching regarding saints?”**

**Nancy Brown:** Well, I know when I went in, I think it's the second book where Harry encounters the Mirror of Erised, or maybe it's the first book. He sees his parents, and grandparents, and uncles and aunts, and various relatives. I remember thinking, is that like the communion of saints? Is there a dimension where maybe your relatives are actually very close to you, but you can't see them?

I did think of that. When Harry has these experiences with his family, especially with the mirror, there's such a longing in him for his family. He's just desperate for the parents that he doesn't have any longer. I think that's such a great part of the book, his desire for family.

**Brandon Vogt:** I want to toss this next question to Julian. Somebody asked, “Okay, even granting everything you've said that there aren't seriously strong arguments that *Harry Potter* is intrinsically evil, why would we encourage kids to read this stuff when there are so many better books that they could be reading instead?” What do you say to that?

**Julian Ahlquist:** Well, it's not a zero-sum game, right? You can read *Harry Potter* and the other books, right? It's not like you've got to choose either *Harry Potter* or any other book and bam, you're done. Read *Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*. It's a false dichotomy to say you've got to choose one.

**Brandon Vogt:** Well, the reason I tossed this question to you is because I think at the original panel you said, “Well, yeah, but you could make that argument against every book in the world except the number one greatest book...”

**Julian Ahlquist:** I did say that, right. If you're saying you should only read the best literature ever, say the Bible and nothing else, because the Bible is the best book, that's a weird argument.

**Brandon Vogt:** Also, in regard to my own children, again, our daughter who has kind of a mixed relationship with reading. Sometimes she'll binge read little books. Sometimes she'll be kind of ambivalent about it, but she digested the first *Harry Potter* book in 48 hours. She just totally ate it up, and that we talked about it. But my favorite thing for her is that, as I mentioned earlier in the webinar, it became a gateway to longer and deeper reading. That was like building a muscle for her, a reading muscle, after she read this massive book

in such a short period of time. And she moved on from it, becoming a broader and more effective reader. Now she's reading tons of books.

Okay. I'm looking down the questions here. Claudia Paredot says, **“Very informative webinar! Thank you, I loved the way you analyzed and used arguments on the video clip with the exorcist priests.”** Thanks. Claudia! A few more, but I think most people are either asking stuff we've already answered or they're just adding comments and stuff.

So, we've been on a long time—I think 2 hours, 15 minutes. I know that's probably stretching the attention span of many people. So, a few closing logistical things here.

Again, be sure to go to the website **BrandonVogt.com/Potter**. That's where this video will be available as soon as we hit end. Beneath the video, I've included links to all of the books, articles, videos, pro- and con- resources we've mentioned. You'll find it all there.

I'm also making a transcript of this full video as well as timestamps for the video.

So, thanks again for joining us! Thank you, Nancy. Thank you Julian. I loved hanging out with you guys and chatting about *Harry Potter* and Catholicism. We'll see everybody later. Goodnight!

**Julian Ahlquist:** God bless!

**Nancy Brown:** Thank you. Bye-bye!