

# OPINIONS

## Just wild about Harry

### Catholic Courier

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The Catholic Courier wishes to provide space for readers throughout the diocese to express opinions on all sides of the issues. We welcome original, signed letters about current issues affecting church life.

Although we cannot publish every letter we receive, we seek, insofar as possible, to provide a balanced representation of expressed opinions and a variety of reflections on life in the church. We will choose letters for publication based on likely reader interest, timeliness and a sense of fair play. Our discerning readers may determine whether to agree or disagree with the letter writers' opinions.

Letters must not exceed 500 words. Anonymous letters and the use of pseudonyms are unacceptable. We reserve the right to edit letters for legal and other concerns. With respect to errors in submitted text, we will correct spelling only.

Mail letters to: Catholic Courier, P.O. Box 24379, Rochester, N.Y. 14624. Please include your full name, phone number and complete address for purposes of verification.

**EDITORS' NOTE:** Parents in school districts across the country are fighting to have the novels of J.K. Rowling removed from school-library shelves because their plots revolve around witchcraft and wizardry. In this editorial, reprinted from the Cincinnati Archdiocesan newspaper *The Catholic Telegraph*, Editor/General Manager Tricia Gallagher Hempel argued that parents should give their children credit for knowing the difference between fantasy and reality.

### GUEST COMMENTARY

I had to open one of my daughter's Christmas presents in order to write this editorial. Please do not tell her that she will be finding under the Christmas tree the three-book set of Harry Potter children's novels by Scottish author J.K. Rowling. It is now safely rewrapped and tucked back in its hiding place.

Pushed for time, I only got about halfway through the first book, and I am still confused about Muggles and Hogwarts wizards. But I feel safe in saying that we have seen with the arrival of Harry Potter the dawning of a new age in children's literature — good children's literature. So long, "Goosebumps"; push those "Babysitters Club" serials aside. I can't wait to read the Harry books when my daughter is done with them.

In the tradition of such wonderful works as C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*, Harry Potter inhabits a world shared by witchcraft and wizardry. There are spells, magic wands, potions and herbs, a boarding school where magic is the curriculum, and orphaned Harry himself plays a form of basketball on his broomstick (the *Nimbus 2000*).

But there are also very clear-cut lessons in good and evil, right and wrong. As some young Harry fans have stated, they wish he were a real live child, since they suspect he'd make a good and loyal friend. Some students say Harry is far better than Nintendo, or any television shows they watch.

The Harry phenomenon is sweeping the nation and the world; earlier this year, the second book in the series pushed ahead of the Thomas Harris novel *Hannibal*, the much-awaited sequel to the gruesome *Silence of the Lambs*, on best-seller lists. The waiting list for Harry books at any library is long, and youngsters 9-90 are recounting that they have read the books as many as 17 times each.

### Hopes readers will open hearts, homes to young and neglected

#### To the editors:

Thank you for drawing attention in your Nov. 4 cover story to the critical need for foster parents. As an advocate for children who have been abused and neglected, I know, first-hand, the important role that foster parents have in the lives of these children.

Many readers of the *Catholic Courier* may not have ever thought about the foster parent ministry. Now that the seed has been planted and awareness created, perhaps some individuals will open their hearts and homes to our needy children. It is an opportunity to touch the life of a child, or children, in an important, meaningful way.

"I was a stranger and you welcomed me." As we reflect on the message of this Scripture verse, our challenge becomes: "If today you hear my voice, harden not your heart."

Information about the foster parent ministry can be obtained by calling: Monroe County Department of Social Services, 716-274-6522; Berkshire Farm Home Center, 716-454-1620; Catholic Family Center, 716-262-7145; Hillside Children's Center, 716-654-4522; Ibero-American Action League, Inc., 716-256-8900; and Urban League of Rochester, 716-325-6530.

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But parents in New York state, Minnesota, Michigan, Missouri, North Carolina and Georgia have complained about the books and legal challenges to the novels' presence in schools have been filed in eight states.

Some ministers have begun to preach against Harry, and some adults want the books out of school libraries, or at least out of the classroom, where some teachers are reading them aloud in the hopes of casting Harry's spell over students who are less than literary-minded.

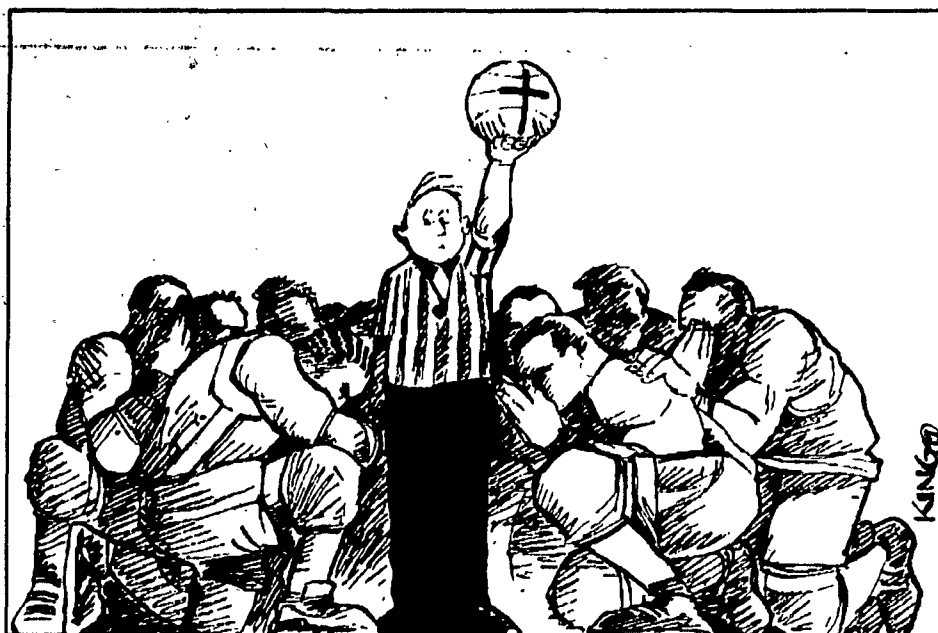
According to a Nov. 1 article in *The New York Times*, "There are whispers about the books being the work of the devil, their remarkable popularity — 5 million hardcover and 2 million paperback books sold in the United States so far — evidence of Satanic strength. In their formal complaints asking school districts to remove the materials, parents argue that since witchcraft is a religion, books about it do not belong in public schools."

Some of the best-loved books I can recall from childhood and adolescence were filled with images of evil, witches and magic. There was *Macbeth*, *Dracula*, *The House of the Seven Gables*, *The Salem Witch Trial*, *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, *The Once and Future King* (Arthurian legend, anyone?). Dragons, witches, wizards and potions were fun to read about, but no child over the age of 7 took them as anything more than fiction.

Parents who protest are not giving their children enough credit for comprehending the difference between fact and fiction. They are also not giving themselves enough credit for having raised children who can respect the difference between fact and fiction, good and evil.

Just a few days ago, on Halloween, my 8-year-old daughter remarked to me that she liked Halloween, but that she loved Christmas. "Halloween is about scary, evil stuff, Mom," she said. "But Christmas is all about light and hope and love. I really like it a lot better."

As parents, let's be grateful the kids are reading well-written material. And let's be grateful that a fantasy world such as Harry's exists for them to lose themselves in for a brief period. The real world is far too much like "Hannibal," and it is filled with many greater evils.



### Theater can't alter its subject

#### To the editors:

Here are my two cents on the Mass as theater (letters, Oct. 28 and Nov. 4).

In Jesus' time it was true that one ought to be freed of bondage to Satan even on Sabbath (Luke 13:16). In those days the leader of the synagogue was wrong. In these latter days, however, he would be correct. Sunday Mass is theater in that essence is that of an awards banquet for those in the state of grace. The acceptance line before Communion should be: Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but you have said the word on some past weekday and my soul was healed.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church #1482 states (in part), "However, regardless of its manner of celebration the sacrament of Penance is always, by its very nature, a liturgical action, and therefore an ecclesial and public action." The primary liturgical action of the Catholic community is on Sunday, the sacrifice of Calvary in an unbloody form. This liturgical sacrifice does not effect the forgiveness of an individual's sin. The practice of the Church is that there are six other days in the week to be healed. Sinners should

come on those days to have their sins forgiven, not on the Sabbath.

Would it be different, if Jesus of Nazareth were actually present at Sunday Mass and offered himself as the Lamb of God? Perhaps not. He might reply to the modern day good thief, "Oh, don't bother me now. You should have thought of that before Mass. I'm too busy offering my life for the forgiveness of sin. Come to be freed from bondage to Satan, outside of Mass, and, preferably, not on the Sabbath. On with the awards banquet!"

There is a reason for the dichotomy. On the one hand, the mission of Jesus was to the lost sheep of Israel, culminating in the bloody sacrifice of Calvary, by which the Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world. On the other hand, the primary liturgy of the Church, the sacrifice of Calvary existentially present in, unbloody form, is theater for the found sheep, those whose sins have been forgiven. Theater does not effect that which it portrays. A sacrament does.

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