Harry Potter is back in the movie theaters, and bookstores are full of Potter commentary. Here are two books that look at the Christian teachings in the world created by author J.K. Rowling.

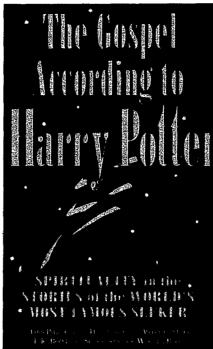
In A Charmed Life: The Spirituality of Potterworld, the Rev. Francis Bridger, a theologian and pastor in the Church of England, takes on the criticism that the setting of the books, a boarding school for wizards and witches, is "ungodly and dangerous." He says that Hogwarts - Harry's school - is based on "the traditional 'wonderland,'" a fundamental aspect of many children's stories. Rev. Bridger points out that the land of Narnia, created by C.S. Lewis, the world of Chocolate Factory created by Roald Dahl and the original Wonderland of Alice created by Lewis Carroll are all children's literary classics that contain magical elements in a wonderland setting.

Rev. Bridger writes that in Potterworld good always triumphs over evil. Even though magic is the framework in this world, it is the Christian traits of love and friendship that essentially drive the plot along. He says that author Rowling has used plot devices such as the Mirror of Erised in the Sorcerer's Stone and the Death Eaters in Azkaban and Goblet of Fire to illustrate and examine spiritual and secular issues ranging from love, friendship and courage to fear, evil and death. Moreover, the construction of Harry's world serves to enable its readers to confront and deal with similar day-to-day el-

Rev. Bridger writes that in Christian theology, the belief in self-sacCHARMED LIFE the Spirituality of **POTTERWORLD** FRANCIS BRIDGER

A Charmed Life: The Spirituality of Potterworld by Rev Francis Bridger. Doubleday (New York, 2002). 164 pp.; \$10.95 Reviewed by Sai Hylton/CNS

rifice and mercy is intrinsically linked to the belief that we ourselves are the recipients of self-sacrifice and mercy. This is an important recurring element in the Potter books. When Harry's mother gives up her life in order to protect her son from evil Lord Voldemort, this ultimate sacrifice of love is similar to Christ dying for the sinners of the world. In other words, such an act, Rev. Bridger writes, "is not just the noble thing to do — it is the



The Gospel According to Harry Potter by: Connie Neal. Westminster John Knox Press (Louisville, Ky., 2002) 166 pp., \$12 95. Reviewed by Sai Hylton/CNS

Christian thing to do, godly thing to do, because it reflects the selfless love of God himself."

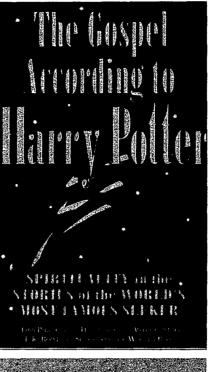
In the second book, the subtitle of The Gospel According to Harry Potter is Spirituality in the Stories of the World's Most Famous Seeker. And it is just this kind of punning that shows author Connie Neal knows her stuff, because as any fan knows "seeker" is the position Harry plays in "quidditch."

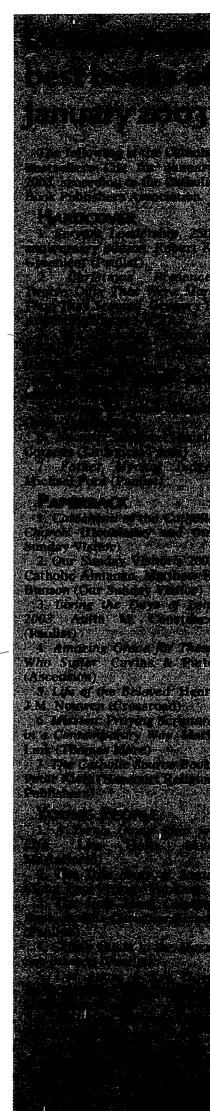
Neal looks for and finds "glimmers of the Gospel" in each of the four Potter books published so far. Neal says these are the major themes of the books:

- In book one, the triumph of good over evil and the power of love.
- In book two, freedom for captives and rejection of racial preju-
- In book three, righting injustice and overcoming fears.
- In book four, the aggressive nature of evil must be aggressively resisted.

In clear readable prose she touches on the main events in each book and then points to relevant Bible passages. This is a fun and well-informed book and not the least bit preachy.

Hylton is a college senior majoring in communication and Spanish at Randolph Macon Woman's College in Lynchburg, Va.





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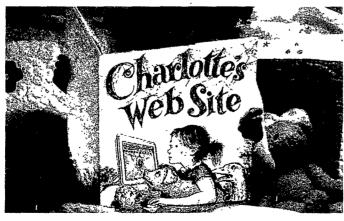
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