

Church isn't about buildings



Ed Zelachoski/CNS

So, where is God in the Potter picture? Jesus Christ? Nowhere. Children are taught by necromancers to conjure up magical tricks. Necromancy stems from the power of darkness, acknowledging a "power source" that originates not from God. Miracles instead come from God, and it is to Him we should give credit. I found not one positive mention of the Creator or His Son. For Harry, Christmas was a period of loneliness and isolation, left by himself at the time of the Birth of our Savior. And what of the life-size chess game? Children, hearing Weasley's courageous sentiments might misconstrue the origin of John 15:12-13. Would they realize it is the God of Love, the Power of Light? No wonder John Paul II has introduced the world to the Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary to help "Deliver us from evil!"

That these stories are placed within a "dark" framework is disturbing to me. Harry is a good sort, lik-

able and tries to like everybody, Malfoy excepted. Love thy enemies? Guess not. Even though he seems unaware of God, Harry has been graced by the power of God's Love to protect him. In that regard at least, Harry is no different from any other child, real or fictional.

Pat Ober
 Genung Circle
 Ithaca

Reminded of desert slogan

To the editor:

Reading the Bishop's (January 23) column about his trip to Chile reminded me that I was in that country in 1970. The good people that lived in the desert area had painted on the sides of cliffs and mountains *Cristo es el respuesta* which translates to "Christ is the answer."

What a remarkable reminder of Gospel values in this slogan.

Thomas Fogarty
 Walnut Street, Auburn

One of the best lessons I've had in church theology happened while sitting in a pew at St. Charles Borromeo Church in Rochester. It was my first visit to that church, and I was struck by the beauty of the sun shining through the glorious stained-glass windows.

Father Ed Palumbos was pastor at the time, and as he walked by my pew he greeted me. I commented, "Gosh, this is a beautiful church!" He replied, "Yes, and isn't the building nice too?" It was a good lesson on the definition and understanding of the church.

I looked up "church" in the Catholic Encyclopedia, and the first sentence reads: "Church: the Christian community, also known as the Body of Christ, the People of God, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit." Nothing about the building.

The first subsection of the article talks about "The Church and Churches in the New Testament." Its first sentence reads, "The Church of the New Testament was diverse and pluralistic in character." Again, nothing about the buildings. A description of the various communities that made up the early church follows.

We learn that certain communities emphasized teaching, church structures and pastoral care. Others concentrated on the church as imaged in the body of Christ and bride of Christ. Still others stressed institutional aspects of the church and the charismatic strands that emphasized the role of the Holy Spirit. Again, nothing about buildings.



Patricia Schoelles, SSJ

The Moral Life

The article describes difficulties in the early communities, as former Jews and former pagans tried to form a single community. It talks about differences in the communities being related to the particular locations of the churches. The mother church in Jerusalem, for example, naturally maintained close links with Judaism and an attachment to the temple not found in other communities.

The point is that early Christians did not talk about the buildings they were in. We learn about many different communities, their different struggles, their varying theological and pastoral emphases, the variety of their efforts to embody the message of Jesus in the concrete circumstances they lived in. The article in the Catholic Encyclopedia includes this great passage: "Despite these local differences, certain common elements existed: faith in Jesus as Messiah and Lord, the practice of Baptism and the celebration of the Eucharist, the apostolic preaching and instruction, the practice of communal love, and the expectation of the coming reign of God. There was freedom in all

matters."

It also highlights some of the characteristics and identifying marks of the church as advanced by the Second Vatican Council: "the People of God, a servant community, an ecumenical community, a collegial community (sharing authority), and an eschatological community (looking forward to God's reign and striving to actualize it)."

My professor in graduate school, who was a Methodist, would say three times every term that "When you Catholics hear the word 'church' you picture Rome and St. Peter's. We Protestants picture the little church on the corner." At least he tried to draw my image of church a little closer to home. But even he kept me focused on buildings.

As we 21st-century Christians struggle through renovations of the cathedral buildings, the shortage of ordained ministers, the diminishing numbers in some of our parish communities, the prospect of increased collaboration with other parishes, the possibilities of some parishes merging together, we might take just a small reminder from Father Palumbos' wise words to me and from the article in the Catholic Encyclopedia.

We need the buildings and love them, and we ought to do all we can to make them hospitable and worshipful places for gathering in his name. But the church isn't about the buildings at all.

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