

# **Kids seeking alternative identity and spirituality through the lived theology glimpsed in the Harry Potter series**

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**Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of**

**Philosophiae Doctor**

**In Practical Theology in the Faculty of Theology**

**University of Pretoria**

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**April 2014**

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## Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and that it has not previously, in its entirety or part, submitted for a degree to any other university.

All material contained in this dissertation has been duly acknowledged.

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Anastasia Apostolides

## **Acknowledgements**

I acknowledge with sincere gratitude the following people:

Prof Johann Meylahn for his continued support, guidance and insightful ideas. It has been a privilege to work with him.

My parents, Antonia and Dimitri Stivaktas for the countless of hours of baby-sitting that they performed, so I could do research.

My sister Voula Stivaktas, for her continued, encouragement and support.

My friends for the countless cups of coffee that kept me going.

My husband, Zenon Apostolides, for his continued love and support through this long journey.

Our children, Panagioti and Ioanna who make it all worthwhile.

I would also like to thank the University of Pretoria for the study grant.



## Abstract

The *Harry Potter* series has been part of many kids' socio-cultural context since 1997, and is a phenomenon that has had a huge impact on them (many of whom are now adults). It is argued that some kids' identities and spiritualities may have been directly shaped, and may continue to be directly shaped, by the alternative *sacred* story presented by Rowling. As this has the Christ discourse woven into its narrative, there are kids who are using the Gospel values on a daily basis, whether they are aware of it or not. Rowling's fantasy asks readers to question the impact that the dominant discourses of their 'realities' may be having on their identities and spiritualities, putting them in a position to question if that is indeed who they want to be. This study was motivated by how kids, who live in a Western society where one of the *sacred* stories is power/materialism/consumerism, can not only appreciate, but also live out (in lived theology) values of the *Harry Potter* series which are in complete opposition to the Western *sacred* story of power/consumerism/materialism. Since the consumerist discourse places a heavy burden on people to keep up with their socio-world, if they do not live up to these demands they will simply not 'fit in'. People, especially kids, do not want to be perceived as outcasts. Practical theology seeks to react to, and understand the shifts that have a direct implication on how people's lives are lived out and affected daily, in response to their socio-cultural world. One such shift is how people are now seeking ultimate answers from alternative sources such as for example literature, and specifically in this thesis, the *Harry Potter* series. Therefore, when a fantasy, such as *Harry Potter*, is published, it is important to question what kind of transformational and even transcendental impact it may be having on them. This is also an important question from a lived theology perspective as the *Harry Potter* series is lived religion. Lived theology seeks to understand how people practice and apply the sacred outside the Church and the four Gospels, while still using the Gospel message to live out their life on some level every day. These values include people's practices, their actions

towards others within their socio-cultural context and their personal *sacred* experiences that may allow them to transcend the way in which materialism affects their identity and spirituality. Lived theology seeks to understand how these values may affect practical theology. While some people no longer feel comfortable with/drawn to the Church, and feel alienated from the Gospels that were written for a socio-cultural context that is very different from Western society today, this does not mean that human beings are no longer spiritual/religious/Christian. They continue to seek for answers to the ultimate question at different stages of their lives.

### **Ten Key Terms**

1. Harry Potter
2. Practical Theology
3. Lived Theology
4. Alternative identity and spirituality
5. Christ discourse
6. Consumer discourse
7. Transformation and transcendence
8. Wounded Christ
9. *Sacred* and *mundane* stories
10. Youth culture

## Chapter 1:

### Positioning the study

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#### 1.1 Introduction

For well over a decade, *Harry Potter* has been a part of kids' social context, first in book form, then in a film format and now as virtual reality. Playstation 3 has released the *Wonderbook: Book of Spells*, an 'enchanted book' that allows the reader to learn, practice and master the magic spells from the series by bringing the spells 'to life' around the player<sup>1</sup>. This is an actual book that the player opens up to encounter the magical world of the series in virtual reality. Therefore, the *Harry Potter* series has become part of many aspects of kids' digital media and part of their socio-cultural context, making the series accessible on various levels (for instance, books, digital media, and even birthday parties). Miller-McLemore (2006: 68) uses the term *kids*, as the term 'seems to stretch a bit further than *children* to cover teens and young adults.' I will also be using the term in the same manner unless otherwise specified. Everyone has heard of *Harry Potter*, unless as Granger (2008:1) points out, you have been 'living on the planet Zeno since 1997 or have recently come out of a coma.' Harry, and the many other loved characters (even those that are despised) of the series, and their actions, may have been woven into some people's personal narratives over the last sixteen years.

This study will limit itself to the books, arguing that the *Harry Potter* series may have become an important narrative source, specifically for kids to construct their identities and spiritualities in an alternative manner. Kids are confronted with an alternative reality to that of their own in the series, as Rowling weaves glimpses

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.jkrowling.com/en\\_GB/#/timeline/wonderbook-book-of-spells/](http://www.jkrowling.com/en_GB/#/timeline/wonderbook-book-of-spells/)

of the Christ discourse through some of the characters' actions in the wizarding world. The aim of this study is to argue that the *Harry Potter* series presents pastors and youth workers with an ideal tool to help guide kids towards a more spiritual life that includes this discourse within their social context. Although many of the latter may have read and incorporated the narrative into their lives, they might be holding back from expressing the implicit values of the series, as they may feel that these alternative values may go against the dominant discourse of their society, and could hinder them 'fitting in'. The series presents pastors and youth workers with the opportunity to bring these values out of the shadows, helping kids express these values without feeling bound to the dominant Western discourse of consumerism and materialism.

This study attempts to illustrate how the *Harry Potter* series, with its glimpses of the Christ discourse, as an alternative *sacred* story, has captured the imaginations of kids living in a consumerist Western society. Rowling has not bound the series directly to any specific institutionalized religion; but rather, she chooses to use glimpses of the core values and meaning of the Gospels. As the series was written over a span of ten years, those who completed the whole journey with Rowling lived through the protagonists' experiences, making the series a lived religion that they may have lived out on a daily basis. Kids find it easy to identify with and are drawn into the lives of the teenage characters of Harry, Ron and Hermione who so closely resemble kids within a Western social matrix, as they experience adolescence with all its challenges. However, the three characters also challenge the Western social context of kids by acting selflessly towards one another, and their wizarding community. Thus, while similar to Western kids, Harry, Ron and Hermione demonstrate an alternative existence, challenging the dominant Western one, which puts more value in what their friends own, rather than the value of the person with whom they are friends.

The reader of the *Harry Potter* series confronts and reacts to an alternative world of wizards, through not only the alternative world created by the author, but also

the world that is created in-front-of-the-text between what the individual imagines and the author's creation. In this, the reader frequently goes beyond the boundaries of their own world to experience a life with different values that may ultimately remain with them. Kille (2001: 25), names this the '...imaginative space between the interpreter's world and the possible world projected by the text.' This 'imaginative space' may have a profound effect on an individual's spiritual journey as they are permitted to imagine themselves in a way they may have initially deemed unlikely, before the reading of a certain narrative (Ricoeur 1981a: 112). In the case of the *Harry Potter* series, kids are allowed the possibility of imagining themselves (their identity) in a manner alternative to the dominant imagination that Western consumerism offers (my worth to others depends upon what I own). This alternative identity does not require anything material to live up to the demands of their social context, and is in direct opposition to Western consumerism and materialism that always seems to require or sometimes even demand the latest desired object (clothes, gadgets and so forth) in order to 'fit in'. Kids seem to be drawn into the 'non-superficial reality' that the *Harry Potter* wizarding world offers them. This world offers kids the option to love and put friendship before material goods.

As this narrative is read (especially for those who started reading the series as Rowling wrote it) over several years and kids include the values of the series in their identity formation, the series may become part of the way they live their lives and act towards others. This means, that kids live out the values of the *Harry Potter* series, as the values have become woven into their identity and have moved from their imaginations into their 'real' world. The alternative world of the series shows them that their 'real' world is corrupted in many ways and that they have the possibility to choose not to be part of this corruption. It also allows them the possibility to choose to live in a way that opposes the dominant discourse of their 'real' world.

## 1.2 The problem field

The problem field is the challenge to the Church as fewer people attend or join institutionalized religions and seem to struggle to find ultimate meaning in the Gospels. There are various reasons for this loss of meaning in the Gospels, a few examples of which pertain to this thesis:

- Some kids are brought up in a very secularized manner, where the dominant discourse places value on identifying value (self and others) with possessions.
- The language, world and metaphors used in the Gospels are too far removed from the language, world and metaphors of kids in the world today.

Issues such as those mentioned above make it necessary for the Gospels to be translated into today's language, world and metaphors. The fantasy genre seems to be a genre well suited for this task as many fantasy authors, to varying degrees, weave into their narrative the Christ discourse, in a language that kids 'get'. Examples of authors who have used the Christ discourse in their work in the past are Tolkien and Lewis, and more recently Rowling.

Even though institutional religion has lost its meaning in the Western socio-cultural environment, there is a return to religion in the post-secular world. But, this return has taken a turn beyond institutional religion and is expressed in popular culture (as previously indicated, one such genre is fantasy). Beaudoin (1998: 21) argues that searching for alternative places for spirituality, such as the arts, literature and music seems to have become a quest for the 'new' symbols of society, as a means of replacing traditional systems such as the Church and the clergy, with whom kids have become disillusioned. Other kids know nothing of religion except for such exposure they may have had from the media, where horrific incidents are reported about a particular religion (Tracey 2010: 67).

Beaudoin (1998: 34) goes on to say that although some kids claim not to be religious, they still express spirituality by using material (with glimpses of the Gospel, such as in their reading material, for example the *Harry Potter* series) they interact with, within their social context that sometimes inspire them to transform and re-shape their spiritual identities. Therefore, although it may seem that they are no longer exposed or influenced by the Gospels, this is not so, as the Gospel message has shifted from the Bible and the Church to other places; alternative places that people find more accessible. This is consequently not something negative, but shows that people's spirituality evolves to adapt with their technology, socio-cultural world, and level of comfort within this world, to answer their ultimate questions.

The world or 'space' that is created in front of the text, between the reader and the *Harry Potter* series, becomes a 'church' where they are exposed to glimpses of Christ, in a language with which they can identify. This 'church space' of the imagination challenges kids to re-think their identities with its glimpses of a Christ-like life. Millbank (2005: 2) explains that in the 'post-Christian phase', where there is a decline in institutionalized religion, fantasy seems to have the ability to give glimpses of the Gospel, allowing the story of Christ to 'persist in the echo of the public value.' Therefore, the Gospel has moved from the Bible to the fantasy genre in a secularized world, and become a religion that, as was mentioned above, some people live out. (The concept of lived theology/religion is explained in some detail below and in Chapter 2). Thus, Christ continues to challenge society, not from the Bible, but from within social mediums that many people find valuable and feel comfortable with, such as the said fantasy genre. Fantasy writers such as those previously mentioned, use glimpses of the Gospel in their work to expose and challenge the effects of the dominant discourses of their societies; those discourses that they see as fragmenting and hurtful to people's identities and binding them to material things. These writers use the Christ discourse as an exposing and transforming tool to reveal the effect of the dominant discourses. If, as Ganzevoort (2009) argues, practical theology is the

study of ‘...lived religion in a hermeneutic mode’ that attends ‘...to the most fundamental processes of interpreting life through endless conversations in which we construct meaning’, then this includes conversations with ‘...our fellow human beings’ and the ‘...traditions that model’ our lives. By ‘traditions’ Ganzevoort (2009) means the Bible and the Church, ‘...with all its interpretative power and normative claims’, eventually aiming ‘...at a more profound and more adequate spiritual life.’

## 1.2 The research gap

Practical theology has recently, for some academics, such as Gräb (2012), Miller-McLemore (2012 b, c, d) and Ganzevoort (2009), started to place itself within a hermeneutic of lived theology/religion that includes the socio-cultural within the religious. Lived religion, according to Miller-McLemore<sup>2</sup> is the practice of everyday life that has religious or moral implications with or without a person being conscious of it. Many decisions made by people, says Miller-McLemore, have been formed by Gospel values (Christian values). In other words, people use within their daily lives aspects of values that they have gained from Christian values. Miller-McLemore’s (2012c: 103) understanding of lived theology extends beyond the Church, including social practices where the divine may also be encountered in everyday living and considering how this may have an influence in theology and how people experience the divine. Gräb (2012: 80-81) agrees with Miller-McLemore, and calls for a practical theology of lived religion that is not only ‘...limited to church theory, pastoral theology or even methodologically-orientated empirical science (theologia applicata)’, but also includes an attempt to define socio-cultural ‘...phenomena as religious through the employment of cultural-hermeneutic.’ Ganzevoort (2009), as was seen above, understands lived

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.faithandleadership.com/qa/bonnie-j-miller-mclemore-theology-religious-communities-and-practice>



religion as evaluating the practices of lived religion in the light of the sacred texts and the sacred ideas of a particular religion, such as for example, Christianity.

The major question for the hermeneutic of lived religion is the question of normativity, transformation and transcendence. Yet, practical theology, according to Miller-McLemore, and Gräb should have a normative, transformative and transcendent role to play within society. In other words, while the normative role of theology remains an important one within the field, practical theology additionally needs to include the transformational aspect that involves glimpsing/encountering the Christ discourse in some way, on a daily basis. Rowling uses the *Harry Potter* series to offer glimpses of such a discourse. The said discourse opens a way for kids to have the opportunity to live transformed lives that are in-line with the Gospels (normative). Consequently, to be able to interpret the lived religion/theology of the *Harry Potter* series, we need to be able to read it together with the Gospels (as a normative text). It is then, on the basis of the normative text of the Gospels, that it can be argued that the *Harry Potter* series offers glimpses of the Gospels. Secondly, those glimpses of the Christ discourse can be transformative as they offer an alternative to kids' dominant discourse of their 'realities'. This links back to what Miller-McLemore<sup>3</sup> explains about people forming their values from the Gospels (Christian values), and incorporating these within their daily lives, even though they may not be aware that these are Gospel values that are shaping their lives.

Rowling in her *Harry Potter* series, addresses the dominant discourse of consumerism/materialism (that has taken on religious dimensions), through her depiction of the 'Muggle' world, with the Dursleys as her prime examples of people who try and 'fit in' with their society through their belongings, and then offers an alternative to this way of life with the Christ discourse. It is typical of the

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.faithandleadership.com/ga/bonnie-j-miller-mclemore-theology-religious-communities-and-practice>

fantasy genre to challenge dominant discourses through a fantastic narrative with an alternative spirituality/religion with an appropriate ethos. The above mentioned author puts emphasis on people, family and fellowship/community as the most treasured occurrence that a person can experience in their lives, as opposed to the latest material things. Rowling's pitting of fellowship against consumerism (with all its downfalls), opens a space for transformation that may allow kids to be liberated from the never-ending vicious cycle created by consumerism and materialism. Consumerism and materialism directly cause problems in people's lives, obliging people to 'fit in' to their socio-cultural world by acquiring what the market is telling them they need to have in order to 'fit in'. Thus, I would propose that the research gap invites research into the transformative power of lived religion/theology in the *Harry Potter* series. This subsequently leads to the following research question:

#### 1.4 The research question

**What is the possibility for kids to transform their identities and to thus develop alternative spiritualities to the dominant identities that they have developed within a Western capitalist world, through the lived theology experienced by the reader in the *Harry Potter* series?**

To answer the research question the following objectives are necessary:

1. The *Harry Potter* series needs to be explored and then shown how it is lived theology/religion. The books, as was mentioned above, is in series form and people have either read it over the decade it took Rowling to write it, or read it over a certain time period, the series has thus become part of their lives or has started to influence the way the act towards their friends and community. If people live according to some of the values of the series, this then becomes a lived religion that shapes the actions of

their lives; changing and transforming their actions to mimic the actions of Christ.

2. The role of narrative in shaping identity, spirituality and thus ethos, with a specific focus on kid's identity, spirituality and ethos in Western society should be explored. As kids grow and develop they listen to, and are shaped by the stories of their immediate society, first family then peers and, social trends/pressures that come with dwelling in a Western matrix as a child and particularly as an adolescent.
3. A discussion of the *Harry Potter* series as lived theology/religion and the glimpses of the Christ discourse in the series. Rowling uses the Christ discourse to describe some of her characters' characteristics and actions. By doing so she challenges the Western discourse of materialism/capitalism by emphasizing how the Christ discourses ethos cares only for people and the communities where people dwell, as opposed to only your worth through your possessions.
4. Kids' ability to be drawn into the *Harry Potter* series and identify with character's who exhibit Christ-like actions. Kids are still influenced by the Gospel, but from the fantasy genre, as opposed to the Church and the Bible. Therefore, their values may be shaped/challenged by the Gospels, to help them transform and liberate their identities from the consumerist ones that they probably clung to before reading the series.

Upon entering the alternative wizarding world of the *Harry Potter* series through her/his imagination, the reader is confronted and challenged by a different spirituality to that encountered in their dominant material world. Rowling's main characters (Harry, Ron, Hermione, Dumbledore, and others), live by the core values of the Gospels (fellowship, love and so on), which are in direct opposition to the way many people live in a consumerist Western world. Tolkien (2008: 64)

and Lewis (1960: 218) both argued that fantasy has the ability to ‘baptize the imagination’, and transform people’s lives by awakening the reader to the dominant discourses of their world, which often engulf the *sacred* stories (stories that propose answers to the ultimate questions) with core values that put fellowship and sacrifice for that fellowship first. Can the *Harry Potter* series transform the reader to awaken them from the consumerist discourse that they exist in, by living out the characters’ lives (and actions) in their imagination? Osmer (2011: 6) argues that the ‘...pressing task today is to imagine and theorize alternatives to global order totally dominated by the logic and practice of the global marketplace.’ This study will argue that the *Harry Potter* series imagines such an alternative, but in a language that is more accessible to kids than the language of the Gospels in the Bible, thus offering them glimpses of Christ, baptizing their imaginations, enabling them to re-think their lives in accordance with the values of the Gospels, using social media with which they identify.

### **1.5 Epistemology**

As this study works with the construction of meaning through narrative and language, it is situated in the social constructionist postmodern paradigm. Knowledge, identity and subjectivity are not given objectivity by an unbiased observer, but are, continuously, socially constructed through language (Berger & Luckmann 1966: 195). As this study is situated in a postmodern philosophical context, with specific focus on the linguistic turn in continental philosophy, it concentrates specifically on Heidegger’s (1993: 351) linguistic construction of the world.

The above epistemology is linked and related to the social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann 1966: 195) and narrative construction of identity (Ricoeur 1984: 45). Reality and identity are constructed through story, as story allows a person an explanation of how they fit into their socio-cultural environment. Some

stories (*sacred* stories within the *mundane* stories of people's everyday lives) may also help people search for ultimate meaning that transcends their social context (Crites 1989: 69-72). These *sacred* stories try to make connections between 'truth', 'reality' and sometimes to justify or discredit a certain socio-cultural environment (such as for example, Western consumerism), leading a person to re-think their way of life through the alternative 'reality' offered by the *sacred* story.

## 1.6 Methodology

Considering the above epistemology, the following methodology will be used. The approach will be qualitative rather than quantitative and focused on interpreting the texts. This study places itself within the theory of lived religion/theology and seeks to interpret the *Harry Potter* series as an expression of lived religion/theology that has the ability to baptize kids' imaginations into an alternative discourse to that of the dominant market discourse of Western society. The study interprets both the text of the *Harry Potter* series as well as the social contexts of kids in contemporary Western society. To do this, the study will take a critical, interpretive stance towards these texts and contexts, identifying the dominant discourses and exposing their influence on identity and spirituality. To be able to answer the above research question, the following five steps will be taken:

### 1.6.1 Step 1

A focus will be placed on the characteristics of lived religion/theology, with emphasis on the work of Heimbrock (2005), Ganzevoort (2009), Gräß (2012), and Miller-McLemore (2012 b, c, d). These characteristics will then be used to interpret and describe the *Harry Potter* series as lived religion/theology.

### 1.6.2 Step 2

As this study is situated within a postmodern philosophical context, affected by the linguistic turn in continental philosophy, specific consideration will be given to Heidegger's *Geviert* (Fourfold). The world we live in is created through language (Heidegger 1971: 130). However, this is not an isolated or an individual process, but a dialectic relationship between society, culture, language and the individual (Berger and Luckmann 1969: 150). Therefore, Berger and Luckmann are brought into dialogue with Heidegger.

Heidegger's divinities are also brought into conversation with Berger's and Crites' understanding of the *sacred* and religion. The way in which religion and the *sacred* play an important role in social construction of reality will be explored and then applied to the *Harry Potter* series. After this, Ricoeur's understanding of the narrative self and the narrative construction of identity is brought into conversation with the above dialect between the individual and society.

Currently the construction of reality in Western society has the dominant discourse of capitalism/materialism tightly woven in its *sacred* story. This consumerist *sacred* story has taken on a religious dimension for many people; therefore, Rowling uses the Dursleys as an example of the typical consumerist, selfish ethos towards neighbours and even, direct family members (Harry).

Narratives, and specifically the fantasy genre, as illustrated by Lewis and Tolkien (and discussed later in the thesis), are often created by the author to challenge dominant discourses that they see as corrupt and negative between people in their interactions with one another. Their alternative discourses, often expressed through a Christ discourse, opens the possibility of awakening people to an alternative existence that is free of the

dominant discourse by challenging the dominant discourse with something pure.

### **1.6.3 Step 3**

To provide understanding of how fantasy might function as a key genre for transformative lived theology/religion, Tolkien's and Lewis' theories on fantasy in relation to Christianity are explored. Specific attention will be paid to portal narratives and their ability to challenge the dominant discourses of society by offering alternative discourses.

### **1.6.4 Step 4**

The *Harry Potter* series, as lived religion/theology brought about through the various glimpses of the Christ discourse, as exhibited by the characters' actions towards one another and their wizarding community. These characters' actions challenge the dominant discourse of Western consumerism and materialism, with all its pitfalls. In this step it is demonstrated how the *Harry Potter* series may be used by pastors and youth workers to help adolescents re-imagine alternative ways to live their lives through lived religion/theology and ideas from narrative therapy.

### **1.6.5 Step 5**

Step 5 concludes by showing the possibility of transforming kids' identities and developing spiritualities that are alternative to the dominant discourse of Western consumerism/materialism through the lived theology/religion of the *Harry Potter* series.

## 1.7 Overview of chapters

### • Chapter 2

In this chapter it is argued that the *Harry Potter* series may be interpreted and function as lived theology/religion. This understanding is applicable to this thesis as some kids use the series to form identity and spirituality, not by attending Church or reading the Bible, but via literature, within the cultural texts of their social context. The characteristics of lived religion/theology will be identified from the work of Heimbrock (2005), Ganzevoort (2009), Gräß (2012), and Miller-McLemore (2012 b, c, d), to show how there is a turn towards lived theology/religion in practical theology.

### • Chapter 3

In this chapter it is argued that the *Harry Potter* series has become an important narrative source in the social construction of kids' identity and spirituality. Language poetically creates the world that we live in, and our world/reality relies on the social-cultural-linguistic community we belong to (language is the House of Being) (Heidegger 1971:130). People express their life in story, and their story is able to place them in their world (the Fourfold) over a period of time. Therefore, narrative deals with the 'temporal character of human experience' (Ricoeur 1984:3). Crites' (1989:69-72) understanding of *mundane* and *sacred* stories is brought into the conversation in this chapter, as people's *sacred* narratives offer ultimate reference for the *mundane* stories. In Western culture, the dominant *sacred* narrative is capitalism, with its numerous fantasies, and the belief that you are what you own. Rowling uses 'Muggles' to represent the consumerist attitude of 'you are what your own', with the Dursleys as her primary example. Rowling proposes an alternative to the consumerist 'Muggle'



identity: the wizarding world and the Weasley's as her primary example of living with Christ-like values. Rowling emphasizes an alternative way to live (world-view), challenging the 'Muggle' world-view and sometimes even to those who live in the wizarding world, for example the Malfoys. She continuously challenges her characters (Harry, Hermione, Dumbledore etc.) to make choices between the two *sacred* stories she presents and how they choose to live their lives. These choices between the different worlds echo the choices of the early church (Caesar vs. Christ). Meylahn's (2010) interpretation of the Christ discourse is brought into conversation with the series to show how this discourse liberates people from the dominant discourse, thus opening a space for alternative construction of identity, community and spirituality. Meylahn's discourse is developed in dialogue with Lacan's theory of the four discourses, to offer a narrative space for a discourse of Christ, which is not bound to consumerism.

#### • Chapter 4

In this chapter, it is argued that fantasy narrative, in this case, the *Harry Potter* series, may be a useful form of narrative to help kids construct their identities and spiritualities in an alternative way. The *Harry Potter* novels are fantasy novels, where Rowling has created two worlds, the 'Muggle' world and the wizarding world. She uses these worlds to focus on her social comment on Western consumerism/materialism, and thereafter narrates an alternative story that is free of the consumerist/materialistic discourse. Tolkien and Lewis' approach to fantasy is discussed in this chapter and subsequently brought into conversation with the narrative of *Harry Potter*. Rowling creates the wizarding 'Sub-Creation' by means of *mundane* and *sacred* stories that are both present in our world. By creating a 'Secondary World' that is similar to our world Rowling puts kids in a position to see the problem created by the dominant story in their world and then gives an alternative world that they can explore in their imagination that may result in

them making changes in their 'reality'. The series, although popular with all ages of people, is aimed at adolescents who are searching for the answers to the ultimate meaning in this transitional phase of their life. Adolescents often find themselves confused and worried about whether they are fitting in with their social peers, often rejecting their parents' values (Coles 1998:143). Books that deal with the ultimate questions, such as the *Harry Potter* series, allow the adolescent to experience not only what they are going through, but are also given an alternative approach to dealing with these problems.

## • Chapter 5

In this chapter it is argued that the *Harry Potter* series may be used by pastors and youth workers to help adolescents re-imagine alternative ways to live their lives, incorporating lived religion/theology in their lives instead of hiding it in the 'cracks', too embarrassed to live a life that is different/alternative to the lives that their social peers choose. Using ideas from narrative therapy (Freedman & Combs 1996), the problem story is firstly identified and examined; secondly the narrative approach is utilised to help kids identify the stories that they have neglected due to consumerism and thirdly ways in which kids can re-imagine their futures, free of the hold of consumerism, are identified. In this chapter I explore the parallel between the choices Harry, Snape and Dumbledore make, and the choice of the church by exploring the parallels between the alternative world-view of the *Harry Potter* series and the alternative world-view that has the Christ discourse as its founding narrative (as *sacred* narrative) that needs to be brought out of the 'cracks', as described by Meylahn (2012).

## • Chapter 6

This chapter includes a summary of the researcher's concluding thoughts. It discusses how she intends to continue doing research on the *Harry Potter* series. However, she aims to move out of the format of the book and research the possibility of looking for traces of lived religion/theology within virtual reality.

## Chapter 2:

### **Living theology through the *Harry Potter* series**

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#### **2.1 Introduction**

The chapter explores lived theology, and how the *Harry Potter* series may have the ability to function as lived religion/theology. The study examines the narrative of the series to discover how kid's lives might be transformed through the alternative discourse offered as an alternative to the dominant discourse of Western socio-cultural 'realities'. Lived religion/theology focuses on how people utilize, practice and express the *sacred* on a daily basis, within a particular social context to experience transformation and transcendence (Heimbrock 2005, Ganzevoort 2009, Gräb 2012, Miller-McLemore 2012 b, c, d).

By reading the *Harry Potter* series, the reader, and here the focus is on adolescent readers (because this series is a coming-of-age story), may glimpse the Christ discourse that Rowling seems to have subtly woven into the series; a discourse that gives them the choice to live transformed lives. This transforming/alternative way to live (*sacred* experiences); according to the normative texts of the Gospels, makes the series lived religion/theology (discussed in-depth in Chapter 4). The 'living out' of sacred experiences on a daily basis has been termed lived theology/religion by some practical theologians (Heimbrock 2005, Ganzevoort 2009, Gräb 2012, Miller-McLemore 2012 b, c, d).

#### **2.2 Lived Theology**

Before examining the content of the *Harry Potter* series as lived religion/theology, a discussion of the terms lived religion/theology, and their characteristics, is required.

### **2.2.1 The term ‘Lived Religion’ or ‘Lived Theology’**

A difference of opinion over the terms lived religion / lived theology (Miller-McLemore 2012c: 111) exists, as does which term practical theologians should use. Heimbrock (2005: 273) speaks of ‘living religion... religion as human praxis.’ This notion incorporates people’s practical experience as well as their sacred experiences that go beyond the practical (Heimbrock 2005: 290). Heimbrock (2005) uses the term in the context of establishing the empirical validity of practical theology researching religion through phenomenological methods.

Empirical research, says Heimbrock (2005: 275), ‘should be open to new experiences and new discoveries in the experience based research.’ Heimbrock (2005: 290) seeks the ‘human side of religion’ and the phenomenon of religious praxis that may have the ability to transform and transcend people’s outlook on life through the ethos it conveys. In order to research ‘living religion’, Heimbrock (2005: 287), says, certain questions arise that may help understand the human practice of religion. These four questions are as follows (Heimbrock 2005: 287–288):

- 1. How and where people feel deeply at home?**
- 2. How and where they experience fascination?**
- 3. When and in what ways they experience deep yearnings to belong to something and or desire to express freely their sense of belonging?**
- 4. How and when they feel a sense of estrangement?**

These questions, argues Heimbrock (2005: 287–288), concern theology as they are in line with the Gospel message of ‘salvation, wholeness and brokenness.’ However, as he goes on to point out (Heimbrock 2005: 288), although people may have all the above experiences on a daily basis, they may not initially identify them as religious, until many years later. His questions will be applied to the content of the *Harry Potter* series, and the socio-cultural context for which the series was created, to show why the series may be termed lived religion/theology.

Gräb (2012: 79) and Ganzevoort (2009) use the term ‘lived religion’ to describe people’s sacred experiences that they may encounter on a daily basis. Gräb (2012: 90) explains that in some of the religious-cultural environments in which they live, they accept that God may be present in their everyday lives. However, it is imperative for practical theologians to understand **what**, people consider as a Godly presence/experience in their daily lives, and **how**; in other words, how they make a meaningful connection to the sacred in order to be transformed by a particular experience in some way, in their day. These experiences, writes Gräb (2012: 90) also include socio-cultural ones. Consequently, the sacred may not necessarily come from the Gospels or the Church alone (a discussion on this is included below). While Heimbrock (2005: 288) explains that people do not necessarily define sacred experiences as religious, Gräb (2012: 90), as mentioned above, argues that people are open to sacred experiences which are of a religious nature. This is an interesting point, especially where kids within a secularized context are concerned, that in a Western society translates into a materialistic sacred story. By reading the series, kids are confronted with, and have to deal with, an alternative discourse where fellowship and love are far more treasured than any material possession. They may not be aware of the religious context of the *Harry Potter* series, but this does not mean that they do not experience transcendence and transformation through reading these books; an activity

that they may in later years regard as (having had) a sacred/religious experience. They may also transform their practices/actions towards their society to be in accordance with the ethos of the series from their exposure to the narrative, although they may come from a completely secular background. Therefore, by reading the series, they might have not only been exposed to and journeyed with the Christ discourse in their daily life, but may only in later years connect their choice of lifestyle to those of the Gospel values.

Miller-McLemore (2012c: 111) focuses on the term 'lived theology' as opposed to 'lived religion', for the reason that practical theology is interested in how knowing and loving the divine has an effect on people's everyday lives and how these experiences with the divine may in turn influence theology. Therefore, for Miller-McLemore, the focus is on the theological aspect of and not just the praxis of religion, while Gräb and Heimbrock tend to focus more, although not exclusively, on the praxis of religion. Heimbrock (2005) does use the term 'living religion' to go beyond the praxis of religion to the transcendent and transformational. Ganzevoort (2009) utilises the term 'lived religion', but agrees with Miller-McLemore's understanding and description of 'lived theology'. The term 'lived religion', continues Miller-McLemore (2012c: 111), is used by historians and sociologists of religion, to examine only the rituals and practices of 'lived religion', while theology seeks to understand that which may not always be easily described in words. Miller-McLemore's argument for the use of the term 'lived theology' is appropriate for this study as the *Harry Potter* series includes a theological aspect that may transcend and transform the reader to an alternative way of living, that may shape not only their identity, but also their spirituality (transcendence, that cannot be observed or easily described). Although this study is an interdisciplinary one and researches the praxis of religion, it is still firmly rooted in theology and will, therefore, employ Miller-McLemore's term 'lived theology', unless quoting a reference.

### 2.2.2 The characteristics of lived theology

‘The face and structure of religion are changing, and theology, even more practical theology, has to respond to those changes’ (Ganzevoort 2009). This means that practical theology has recently moved from being a primarily ministry-orientated field, to a field that responds to the social changes which include finding Christianity and spirituality outside the Church and the Gospels, moving towards a hermeneutic of lived religion / theology (Ganzevoort 2009, Miller-McLemore 2012c: 111, Gräb 2012: 80). People are seeking and utilizing the sacred from outside the Church and the Gospels, either because they have been raised in a secularized environment or because they have lost faith in organized religion (Tracey 2010: 67). Tracey (2001: 92), explains that kids’ fascination with the sacred (something that goes beyond their immediate ‘realities’), ‘is not primarily anti-religion’, nor an objection against the Church, per se, but rather ‘a desperate attempt by youth culture to counter the advances of the profane and secular society’, in which they live.

Many decisions made by people, observes Miller-McLemore<sup>4</sup>, have been formed by ‘scriptural and theological traditions’. In other words, people within their daily lives use aspects of values that they have gained from a religious source (for example, the fantasy genre), although they may not be aware of it. ‘Those practical, everyday actions were intended to carry significant meanings, and people don’t think about it. But it does shape how we understand ourselves and our relationship with divine presence.’<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup><http://www.faithandleadership.com/qa/bonnie-j-miller-mclemore-theology-religious-communities-and-practice>

<sup>5</sup><http://www.faithandleadership.com/qa/bonnie-j-miller-mclemore-theology-religious-communities-and-practice>



For Ganzevoort (2009), the words ‘hermeneutic’, ‘lived’ and ‘religion’, ‘together form the heart of practical theology’. Each of these terms, Ganzevoort explains, ‘anchor our discipline in religion’, in that practical theology, no matter how diverse has to do with the interpretation of how people practice, express and live out the sacred/religious. In Ganzevoort’s (2009), opinion, the above three words allow for practical theology to encompass normativity, biblical themes, cultural/contemporary issues, for people who are believers and who live with all the above included in their daily lives. The above three words may however, also include people who are not necessarily part of any religious tradition, but live out the values of the Gospel (love, fellowship and love of community). These aspects of lived theology may not always stem from the Gospels or the Church, but from other places, as was said above, such as in the case of this thesis.

‘Hermeneutic’, for Ganzevoort (2009), ‘indicates that we want to understand lived religion from its own characteristics and in light of its own understandings and intrinsic normativity.’ While interdisciplinary phenomena may be the starting point, ultimately the point of the investigation is to understand a ‘religious phenomenon’ (Ganzevoort 2009). Gräß (2012: 81) argues that certain phenomena should be understood through experiences and life-expressions as religious; therefore, he calls for the use of a ‘cultural-hermeneutic’. Gräß (2012: 81) explains that even though socio-cultural expressions of religion may not be ‘traditional church theology’, they still fulfil people’s religious/*sacred* needs, and need to be understood as such. He continues (Gräß 2012: 87) by saying that a hermeneutic of religion does ‘not take leave of the church’; instead, it shows that the church needs to adjust to the praxis of socio-cultural religion. However, he (Gräß 2012:81) goes on to warn that not all ‘normative determinations’ of cultural-hermeneutics are ‘religious’. Gräß (2012: 82) argues that this hermeneutic must be based on a particular religion with specific religious themes, for example in Christianity, and the matters that arise in living out a Christian

life. However, a person may be living a 'Christian' life, and not be aware of it, due to the influence of secularization.

The *Harry Potter* series is one such socio-cultural phenomenon that may fulfil people's *sacred*/religious needs outside of the Church, and is rooted in Christianity via the Christ discourse that is subtly woven into the alternative sacred story by Rowling. Harry shows kids that by caring more about others than himself, the centre of his life is not within him or about him (as selfish Western consumerist sacred discourse would hold); but, rather, the centre of his life is outside of him, in the form of his friends and community (Christ like behaviour). Thus, illustrating to readers that it is not material possessions and selfish behaviour that are important, but rather the quality of life Harry experiences with his friends and wizarding community that help shape his identity and spirituality, in a life that echoes the Gospel values. Therefore, Rowling deconstructs Western 'reality's' materialism and consumerism, rebuilding the readers 'reality' with the alternative ethos of the Gospels.

'Lived', Ganzevoort (2009) defines as the 'actions and meanings operant in the way humans live, interact and relate to the divine.' In other words, do people live out their lives in a Christ-like manner on a daily basis? Miller-McLemore (2012c: 123), points out that it is also very important when researching and interpreting the 'lived' that the 'values of the lived' are focused on, and this, as she points out, is not always an easy task. 'Practical theology has relevance for everyday faith and life or it has little meaning at all' (Miller-McLemore 2012b: 7). This means, that religion/faith need to be experienced and lived out on some level every day to have actual/practical/ transformational impact in daily living. In essence, this is about putting into practice, each day, the ethos that a person values and sometimes using these values to overcome daily difficulties, or embrace joys at certain periods in a person's or a community's life. What is important

to Ganzevoort (2009) in the term 'religion' is that the focus is placed on the praxis or it could not be part of practical theology. Therefore, it is in line with what Miller-McLemore says about lived theology having relevance in how the living out of religion each day takes place, no matter how small the gesture.

Ganzevoort (2009) also goes on to discuss how no text that is created is 'without ideas or praxis behind it, in it and evoked by it; no idea without sources and repercussions in praxis; nor, praxis without sources and inherent ideas.' This is true for the *Harry Potter* series, as the series did not come out of nowhere. When Rowling's mother died at a young age, Rowling sank into deep depression. Rowling had started dabbling with writing the *Harry Potter* series, but continued to write as a way of coping with the loss of her mother. Rowling acknowledges that either the series would never have been completed, or the spiritual quest of love and death on which the series became so focused would not have been the core issue of the series, had it not been for the death of her mother.<sup>6</sup> Rowling used the values of the Gospel that she had grown up with, and still follows, to work her way through her ultimate journey. Rowling's spiritual quest for love and how to deal with the death of a loved one are addressed in Chapter 4.

'Religion', explains Ganzevoort (2009), is closely related to the sacred; he defines religion as 'the transcending patterns of action and meaning embedded in and contributing to the relation with the sacred.' Practical theology, insists Ganzevoort (2009), whether studied from the phenomenon of a certain subject or theologically reflected upon as a phenomenon, always focuses on religion. Miller-McLemore (2012c: 143) elaborates that religion is studied 'at the point where human suffering evokes or calls for a religious response and sometimes at the point where a religious response is given and or experienced.' These experiences are ones that help a person

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.oprah.com/>

transform, and or answer an ultimate question that may have an effect on how a person values life after this experience. This also goes back to Heimbrock's (2005: 287–288) point of lived theology being in line with the Gospel message of 'salvation, wholeness and brokenness.'

Gräb (2012: 84) calls for an understanding of 'religion' that 'will give practical theology the chance to show—even in church activities—how people beyond the church can relate in and to a Christian–religious view of world and life.' In other words religion, or the experience of religion, does not stop in the Church, but goes beyond and into the world, having an effect in shaping people's identities and spiritualities, and ultimately on how they choose to express their values each day.

### **2.2.2.1 People's search for the ultimate questions and the living out of religion within their socio-cultural 'realities'**

As was indicated above, the Church and the Gospels have lost sacred meaning for many people in Western society and this is especially so for kids in society, as a result of secularization (Eaude 2012: 121). However, even though institutional religion has lost its meaning in much of the Western socio-cultural environment, there is a return to religion/the *sacred*, through other means, to provide a sacred canopy in a post-secular world (Oelschlaeger 1994: 85). Hence people locate meaning for their lives in places where they can identify their questions and answers. Religion has never quite disappeared because:

social communication can't do without recourse to entirety, totality, wholeness. Single issues only make sense with reference to some whole that connects them to one another. Individually, we are unable to comprehend the totality of something as vast as 'the universe' in our limited, individual experiences; we can't even process the totality of our own lives (Gräb 2012: 86).

The *sacred*/religion is a phenomenon that helps people give ultimate meaning to the existential problems they face daily. These are issues that people can share in and even face together (as a community, instead of an isolated individual) and are, therefore, experienced by humanity as a whole (Berger 1967:37). In this way people form social order, in what would otherwise be a chaotic and meaningless experience of their world. He goes on to argue (Berger 1967:51) that it is religion/or the *sacred* that supports social order; 'a sacred cosmos that will be capable of maintaining itself in the ever-present face of chaos' (Berger 1967: 51); a *sacred* canopy where hope and social order can be sought. People construct socio-cultural 'realities' through language and narrative (Berger & Luckmann 1966: 195). People's 'realities' are co-constructed through the dialectic between their personal experiences and the world in which they live; they experience the need to understand the ultimate questions, seeking to find the answers for their existence and the purpose of their lives. These ultimate questions can be sought and accessed through story. These stories are referred to as *sacred* and are made up of human beings' understanding of their 'sense of self' within their socio-cultural context (Crites 1989: 69-72).

Human experiences that have *sacred* story lines threaded through them influence the formation of people's identities and spiritualities. *Sacred* stories are the *sacred* canopies where people feel a sense of belonging to / being in a place of comfort where they can construct and explore answers to the ultimate questions, such as, Who am I? Why am I here? How did I get here? Where am I going? (The social construction of identity, and spirituality, along with *sacred* stories, is addressed in Chapter 3).

The Gospels, Heimbrock (2005: 274) points out, are also *sacred* narratives / expressions of people's experiences of the *sacred*. In other words, these documents are the social construction of reality experienced by a certain people in a particular socio-cultural context and time; they constitute the

*sacred* canopy that was created to answer those people's ultimate questions that they were confronted by and grappled with day by day. The Gospels are, therefore, the lived theology of people from another time and era, with a different socio-culture, embraced by those who live in a Western world today. However, the ultimate questions of, Who am I? Why am I here? How did I get here? Where am I going? remain the same through time. Although it may be difficult for people to understand the Gospels, when put in another context, for example, in the fantasy genre, the Gospel message can be lived out daily by people in an era where values may seem far from those of the Gospel message. Just as the *Harry Potter* series may be regarded as an expression of concern for the effect of the Western dominant discourse taking place today, with the proposed alternative story based on the Christ discourse; so too, were the Gospels written as a social comment on the dominant discourses of their particular era.

An example of kids seeking religion/spirituality (ultimate concerns), and living out religion day by day is evidenced in the research by Tracey (2010: 65-71). Tracey (2010: 65-71) set up an undergraduate course called *Spirituality and Rites of Passage*, in order to understand what it is that young adults understand by the term 'spirituality'. There were 150 students in the class, who ranged from 19 to 24 years and represented 80 percent of the student body. Most of these students had no religious background or affiliation. Tracey's (2010: 65-71) course revealed the following as regards young adults' spirituality: These students were searching for spirituality outside of established religion; they were not anti-religious, but most came from families (sometimes three generations), that had been 'secular, humanist or atheist' (2010: 67). In other words, they knew nothing of religion except for exposure to it through the media. When formal religion makes headlines, it is usually 'when bad or atrocious things have been committed' (Tracey 2010: 67). Therefore, while not being anti-religious, these students did not hold a very good opinion of formal religion either. Tracey (2010: 67),

calls these students 'pre-religious' or 'pre-theological' as they have 'felt the inward stirrings of the spirit', but they have not had the opportunity to relate these stirrings to any particular culture, religion or tradition. These students, explains Tracey (2010: 67), stand 'naked before the numinous realm they seek'. When the students were questioned as to why they wished to attend the course, most answered that they were searching for a meaning to life or a deeper kind of truth. 'They talk about meaning as if it were a precious commodity, as if society does not possess meaning, or if it does, they are not aware of it' (Tracey 2010: 67). The student's awareness of absence of meaning not only in their lives, but also in society, is what led them to want to attend this course. Tracey continues, saying that he was 'delighted' to hear this, as most often, 'great mystics and visionaries' sought spiritual truth not because 'they felt God's presence, but on the contrary, because they sensed God's absence' (Tracey 2010: 67). This case study supports the idea that people never stop seeking for the meaning of life daily, as they cannot make sense of their lives without the continuous seeking of answers to the ultimate questions. The abovementioned study also strengthens the notion that people will seek for answers to their ultimate concerns within their socio-cultural world, when they cannot find/connect to formal religious institutions. Seeking is a vital part of kids' 'meaning-making', a tool to help them on their quest for the ultimate questions (Hyde 2008: 123).

There is also, as Eade (2012: 121) points out, a 'growing emphasis on both choice and accountability.' This pertains to the choices we make, and how they affect us and, those around us. We are part of a community and on some level, our actions have consequences within that community, whether big or small. The Christ discourse, which is presented as a choice by some writers, resonates in narratives, such as in fantasy novels (Tolkien and Lewis being the two most prominent writers in the genre – these two writers are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4), works of art, films and

other media, which often place emphasis on the choices people make, and on if, how and when they are accountable for their actions.

In the last sixteen years this particular series has been a phenomenon amongst many other fantasy series written for adolescents, with its two parallel worlds: the one being similar to the Western world and the other containing glimpses of the Gospel message, where the protagonists worry and think about the consequences of their actions. Phenomena such as the *Harry Potter* series sometimes 'take churches... by surprise', comments Heimbrock (2010:120), as the Church's interpretation of the Gospels is re-interpreted from outside the Church. But, this does not mean that it is a 'bad' thing; rather, as was said above, practical theologians need to adjust their research.

#### **2.2.2.2 Lived theology in the fantasy genre**

Rowling is a contemporary author, who, like her predecessors, Tolkien and Lewis, chooses to use the Christ discourse to make a social comment on Western society's choice to be seduced by materialism/consumerism. The *Harry Potter* series is Rowling's expression of the *sacred/divine*, a personal exploration of the trauma of death and the choice to choose the love of a Christ-like community over material gain and social status. Although Rowling makes social comments about the disturbing effects that materialism/consumerism have on people's identity and spirituality, kids love the series. Rowling, it was reported, seems to have accomplished the impossible: not only did she get kids reading<sup>7</sup>, but most of these kids stuck to the series for the decade it took Rowling to write it (this point is expanded in Chapter 4).

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.timesnews.net/article.php?id=9015235>



This thesis is a literary analysis of the *Harry Potter* series, sifting through the narrative to discover where traces of the Gospel can be glimpsed, and how the values of the Gospels might have an effect on the identities and spiritualities of those kids who read these stories frequently. These *sacred* experiences may then be expressed within their ‘world-views’, which may clash with the ‘world-views’ of their socio-cultural ‘reality’. Consequently they are placed in a position where they are exposed to the problem discourse of their ‘reality’ and realize that they have a choice of where to place their values (values such as love, fellowship and so on). This ability to choose, observes Heimbrock (2010:129), plays a vital role in the application and participation of people searching for answers to the ultimate questions that may ‘shape their life in a meaningful way. A civilized culture needs individuals who have developed ways of expressing and communicating their emotions, who are sensitive to the trans-rational, who have a language for their deepest longings and anxieties and for the encounters with the beautiful and the uncanny.’

Fantasy narratives, as discussed in Chapter 4, through their magical worlds may illustrate to kids, via the imagination, that, for example, anxiety is experienced by many and not them alone, as adolescents often feel that no one understands them (Chapter 3). Fantasy illustrates to kids that the ‘beautiful and uncanny’ can be a way to experience the *sacred*. Fantasy opens a space for kids where the ‘beautiful and uncanny’ may be experienced in friendship and community and not merely in material goods. Fantasy reveals to kids that the *sacred* does not necessarily just come from prayer or the Church and the Gospels, which kids may perceive as too unfamiliar or too austere, compared to their Western socio-cultural world, where in many instances anything goes, from clothing to behaviour.

According to Eade (2006:17) spiritual development ‘concerns itself with what is most important about ourselves as people’, and fantasy novels open

up spaces of the imagination for kids to explore their spiritual selves. Heimbrock (2010:129) insists that the search for the *sacred* in everyday life be an 'open-ended' quest. As a result this allows room for kids to develop their identities and spiritualities by re-reading their favorite fantasies, such as the *Harry Potter* series, at different stages of their lives. It allows them further insights and answers as they mature and experience life with all its ups and downs (Chapter 3 discusses Ricoeur's understanding of reading narrative). Consequently when for example, a kid reads the series for the first time they may not have experienced the loss of a loved one through death as Harry has. The kid may identify with many other aspects of the series and even experience transcendence through another aspect of the novel. But, in reading the series a few years later, the kid, now perhaps an adult, will be able to identify with Harry's loss through their own experiences of personal loss, and experience what Rowling offers as her expression of loss: a deeper spiritual meaning that may culminate in transformation.

As there is a decline in the number of youth taking part in congregational life, Osmer and Schweitzer (2003: xviii) reflect on where kids will come across the 'ethos through which they will acquire the intellectual and moral virtues of a Christian life.' By ethos, Osmer and Schweitzer (2003: xviii) mean an ethic that is symbolized within the community in which they live. In reading the *Harry Potter* series, kids have the opportunity to experience the *sacred* story of the Gospel within the wizarding community versus the values of the *sacred* story of Western consumerism/materialism. The ethos of the wizarding world of the *Harry Potter* series is made up of the *sacred* canopy of norms and values that evokes the Christ discourse, which rejects materialism, status and social judgment, embracing brokenness, community, transformation and salvation. The ethos of the Christ discourse is in total contrast to the ethos of Western consumerism/materialism and its *sacred* canopy of status, value of material goods and the desire to impress one's society. In essence, the *Harry Potter* series allows kids to step into an

alternative world where they can acquire the ethos that Osmer and Shweitzer (2003: xviii) describe.

Ethos/normativity, transformational aspects of religion and transcendence are the prominent features of lived theology/religion. Practical theology, according to Miller-McLemore, and Gräb, should have a normative and, or transformative role to play within society. Miller-McLemore (2012c:111) explains that she considers '*theological* as inclusive of but ultimately more than the *normative* (e.g., ethics and prescription). *Theological* includes something of the *transformative* and transcendent.' The transcendent cannot be observed, but is sometimes captured and glimpsed in *sacred* stories.

### **2.2.2.3 Normativity**

Miller-McLemore (2012b: 25) states that practical theology *is* normative and therefore, asks of those who practice Christianity to live by the 'sacred and the transcendent': normativity facilitates religious communities developing and transforming in Christ (fellowship, love and so forth). Therefore, the normative, in the *Harry Potter* series, should go beyond the ethical to inspire kids to choose to surpass their consumerist identities that are bound to the material, and help them understand the *sacred* identity of fellowship and love of the community.

Miller-McLemore (2012c:111) makes it clear that the normative role of theology is an important one within the field of practical theology, but highlights the importance of transformation, that involves glimpses of God in a person's everyday life. In choosing to transform through the glimpses of the Christ discourses from everyday sources, like the *Harry Potter* series, that are alternative to the destructive dominant discourse of everyday life, such as consumerism/materialism, a person chooses to live in accordance

with the values of the Gospels' message. Heimbrock (2005:292) points out that, 'everyday life is not neutral or random in terms of values and structures of order.' Therefore, people choose how they live out their everyday life, and this is evident in their actions towards one another. Ganzevoort (2009), on the other hand, seeks to understand lived religion's 'intrinsic normativity', as it is normativity that strives towards a more satisfactory spiritual life.

The *Harry Potter* series has an 'intrinsic normativity' in its alternative *sacred* story that strives towards a deeper spirituality through a community (wizarding) that includes the Christ discourse in their everyday life actions towards one another. These actions in themselves may be of a *sacred* nature, for example when showing another person kindness, friendship and love (normativity). As Miller-McLemore (2012b: 25) points out, 'practical theology is normative. It makes demands on those who practice it to live by the *sacred* and transcendent convictions it professes.' And it takes courage to practice one's convictions on a daily basis, within a socio-cultural world where a person's convictions may not be seen as the norm.

#### **2.2.2.4 Transformation and transcendence**

As discussed above, Miller-McLemore (2012c:111) explains that theology is innately normative, but insists that theology must also be transformational and transcendent for it to have *sacred* meaning. This thesis attempts to illustrate the way in which a person can encounter the opportunity for transformation from their reading of the fantasy genre. This is a chance to experience the *sacred* in an otherwise ordinary day, whereas Miller-McLemore (2012b: 7) points out, religion/*sacred* may be irrelevant, if not experienced on some level each day.

Many fantasy novel authors (Chapter 4) use the Christ discourse in their alternative worlds, juxtaposing it with a dominant discourse that they

consider to be destructive to people's identities and spiritualities. Fantasy writers hope to help make people fully aware of these destructive discourses and to show people that they have a choice not to follow these discourses. Here, the focus is placed on what Loder (1981: 131) terms 'transformational narrative'. A transformational narrative is a narrative that 'moves from an initial lack, loss, or dilemma into a gain over the original conditions' (Loder 1981: 131-132). These are usually narratives that answer the ultimate questions of Who?, Why?, and What?, that may allow a person to grow (in identity and spirituality), and which provide the reader with another way of living. Kids need to 'construct a lived and livable world', that makes up 'the dynamic core of what it means to be a person' (Loder 1998: 89). In other words, by constructing meaningful spiritualities from a young age, kids will then be more open to develop their spiritual identity, and question/break away from the limitations of the dominant discourses that may hinder their spiritual development as they grow older.

Transformational narratives are innately hopeful; good (alternative *sacred* story) and order always overcomes evil/corruption (dominant discourse in 'reality'), no matter how chaotic and bad things seem at the beginning of these narratives. Loder (1981: 132) adds that because transformation is the primary task of these narratives, these are consequently also the narratives that are the basis by which people construct mythical worlds. These worlds possess an innate spiritual quality (*sacred* canopy) that Ganzevoort (2009), argues, leads people to experience a more adequate spiritual life, as was mentioned above: 'Thus fairy godmothers, genies, magic lamps, and the like all lend to folktales their spiritual quality, usually making it all turn out better for the hero than it ever was before' (Loder 1981: 132).

Transformational narratives, like the *Harry Potter* series, therefore, may help kids to competently grasp the possibility for transformation of living a life with different values from those offered by Western materialism or

consumerism, even though they may not have grasped the meaning of the Gospels. This particular narrative then becomes a significant bridging tool to the Gospels. Although all narratives come to an end, their transformational abilities remain with the reader, some becoming part of their identity and spirituality for a lifetime (Chapter 3).

Normativity, transformation and transcendence are the key characteristics of the *Harry Potter* series, which therefore contains a strong link to lived theology. As indicated earlier, reading can be another way to find ways of expressing and living out the *sacred*/religion, in daily existence.

### **2.3 The lived theology of the *Harry Potter* series**

Heimbrock's (2005: 287), questions on researching 'living religion' will be applied here to see how the phenomenon of *Harry Potter* can be considered as lived theology.

- 1. How and where people feel deeply at home?**
- 2. How and where they experience fascination?**
- 3. When and in what ways they experience deep yearnings to belong to something and / or desire to express freely their sense of belonging?**
- 4. How and when they feel a sense of estrangement?**

The 'cultural-hermeneutic' of the *Harry Potter* series phenomenon is worthy of critical analysis, for the reasons mentioned. The alternative *sacred* discourse presented by Rowling may allow the reader to experience transformation and the possibility of choosing to follow the ethos offered by the series. People look for answers for the ultimate questions in their socio-cultural worlds, and by doing so they extend the boundaries where the *sacred* can be experienced. The *Harry Potter* series is one such socio-cultural phenomenon.

The above questions were adapted to interrogate the series, as follows:

### **2.3.1 When and why people may have a sense of estrangement from the Church and the Bible?**

As was said above, presently, people's quest for the *sacred* is being sought outside the Church, either because of secularization or a loss of trust in organized religion, and difficulties in identifying with the people and socio-cultural context of the Bible. People are more open to *sacred* experiences that are not bound to 'formal religion', and have become more aware of what choices they make and the consequences of their actions. They consequently create alternative *sacred* canopies under which they can dwell to search for ultimate meaning. As was also said above, even though these *sacred* experiences are not 'traditional church theology', they satisfy people's *sacred* needs, and therefore need to be paid attention to, so as to understand how these experiences may shape people's understanding of the *sacred*/divine (Gräb 2012:81).

### 2.3.2 Why people may experience fascination with the *Harry Potter* series?

The *Harry Potter* series challenges kids' materialistic image of themselves and the world they live in. Western society puts so much value on material goods and on the need for kids to possess these items to fit in this world and for their peers to like them. This, however, does not seem to discourage kids from the series. Kids seem to be fascinated by a wizarding community some of whose members are willing to sacrifice their lives for their friends, their community and their values. In the wizarding world kids are allowed to experience being liked for who they are and not for what they possess. For many kids who are completely immersed in a secularized, Western materialistic upbringing, it may be fascinating to encounter the possibility that there may actually be people out there in their 'realities' who may like one for who one is.

As this series developed out of Rowling's personal experience of loss, the series contains a deep *sacred* search for the ultimate questions of fellowship, love, sacrifice and death. Rowling deals with these issues in an honest manner, without always making excuses or trying to make it better, but choosing to question and find some answers through her experiences. This may fascinate kids who have been through similar experiences and may not have always received an honest answer, or may feel too confused to know where to start the process of healing. By using the Gospel message of 'salvation, wholeness and brokenness', Rowling gives them a starting point that is part of a 'reality' which is alternative to the shallow realities in which many kids live. This search for ultimate questions within the framework of the Gospel ethos, then becomes lived religion, and may serve to transform a kid's identity and spirituality.



### **2.3.3 Why people may experience a free sense of belonging to the *Harry Potter* world?**

The teenage characters of Harry, Ron and Hermione are wizards in training. However, they are also easy for kids to identify with, as Western teenagers. These three characters may challenge kids 'realities' through the Christ discourse and the Christ-like values they hold dear. Rowling has them experience all of the challenges of adolescents, from the awkwardness of having to deal with the opposite sex, to feeling alone and misunderstood. Kids feel a sense of belonging when they can identify with characters that seem so like themselves. Rowling presents some of these scenarios in a comical way (Ron's and Harry's inability to understand girls), while other scenarios are accorded full respect and understanding: Harry's need to belong and be loved by someone, for who he is; until the age of eleven the Dursleys had not ever been kind to Harry, or indeed liked him, let alone loved him. Harry only experiences being truly cared for when he goes to stay with the Weasleys over the holidays. In the wizarding world, Harry's identity is elevated to that of friend and brother, instead of the burden he is made to feel he is in the 'Muggle' world.

### **2.3.4 Where and why people may feel deeply at home with *Harry Potter's* world?**

Rowling draws kids into the narrative of the series through her ability to cause them to identify with the decisions/actions carried out by characters of the series. These may make Harry, Ron and Hermione unpopular or marginalized in their social context for their beliefs. Kids feel at home where they can identify with characters like themselves and read about how the latter may handle similar situations to the ones they need to face and handle on a daily basis. Rowling demonstrates to the reader that there are values more valuable in life than objects of desire. Rowling, like many other fantasy

writers, as said above, re-interprets the Gospels through the lens of the fantasy genre, putting the Gospels in a context that is more easily understood by kids. She shows how characters such as Professor Dumbledore and Professor Snape do not compromise their love, or fellowship of their community, to save themselves. These characters are prepared to sacrifice themselves to protect their values, over fear of powerful corrupt individuals or material gain. Rowling does not present any of the characters as flawless people, each having made mistakes that they later regret. Some of these mistakes have cost others their lives or have brought about dire consequences through their selfish actions. Through these characters, the reader experiences the difficulty of confession, forgiveness, humility and the consequent joy of liberation experienced by the character. Therefore, because Rowling threads her narrative with glimpses of the Gospels, which are innately normative, the reader may be transformed through the glimpses of the Gospel, because these serve as the alternative *sacred* story to the *one* with which they are usually confronted.

As indicated, it is with the wizarding family, the Weasleys, that Harry learns what it is like to be truly cared for and illustrates to readers how, each day, they care for those in their wizarding community who are not accepted by others. Like Christ, they take in those whom their society may deem as undesirable/worthless, embracing them as family, not worrying about the effect on their socio-cultural reputation/image. These values serve to demonstrate that the *Harry Potter* series is lived theology. This is further explored in Chapter 4.

As the *Harry Potter* series has the Christ discourse threaded in its alternative/*sacred* story, it allows the reader glimpses of the values of the Gospels from an everyday perspective and that makes the series function as lived theology. In other words, some of the characters from the wizarding

world live out, day by day, values from the Gospels, no matter how hard a situation may be. These situations are impregnated with ethos (being normative) and create the possibility of transformation and transcendence; therefore, they serve as examples of lived theology for the reader, who may then carry these experiences into their 'realities'.

## 2.4 An overview

The characteristics of lived theology are transformation, transcendence and normativity, from sources that are outside of the Church and the Gospels, but include and express the values of the Gospels. These characteristics, with a particular focus on the first two, are the core of daily living out, in some way the *sacred*/religion. The *Harry Potter* series is an example of a literary fantasy work that is lived theology, and is a form of religion outside of the Church and the Gospels, with glimpses of the Gospels (innately normative) ethos with the Christ discourse (holds the possibility for the choice of transformation). Therefore, I would argue that the *Harry Potter* series is a phenomenon that may have a remarkable impact on kid's lives; that opens up the way for them to experience deeper spiritual meaning and even spiritual fulfilment, where some of their ultimate questions are addressed and meaningful choices are given to answer these questions. Through their imagination, they are challenged to reconsider their values and are allowed to know what it could be like in their 'reality' to choose to live transformed lives in fellowship, love and community.

The series is also a phenomenon in that it has made an impression on kids who were not reading much/not at all before the series, and who placed their values in the dominant *sacred* story of their Western socio-cultural world of materialism/consumerism. The alternative story points out to kids the damage thereby done to their identity and spirituality over a lifetime, through the different characters' experiences over several books. Since the

series is rooted in the Christian ethos, it is important to understand the transformative spiritual effect it may have on kids in a consumerist/materialistic society.

Practical theology seeks to respond to the shift in the socio-cultural world in which people live out their lives. Although they may not feel drawn to the Church or the Gospels in a secularized Western society, this does not mean that they have stopped being spiritual/religious or have stopped asking and seeking answers to the ultimate questions. They are now seeking ultimate answers, from alternative and creative places, that put them in a position to re-think their present values and ideals.

From the perspective of lived theology the understanding of how people utilize and experience the *sacred* (especially from a Christian perspective) outside the Church and the Gospels is essential. Practical theology seeks to understand how people live out their religious/*sacred* practices in a meaningful way on a daily basis, even if it is in a small way, and also seeks to understand how these experiences with lived theology may affect practical theology. Lived theology needs to be experienced everyday to be relevant to practical theology, through people's practices, actions towards others in their society and the personal *sacred* experiences they may have that affect their identity and spirituality.

## CHAPTER 3:

### **Alternative identities through the choices created by alternative worlds in narratives**

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#### **3.1 Introduction**

This study argues that the *Harry Potter* series has become an important narrative source in the social construction of Western kid's identities and spiritualities. The *Harry Potter* series as an important narrative source with which kids can construct their identity, harbours a Christ discourse. As discussed in the previous chapter, this implicit discourse may be interpreted as a form of lived theology. Kids who read the series are thus exposed to the implicit discourse which, directly or indirectly, influences the way they perceive themselves and the world. The said discourse plays a normative role with regard to these kids' identity, challenging them to make the choice of either living in the 'Muggle' world or opting for the alternative: the magical/wizarding world of Harry and his friends. Therefore, in so choosing, kids may be living out the Christian values (lived theology) of the series on a daily basis without even realizing that these values are from the Christ discourse. In this chapter, it is argued, narratives, and particularly the reading of them, play an essential role in the construction of identity and thus spirituality, specifically for kids.

In Chapter 4, I argue that reading fantasy narratives, in this case the *Harry Potter* series, may play a vital role in allowing kids to develop alternative identities and spiritualities, by choosing to transform their identities and spiritualities that are consciously lived out day by day. They are thus enabled to choose who they want to be, through the options offered by Rowling: the choice to follow what the consumerist West (the global market)

dictates makes a person happy or the alternative, that is, choosing to be a person who lives according to different values (discussed in detail in Chapter 5). Therefore, the *Harry Potter* series, with its alternative worldview, is lived theology, as understood and interpreted in the previous chapter, and may be used as a transforming ministering tool to counter the Western consumerist worldview with its dehumanizing effects on people. The alternative values that Rowling illustrates through the series may be compared to the core values of the Gospel. Hence, it is argued that the *Harry Potter* series has the ability to help kids identify with these values and seek to shape their identity and spirituality accordingly. Rowling's offering of an alternative identity and spirituality is in total opposition the dominant identity and spirituality of Western consumerism (Chapter 2), which Rumscheidt (1998: 5), describes as follows: 'In interpersonal, international, and intercontinental relationships, people are reduced to being either customers or products.' The *Harry Potter* series has been enormously popular with kids. One of the many reasons that it has been so popular is that kids can easily identify, with not only the characters but also the two parallel worlds that Rowling has created.

Although the worlds Rowling creates are highly imaginative, they retain many features from our own world, allowing kids to 'feel at home' in the *Harry Potter* world. In other words, these books speak the same language as kids do, from many perspectives. Examples of kids easily identifying with the *Harry Potter* world are: the teenage characters, who are so like kids in a Western society, the school set-up (although magical, the peer dynamics are exactly the same), the way parents, both 'Muggles' and wizards, interact with their kids, to name but a few examples. As previously pointed out, this is not always so with regard to the Gospels. Kids find it hard to identify with characters who do not speak the same language as they do, or wear the same clothes as them, or live in the same social frameworks as they do. The underlying storyline of the *Harry Potter* series can be compared to the

narrative of Christ as depicted in the Gospels (discussed in detail in Chapter 4). In other words, since the *Harry Potter* series is lived theology, it may have the ability to become not only a transformative ministering tool, but also a bridging ministry tool to help expose kids to the sacred story of Christ, in a language with which they can readily identify. As Gerkin (1997:91) points out, to offer pastoral care, the pastor needs to have the ‘capacity to listen and the capacity to observe.’ If a pastor were really to listen and observe kids, he/she would hear and see how many kids enjoy the *Harry Potter* series, and how the series is transforming kids’ lives, as discussed in detail below.

The *Harry Potter* series offers pastoral ministers and youth workers the opportunity to make kids aware of the dominant culture of the ‘global market’ in which they are being raised (with all the pressure this exerts on people), and then to make them aware, through the series, that there is an alternative lifestyle they can choose to live by. As was said above, Rowling’s series has the *sacred* story of the Christ discourse woven into its narrative, but has not attached this *sacred* discourse to any particular institutionalized or denominational tradition. Rather, it uses Christ’s human actions of love, sacrifice and death, through some of her characters’ actions, to tell her story.

The argument of this chapter is as follows:

1. Language poetically creates the world we live in and thus ‘our’ world is dependent on the social-cultural-linguistic community we are part of. We live in this created world, focusing on Heidegger’s idea that language is the House of Being. But, this world is ever changing and evolving to keep up with the advances and experiences of its inhabitants. In a global world where various cultures and languages are interconnected and one is exposed to other ‘worlds’, sometimes having to live in different worlds

with their various demands and expectations of the individual (character and identity), causes the person to feel fragmented. For example, kids are expected to act one way in their 'home-family-world', and then in another way within their 'school-world', and in yet another way within their 'teen-culture-world'. Therefore, kids exhibit different characters in different worlds, depending on which role they have to perform. In a 'global village' where there is more and more fragmentation of society taking place, people feel misplaced, causing individuals social and personal problems (Gerkin 1997: 101).

2. The individual relates to this created world by means of a dialectic as the world is continuously socially constructed. This dialectic between the individual and society results in an ebb and flow between the individual and society, as both are created through one another. This is consequently the basis of how the individual socially constructs reality.

3. Within the dialectic that the individual conducts with society, narrative plays an essentially important role in the construction of the social-individual world and particularly in the construction of personal identity in that world. The individual interacts (dialectically) with the socially constructed world and narrates her/his story in an attempt to define her/his identity in dialogue with the community/society's narrative. Although the individual lives out various identities (depending in which world they are in), there is the common dominant narrative, that is, the narrative of the capitalist/consumer, which to a large extent defines the individual within a Western capitalist world. This narrative, to a large extent, determines the kids' 'home-family world', 'school-world' and the 'teen-culture-world'. For example, it determines the 'home-family-world' as either a working class family, a middle class family or an upper class family. Therefore, although the kid occupies various worlds, these



worlds are all embedded in the prevailing narrative of the Western capitalist world.

4. It is within this dialectic of the social construction of reality that the individual constructs her/his identity, through the use of narrative.

5. Part of this language-world, which, according to Heidegger, is made up of the Fourfold (*Geviert*), is the divine. These are the *sacred* stories that provide us with the ultimate meaning of our lives.

6. Thus to construct our identities we use the *mundane* stories (narratives of our culture, the stories we hear from early childhood, both stories and real life experiences), but embedded within a dominant *sacred* narrative. The *sacred* narrative offers the ultimate reference for the *mundane* stories. The ultimate meaning for the great questions, the *sacred* narrative, is the founding myth (primal fantasy) that explains why things are the way they are.

7. It is argued that in contemporary Western culture, the dominant *sacred* narrative is capitalism, with its various fantasies. This *sacred* narrative influences the *mundane* stories through which we create our identities and of course, our spiritualities. Thus, the product of an individual social construction of identity in a Western capitalist consumer society is: I am a consumer (that is my identity) which Rowling depicts as 'Muggles', her primary example being the Dursleys. Rowling proposes an alternative to this 'Muggle' identity: the wizarding world and the Weasleys being her primary example.

8. The wizarding world is both good and evil, and many aspects of it are no different to the 'Muggle' world. Nevertheless, Rowling places great emphasis on an alternative way to live: a different world-view. This is a

direct challenge to the ‘Muggle’ world-view and sometimes even to those who live in the wizarding world; for example, the Malfoys. Rowling continuously challenges her protagonists to make choices between the two worlds and how they choose to live their lives. These choices between the different worlds, where different *sacred* stories reign (the ‘Muggle’ world where one seeks to live like the ‘Jones’ vs. the wizarding world and the Order of the Phoenix, who are prepared to die to save their community from being destroyed by Voldemort) already echo the choices of the early church: Caesar vs. Christ. In Chapter 4, I explore this parallel between the choices Harry, Dumbledore and Snape make, and the choice of the church by examining the similarities between the alternative world-view of the *Harry Potter* series and the alternative world-view that has the Christ event as its founding narrative, as *sacred* narrative. I then describe Meylahn’s discourse of Christ, which is in essence a redemptive alternative way of existence and one that is closely echoed by Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series. Meylahn’s discourse stems from an interpretation of Lacan’s theory of the four discourses, to offer a narrative space for a discourse of Christ, which is vulnerable to our present reality and not bound to traditions and values. Although Harry is not a Christ figure, as discussed in Chapter 4, his actions, along with some of the other characters’ actions, echo Christ’s actions towards and for humanity. Also, as pointed out above, Rowling has not bound the series to any tradition or religion. I use Meylahn’s discourse of a wounded Christ as a hermeneutical tool to interpret the *Harry Potter* series from a pastoral theological point of view in Chapter 4.

### **3.2 How human beings create their world and construct identity through language and narrative**

In this section I discuss how human beings construct their identities and thus their spiritualities, through narrative. This is subsequently used to show

how kids cope in their social context to form their identity in a Western consumerist society. Rowling, in the *Harry Potter* series, challenges her protagonists with the choices she puts before them, and through these protagonists she challenges the readers. As most of the readers are kids who live in a Western consumerist society, Rowling is challenging them to question their consumerist/materialistic identities and spiritualities. This discussion is important to this study, as the lived theology of the *Harry Potter* series has become part of the cultural and social context of youth culture; since it is in opposition to the dominant discourse of the West's obsession with what a person owns, it is essential to research how kids may face this challenge. Here, Heidegger's (1993: 351) Fourfold (*Geviert*) will be discussed to show how people create their world through language, along with Berger and Luckmann's (1966: 195) explanation of how people use their socio-cultural context to develop identity, and Crites' (1989: 69-72) *sacred* and *mundane* stories that people use to explain their world and answer their ultimate questions. Thereafter, Heidegger is engaged in conversation with Berger, Luckmann and Crites to understand how the socio-cultural context (which includes sacred and mundane stories) of a Fourfold is created and shaped by people, and how, in turn, this created world shapes who people are.

### 3.2.1 Heidegger's 'Fourfold'

The world in which we live is created through language, 'because everything is language' (Meylahn 2010: 2). Meylahn (2010: 2) interprets Heidegger's understanding of language, as language opening up a 'realm of our being'. This realm consequently becomes a dwelling place where individuals reside: the House of Being (Heidegger 1971: 130). Therefore, language creates the world. The created (socially-constructed) world, Heidegger argues, is made up of the Fourfold (*Geviert*): earth, sky, gods and mortals. 'But on 'on earth' already means 'under the sky'. Both of these also mean

‘remaining before the divinities’ and include a ‘belonging to men’s being with one another.’ By a primal oneness, the four: earth and sky, divinities and mortals, belong together in one’ (Heidegger 1993: 351). Hence, we dwell on earth, under the sky with each other (mortal), and stand before/answer to divinities (that we have created through story). Within the Fourfold, it is language that summons the ‘things’ of that world. ‘The place of arrival which is also called in the calling is a presence sheltered in absence. The naming calls and bids things come into such an arrival. Bidding is inviting. It invites things, so they may bear upon men as things’ (Heidegger 1971: 199). Meylahn (2013: 67) argues that Heidegger’s summoning of ‘things’ into the created world can also be applied to narrative and provides the *Harry Potter* world as an example: ‘The place of arrival is the *world* of Harry Potter in which all the *things* called find their place and yet this world and all the things (characters, London, Hogwarts, etcetera) are near in that they are sheltered in absence’ (Meylahn 2013: 69). In the *Harry Potter* Fourfold (*Geviert*), all the things that exist within it are created through language into existence. But, says Meylahn (2013: 69), although the series is Rowling’s ‘creative expression’, it is not Rowling who is speaking to the reader, but the text.

It is the language of the text that speaks in that it names things (Hogwarts, Hogwarts Express, and etcetera) and in naming, the things named are called into their thinging, and in thinging they unfold a world in which the things abide. The text, through naming various things, creates a world in which these things find a home... The world of Harry Potter gives all the things their place and yet it is these very things that give birth to the world of Harry Potter. Both world and thing are called by speaking of the language...World and things belong together. The world of Harry Potter and the things of that world belong together (Meylahn 2013: 69).

Just as in poetry, where the poet pictures/imagines something that ‘*could*’ exist here and now, so too Rowling’s text co-constructs, with the reader’s

imagination, a world where her characters come to life for the reader (Meylahn 2013:68). 'The poem, as composed, images what is thus fashioned for our own act of imagining. In the poem's speaking the poetic imagination gives itself utterance' (Heidegger 1971:197). World and things cannot exist without each other: the world of *Harry Potter* is what it is, because of the things in it that make it the world it is. It is narrative that helps us place the things within the world and helps us understand and 'see' in our imaginations the dwelling place (Fourfold) of the 'Muggles' and the wizards.

### 3.2.2 Crites: *sacred* and *mundane* stories

Crites (1989: 69-72) theorizes how our dwelling place is made up of *mundane* and *sacred stories*. *Sacred* stories are stories that are deeply woven into cultures over a long period of time and form part of human beings' existence, their communities; these stories are without specific authors. 'Such stories, and the symbolic words they project, are not like monuments that men behold, but like dwelling places' (Crites 1989: 70). *Sacred* stories are therefore, expressions of human beings' 'sense of self'; human beings create their identities and their spiritualities through these stories.

*Mundane* stories are narratives that human beings tell one another; these include stories that are fictional. *Mundane* stories consist of the everydayness of our lives, and are often (consciously/subconsciously) embedded in *sacred* stories with ultimate realities. For example, the dominant Western consumerist *sacred* story is part of people's daily *mundane* stories: people continuously seek to buy things to be part of their world, where other people also possess the same things. These make them feel part of their world and give them some sense of belonging to this world. Both *sacred* and *mundane* stories are subject to change but, unlike

*mundane* stories that may be consciously changed, *sacred* stories cannot be altered by ‘conscious reflection’. *Sacred* and *mundane* stories are distinct but not separate: in some *mundane* stories ‘the sacred resonates. People are able to feel this resonance, because the unutterable stories are those they know best of all’ (Crites 1989: 71). Therefore, the hidden *sacred* story within the *mundane* story is accepted by human beings as a world view or *ultimate* sense. This world view or *ultimate* sense can be described as a *sacred* story that gives *ultimate* meaning to our lives. *Ultimate* meaning helps us answer the *ultimate* questions (who? why? how?) we keep asking; thus, *sacred* stories form the very core of our spirituality. Gerkin (1997: 228) explains that ‘ultimate truth’ is not rigid, but is rather ‘represented with faithfulness that is humble’, knowing that it may prove inadequate at some point in our life, making us re-examine certain aspects of this ‘ultimate truth’. Many stories have a *sacred* setting, with an alternative worldview that directly speaks to our spiritual selves through the *sacred*. However, none of these stories is rigid or all knowing; rather they keep motivating the individual to remain humble and keep questioning. The *Harry Potter* series echoes the *sacred* story of the Christ event (discussed in Chapter 4), that is woven in the series; although subtle, it nevertheless touches us, sometimes helping to transform our identities and thus spiritualities.

### 3.2.3 Berger and Luckmann: Society and identity formation

Identity formation is the development of our unique sense of self that is different from another person. Identity materializes from ‘the dialectic between individual and society’ (Berger & Luckmann 1966: 195). Individuals relate to this created world in which they dwell, through the dialectic between their personal language and the language of the world they live in, and thus co-construct (create) their world. This dialectic then forms the basis of how individuals construct their realities. The construction of an individual’s reality, in dialectic with the world/society, is how the individual

forms identity as they find their place within the constructed world. Berger and Luckmann (1969: 150) explain how people do not just ‘take over’ society from ‘autonomous creations’, but ‘take over’ the world from other people who already live in this created world. Children learn from their parents, gaining greater access to the world through their mother tongue. Nevertheless, as they engage with this world of their parents, they begin to shape, form and sometimes challenge this world, as their linguistic skills improve.

Part of this dialectic is the sacred/religion. The sacred/religion is ‘confronted by man as an immensely powerful reality other than himself. Yet, this reality addresses itself to him and locates his life in an ultimately meaningful order’ (Berger & Luckmann 1969: 35) (more discussion will follow below in section 3.7). In a chaotic world, it is the sacred that ‘domesticates’ the dangers of constant chaos and ‘its potency harnessed to the needs of everyday life’ (Berger 1969: 35). Once a human being knows how to behave in her/his social setting and begins to establish her/his identity, s/he then needs others in her/his society to identify her/him with that identity. This consequently becomes her/his *social identity* (Berger 1967: 37).

### **3.3 Heidegger in conversation with Berger, Luckmann and Crites**

Heidegger demonstrates how the world and all the things within the world are created through language. This created world is made up of the Fourfold: earth, sky, gods and mortals. Language calls, names and places all the things to unfold in this created world, in order to construct our dwelling place or House of Being (Heidegger 1971: 130). All of the above components are needed and must be present for the Fourfold to function as a whole. We understand how our dwelling place functions as a whole through narrative. As Crites (1989: 69-72) makes clear, by telling stories, both the *sacred* and the *mundane*, people socially and personally construct

order in their dwelling place, understand their position within their world and how to act towards others in this world to be accepted in it. The *sacred* stories within the *mundane* stories help by providing answers, even if they are not always adequate to answer our ultimate questions, to understand our 'sense of self' of who we want to be / who we are, in our dwelling place. This provides people with a sense of purpose, a meaning to their lives.

People are born into a particular Fourfold. Initially people assimilate the socio-cultural environment of their parents/guardians and this shapes their values and ideals. However, as people age they also assimilate outside influences into their identities, and this may change their identities by various degrees. Berger and Luckmann point out that it is this dialectic between the individual's language and the language of society that helps the individual co-construct their world. Construction of the dwelling place does not, therefore, take place in isolation.

One of the elements in the Fourfold, as Heidegger explains, is that of the gods (divinities), as focused on in this study. People, as Berger (1967: 51) has said, create a 'sacred canopy' (divine element) within the Fourfold that covers and protects people from the chaos of the world. This 'sacred canopy' with its ultimate stories, created through language, in the form of narrative is part of the construction of identity, and thus spirituality, in a dialectic with the Fourfold, and can only be justified and explained by and to people through more stories.

### **3.4 Understanding who we are through narrative**

It would be hard for human beings to understand their world if people did not continuously talk about everything and everyone, including themselves: 'Without repertoires of identification we would not be able to relate to each other meaningfully or consistently. We would not have that vital sense of



who's who and what's what. Without identity there could be no human world' (Jenkins 2006: 6-7). In other words, without continuous narrative, human identity could not exist. This conversation, as Burke (1973: 110-111), points out, began long before we were born and will continue long after we die. We enter into the conversation of 'what life is about', only after we have listened and understood it in our own way. As this conversation is about how to go about our life, and what is real to us, we all participate in the conversation to remain real to ourselves. Therefore, as long as human beings can continue to speak about themselves and their reality to other human beings, they can remain real to themselves, as well as those with whom they are conducting this conversation.

Society to a large extent determines how individuals will conduct their lives and shape their identities. People, says Lum (1982: 386), prefer to relate to people who are similar to themselves, as this maximizes their own identity. The narratives that we grow up listening to (stories our parents tell us about our culture and their personal experiences), and reading (fairytales and classics such as *Lord of the Rings* and *The Narnia Chronicles*, the folktales of the Brothers Grimm, all embedded in their own sacred stories and moral values), form part of this society that we 'take over' and internalize. *Harry Potter* has the ability to become such a classic, and to some extent, already has. Once a person internalizes this 'take over' process s/he may 'creatively modify' their understanding of society to form part of their unique being (Berger & Luckmann 1969: 150). Therefore, some people have already made the *Harry Potter* series a part of their unique being. Most importantly this process of 'internalization' serves for a person to understand others and their existence alongside her/him; because of this understanding a person can make her/his society her/his own (in a dialectic between her/his personal language and the language of the world she/he lives in). Here, reading plays a vital role, as through it, Lewis argued, 'scenes and imagery from books provide them [human beings] with a sort of iconographic by

which they interpret or sum up their own experiences' (Ryken 2002: 226)<sup>8</sup>. This may be linked to Meylahn's (2013: 68) understanding of how language and the reader's imagination can co-construct a world where, for example, Rowling's characters with all their daily problems come to life within their created world with all its 'things' for the reader. However, the reader not only experiences Rowling's imaginary world and characters, but also internalizes what Rowling's text has to say on personal experiences the characters may be confronting, that the reader may also be facing.

In as much as society influences the individual, so too, the individual influences and shapes society. Aldridge (2008: 6) indicates how human beings are not just 'playthings of social forces'; rather, they consciously create the society that they inhabit. As stated above by Burger and Luckmann, there is a continuous dialectic between society and the individual, resulting in both society and the individual influencing one another. As human beings have evolved over time, so too, has society evolved to keep up with its inhabitants. Society is no longer austere and uncompromising; instead, society has become like those who shape it: 'The might of society and its power over individuals now rests instead on its being 'un-pinpointable', on its evasiveness, versatility and volatility' (Bauman 2006: 52). In other words, especially in the West, where individualism has taken over from collectivism, society has been shaped in such a manner, by individuals, as to accommodate their need for anonymity and individuality.

Through reading, the kids enter the many-layered stories of the *Harry Potter* series and are allowed the opportunity to discover themselves through the texts' characters. In adopting some of their values, their actions and so on,

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<sup>8</sup> Although the references are from Ryken (2002), the quotes from C.S Lewis are direct and are included as viewpoints in Ryken's book.

the possibilities are numerous. As Waugh (2012)<sup>9</sup> observes, people who have the ability to ‘lose themselves’ in stories are also able to change their behaviour to mimic that of a beloved character. Researchers call this ‘experience-taking’; it was found that, although sometimes temporarily, some people experience this change. In another experiment by the same researchers (Waugh 2012), people who read about characters who were of a different race to them, or who had a different sexual orientation to them, showed a positive approach towards people who were different to them. Kaufman (Waugh 2012), who led the research, argued that ‘experience-taking’ changes us by allowing us to merge our lives with those of the characters we read about, which can lead to good outcomes. Stories, writes Crites (1975: 32), have the ability, in a subtle manner, to shape our ‘social and private experience’. The stories we read become part of the narrative resources that we use to understand and interpret our experiences in the world. The *Harry Potter* series has proven to be invaluable to kids, who are inspired not only to read the books, but also to write creatively about Hogwarts and its students as they ‘extend histories, characters and storylines’ of the series (Bond & Michelson 2003: 109).

Two surveys<sup>10</sup> conducted in 2006, one by *Scholastic*, and another by *Kids and Family Reading Report*, both indicated that kids between the ages of seven to seventeen were enthusiastic to read the *Harry Potter* series, with the latter report showing that 65% of that age group actually read the books. This percentage was double what it had been prior to the *Harry Potter* series, especially in boys, with children and young adults asking about other fantasy series of books by other authors.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2141131>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.timesnews.net/article.php?id=9015235>

Rowling has also created *Pottermore*<sup>11</sup>, 'a unique online reading experience' for readers of the 'digital generation' to have a safe place to participate, share, and rediscover the *Harry Potter* world. Rowling has created this website as a way to thank her fans (of all ages), who after sixteen years of Harry's existence still send her thousands of letters with inventive suggestions. *Pottermore* includes the reader (as the reader's imagination is a crucial tool to the story, says Rowling) in the story. Le Guin (2008)<sup>12</sup> points out that to read a story well, the person has to 'follow it, to act it, to feel it, to become it'; in short, 'reading is the actual collaboration with the writer's mind.' Rowling also gives extra information that she has been hoarding for years on the *Harry Potter* series world and characters. This shows how important creative work is, and how reading and writing, and even drawing, are effective agents of development (Bond & Michelson 2003: 109)<sup>13</sup>. Therefore, it appears that the *Harry Potter* series has the ability to capture and ignite kids' imaginations, revealing how they use their social and cultural context to construct, and further, their spirituality and identity. 'I, dare say that children who have heretofore never touched a book – children largely bereft of instruction in moral choice, the confrontation between good and evil, and the presence of Christian symbolism in the secular world and the realm of fantasy – have found in the Harry Potter books a wonderful challenging new world' (Auxentios 2010: 25). Nevertheless, the question of how human beings construct their identities from their social and cultural contexts remains.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.pottermore.com> is the website address of *Pottermore* and there one can also see a video recording of Rowling talking about this new website that she has created for her fans. For fans' drawings and input into *Pottermore* please see <http://insider.pottermore.com>, the blog for *Pottermore*.

<sup>12</sup> <http://harpers.org/archive/2008/02/0081907>

<sup>13</sup> Fan sites such as [www.mugglenet.com](http://www.mugglenet.com); [www.the-leaky-cauldron.org](http://www.the-leaky-cauldron.org); [www.harrypotterfanfiction.com](http://www.harrypotterfanfiction.com), are but a few examples of sites where fans send in drawings and stories pertaining to the many characters of the *Harry Potter* series. These stories are often about the relationships between the characters.

During the course of a lifetime, the identity of an individual will need to be explained or it may appear that the individual possesses more than one identity, yet be the same person. For example, a kid will behave differently at home, in her/his class set-up and with her/his friends. This fragmentation of the kid's personhood may bother her/him and the struggle with her/his narrative to be one person to themselves. Narrative helps her/him to come to terms with the multiple roles kids have to perform on a daily basis. Although different people may perceive us differently in each social setting in which we are required to perform, we do not perceive ourselves as having different identities for each role we perform. 'Despite the fact that each of us carries multiple identities or roles within a complex social network of relationships, one does not experience him/herself as a different person taking different positions attached to a different role' (Chen 2009: 9). The kid plays a different role in these worlds and thus may have a different character, but this does not mean that there is a multiple identity. To enable them to have a sense of self (identity) they need to integrate these various characters that they play in the different worlds; the best way to do that is to tell the story of the different roles. He/she tells her/himself: 'At home I have to be like this, because my parents expect me to be that way. At school my role changes and it has to accommodate my teachers, and again my role changes on the playground when I'm with my friends, as they expect something else of me.' For example, Dudley, in the *Harry Potter* series, is a big bully when with his friends, and Harry is often their target, but, once he finds out that Harry is a wizard, he is afraid of Harry, and he tattle-tales to Mr. and Mrs. Dursley if he thinks Harry might be doing magic.

One way for people to explain how they play different roles in their socio-cultural context, and yet be the same person, is through story. However, people also need other people to affirm who they are to themselves. Therefore, once we have told our story we need another person to support what we say about ourselves. As identity is constructed through the

assimilation and internalization of various narratives that we are told from within the socio-cultural context where we exist, these integrated constructions need to be affirmed and recognized by others that we share within our society. 'One may add that the individual appropriates the world in conversation with others, and, further, that both identity and world remain real to himself only as long as he can continue the conversation' (Berger 1967: 16). For example, Dudley's friends have made Dudley the leader of their gang, and call him Big D, affirming to Dudley, that he is a 'tough guy'. Mrs. and Mr. Dursley also proudly tell anyone who will listen, how tough Dudley is, and that he is on the school boxing team (Rowling 2003: 18).

### **3.5 How toddlers create their social identity and then challenge this same identity as adolescents**

By the age of five children have mastered language, using language not only to 'inform but to evoke' (Lacan 1977: 86). Within Lacanian theory, the child initially wants to fulfil all its mother's desires by becoming all she desires, as the object of her/his adoration. This, Lacan (1977: 289) contends, is the child seeking to become the phallus for the mother. However, the father usually steps in to prevent this 'Oedipal aspiration' and 'castrates' any 'phallic' event. Both boys and girls go through this process and most children accept their castration, resolving the 'Oedipal' complex. The father is the symbolic 'big Other', the outside influence that regulates and socializes the child. As the child grows older the 'big Other' subsequently becomes society and, as a result, society regulates the person's behaviour. For Piaget (1962: 129-137), the mother is the child's first love object or 'object-choice'. Her permanence in the child's life allows the child to understand the permanence of things. Through this understanding, the child goes on to understand the difference between her/himself and her/his external reality, both intellectually and emotionally.

In other words, the child's dialectic with society begins with their mother and father who are their first regulators of behaviour in society.

Social identity is the image by which a person wants others to identify her/him. In a particular social setting, a person may take on the identity that society requires of her/him. Molotch (2013: 63) emphasizes that people 'are always, in a sense on stage – performing the self in the spotlight of others. We need approval not just as some kind of bonus for a nicer life. We need it to *be*. The show must go on, the show is our life.' This need for approval and the recognition of our social selves to others and for ourselves makes it effortless for the 'Market' to sell us identities.

People may also 'magnify some of their characteristics, play down others, and again do not see others at all' (Musschenga 2000: 24). There is also the possibility that a person may not be perceived in terms of the identity that they are trying to project, due to the fact they are not aware of some of their character traits. For example, although a person may want one to perceive them as confident, they come across as nervous instead, due to their continual fidgeting. 'Another way of putting this is to say that man produces 'otherness' both outside and inside himself as a result of his life in society' (Berger 1967: 85). Society is the 'big Other' that many seek to please as it is important to them to 'fit in' with this large 'Other'. This leads to the person conforming to the norms and values of the 'big Other', as it is what the latter desires. Therefore, a person's self is a product of the 'big Other', but also remains separate from it. This aspect of trying to please the 'big Other' yet also remain independent of it is important to this study. Although many people have read the *Harry Potter* series to please the 'big Other', they have also remained separate from it by enjoying and utilizing the alternative world of the series that counters the 'big Other's' norms and values with alternative norms and values, living out the values of Christianity (below I discuss more fully how the series counters society). In other words, this

paradox is ironic, as kids only started to read the *Harry Potter* series because the 'big Other' said it was 'cool' and the kids who did not read this series would be 'un-cool' and would not be able to please the 'big Other'.

As maintained above, kids create their identities, and thus spiritualities, through their interaction with their socio-cultural world. It is important for kids to 'fit' into this world with their peers and therefore kids follow the 'big Other' 'religiously'. However, the 'big Other' corrupts kids' identities and spiritualities, placing its values on things rather than people. People are dehumanized, seen by the Market as either a customer or a product (Rumscheidt 1998: 5). By reading narratives, and as was said above, in particular, fantasy narratives, kids are given the opportunity not only to be exposed to the degenerative effect of consumerism/materialism, but also exposed to the selfless alternative story of the Christ discourse, which some fantasy writers use as an alternative.

### **3.6 Our identity and spirituality through narrative**

This section addresses the possibilities that reading opens up for people's identities and spiritualities and is important to the thesis, as it is through reading that kids may be exposed to value systems that challenge them to question Western values of materialism/consumerism, indicating to them that they have other choices.

#### **3.6.1 Paul Ricoeur and Hans-Georg Gadamer**

From a philosophical perspective, Ricoeur understood the reading of literature not as a passive pastime but as an activity in which we fully participate: 'It is by an understanding of the worlds, actual and possible, opened by language that we may arrive at a better understanding of



ourselves' (Ricoeur 1984: 45). Hence, the reader goes through a process of entering and participating in the narrative by:

- a) pre-figuration of the meaning: what the reader brings into the text;
- b) configuration of the meaning: the person understands and internalizes what the narrative is about; and
- c) re-figuration of the meaning: the person assimilates the narrative and now recreates meaning from the narrative, and this recreated narrative now becomes part of the person's identity and spirituality, that may help them move forward and to keep adding to their personhood.

When entering the text, asserts Gadamer (1989: 265-379), people can only interpret themselves through their 'prejudgments'. This means that to interpret and understand any given situation or text, they bring to these instances certain biases, expectations and questions. Without these 'prejudgment' tools there would be no way a person could 'get into' a situation or read a text and fully understand what they have encountered. These 'prejudgments' shape how we deal with all that confronts us, and if peoples 'prejudgments' are not positive, they will come away from all encounters without anything useful and make no progress within themselves. It is no use pretending that people do not have these 'prejudgments', but, instead it is important to make sure that our 'prejudgments' are useful tools that can be used to move forward. This means that the person must be willing to transform their 'prejudgments' as a means to better themselves in terms of the situations and texts that they are reading. Gadamer's 'prejudgment' theory may be applied to *Harry Potter* readers. For example, kids have 'prejudgments' about reading, often seeing it as a boring task that needs to be done for school alone. However, all their friends seem to be talking about the *Harry Potter* series and they now feel

obliged to read these books too, so as to 'be part' of their social context. This means that they start reading the book because the 'big Other' requires them to do so, but when they do start reading the series they find themselves responding to it, allowing themselves to be transformed (re-configured) by the books. Because kids are more open to exploring ('experience-taking') other identities and alternative worlds, the *Harry Potter* series with its deep symbolic meanings and alternative values may allow them to further their quest of finding and developing their identity and spirituality in a more positive and hopeful manner. The series will then also be added to their 'prejudgment' tools that will stay with them into adulthood to help them be more open as adults. 'By telling a story we construct the identity not only of the characters of the story but the character of the readers' (Reagan 1996: 112)<sup>14</sup>.

As discussed above, humans express themselves through language in the form of narrative; narratives tell their story, and their story is able to place them in their world (the Fourfold) over time. Therefore, narrative explores the 'temporal character of human experience' (Ricoeur 1984: 3): narratives are about how people live their lives over a period of time.

All stories, regardless of whether they are fairy tales or a story told to a friend about ourselves, take place over a period. Narratives re-describe to others our actions in arriving at a certain point in time, to result in who we are, now that we are having this conversation. As we saw above, this is vital to identity formation, as we need others to validate who we are to ourselves. This is why all stories follow the sequence of beginning, middle and end, with the actions of the characters leading to certain consequences. Although the end of the story means that there will be no more of the story, says Taylor (2002: 420), it also usually means the achievement of a goal.

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<sup>14</sup> The quotes from Reagan are direct quotes from Ricoeur, stemming from interviews conducted by Reagan (1996).

Therefore, without the end, the beginning and the middle would be meaningless. 'The end is the final working out of all the latent potential of the beginning, and the consequences of the choices in the middle' (Taylor 2002: 420). Consequently, the end of the story gives value to the characters' choices. The characters have been required to sacrifice something, which either has now led to an improvement of their identity, or has had a deep spiritual impact on them, or both. In the *Harry Potter* series, at the end of each book, we learn something more about the plot and Harry learns something more about himself and his circumstances. Harry develops as a person through the choices he makes, even though they may not always be the best ones, since even by making a mistake he sees another aspect of himself or another person from a different perspective. However, it is only in the last book that the reader and Harry learn the whole story. In order to destroy Voldemort permanently, Harry and the other characters need to make many sacrifices and choices, which challenge the three main characters' identity and spirituality.

People actively participate in literature by placing themselves in the characters' world and, as was said above, by taking a journey of the imagination whereby the reader and the text create an alternative world. In so doing, the reader is exposed to alternative interpretations and they have the opportunity to project their own potential onto this created world. The imagination, for Ricoeur (1974: 408), is the 'power of the possible', allowing human beings to imagine their possibilities: 'The imagination has a prospective and explorative function in regard to the inherent possibilities of man' (Ricoeur 1965: 119). Ricoeur also looks beyond the *world-in-the-text* to the *world-in-front-of-the-text*, in other words the world that is produced by reading the text. For Ricoeur, a *world-in-front-of-the-text* reading of biblical narratives was not only about the world the narrative contained, but also about the world the narrative and the reader created to go beyond the text, revealing something to the reader about her/himself. These alternative

interpretations directly influence people's identity and the response that the reader may have to the ultimate questions that affect their spiritual journey. 'What is to be interpreted in the text is a proposed world which I could inhabit and in which I could project my ownmost possibilities' (Ricoeur 1981a: 112). The reader of the *Harry Potter* series confronts an alternative world of wizards, but also the alternative world that is created in-front-of-the-text through the novel, where the individual imagines her/himself differently, i.e. not as being a 'Muggle', but rather a person who seeks to live according to different values, those of Christ. Ricoeur elaborates:

Ultimately, what I appropriate is a proposed world. The latter is not *behind* the text, as a hidden intention would be, but *in front of it*, as that which the work unfolds, discovers, reveals. Henceforth, to understand is *to understand oneself in front of the text*. It is not a question of imposing on the text our finite capacity of understanding, but of exposing ourselves to the text and receiving from it an enlarged self, which would be the proposed existence corresponding in the most suitable way to the world proposed (Ricoeur 1981b: 143).

Both our world and the *Harry Potter* one (which includes both the wizarding and the non-wizarding world), are made up of *mundane* stories (for example teenage fears, hang-ups and the desire to possess everything their friends do), linking up our world to the *Harry Potter* one and making it recognizable to the reader. However, Rowling offers an alternative *sacred* story to the Western consumerist *sacred* story kids are encountering daily (This will be discussed below.) This is what draws the reader into the *world-in-front-of-the-text*, this alternative worldview, or *sacred* story that has the ability to offer the reader an alternative interpretation to the *sacred* story of the West. If the reader has the ability to respond to a *world-in-front-of-the-text* reading of the *Harry Potter* series, without any inhibitions, so s/he may open themselves up to numerous spiritual experiences. At its core (discussed in

depth in Chapter 4), the *Harry Potter* series conveys the spiritual themes of love, friendship, death, courage and sacrifice. Therefore, by opening the reader up to a *world-in-front-of-the-text* using this alternative or *sacred story*, the *sacred story* functions as a stepping ladder for her/him to go beyond the text to have alternative experiences, exposing them to something bigger than themselves, something that is part of an alternative sacred canopy.

### 3.6.1.1 The ‘*ipse* and *idem*’ that make up identity

In constructing our *narrative identities* we try and respond to three questions: 1) *Who* am I ? 2) *What* am I doing? 3) *Why* am I doing what I’m doing right now? As the years go by we ask further questions of ourselves: Am I the same person today as I was a decade ago or two decades ago? If I am not, what has changed to make me into the person I am today? Ricoeur (1992: 121) reflected on two traditional ways in which identity can be understood: *ipse* (selfhood) and *idem* (sameness). He argued that narrative has the ability to combine these two aspects of identity and thus form what he calls *narrative identity*. *Ipse* identifies the *who* of the self, while *idem* identifies *what* the self consists of (Ricoeur 1992: 121). The *ipse* is therefore our identity understood as the selfhood of our individuality, the part of our identity that is accountable to the self and to another; the part of identity that has the ability to change and develop. The *idem* is thus our identity understood in its spatio-temporal sameness, our existence belonging to both space and time. Both these identities are required for a self to continuously exist and be recognized by others as the person we are over the span of a lifetime. It is *character* that connects *idem* and *ipse*, as it is *character* that gives our identity the personality by which we are recognized and is the stable aspect of our identity. ‘My character is me, myself, *ipse*; but this *ipse* announces itself as *idem*. Each habit formed in this way, acquired and which becomes a lasting disposition, constitutes *trait* – a character trait, a distinctive sign by which a person is recognized, re-

identified as the same, character being nothing other than the set of distinctive signs' (Ricoeur 1992: 121). Narratives, the stories we tell about ourselves, allow us to explain *ipse* and *idem* to ourselves.

By narrating our actions in a story, we are able to explain why we acted in a particular manner at a particular time so that it makes sense to others and to ourselves. *Action* can only make sense within a plot; only once we know what the intentions of the character's actions within their narrative setting are, can we understand the narrative's intention. This is also true for a life story. In this way, explains Ricoeur (1992: 146), the processes of *emplotment*, namely *action* and *character*, are joined together to form the 'story-chain' of *who?*, *what?* and *why?* As he puts it, 'Telling a story is saying who did what and how, by spreading out in time the connection between these various viewpoints' (Ricoeur 1992: 146). For Ricoeur (Reagan 1996: 106), the most important aspect of the text was not the object that the text represented but the world generated between reader and text. Ricoeur (1995:309) also reminds us that while a book has an end, 'life is open-ended.' Therefore, although the storybook has an end, our lives are still under construction and revision, as we continuously assimilate the narratives of stories that we read, and experiences we have, embroidering them onto our own personal narratives that we then sometimes project into our 'reality'.

### **3.7 How people express the 'gods' element of their 'Fourfold'**

As was noted above, people dwell in the House of Being, which is expressed by the Fourfold, that unfolds itself as earth, sky, gods and mortals. It was also indicated earlier that these cannot exist without one another. Therefore, people have an innate need for the 'god' aspect of the Fourfold. Some look to the 'god' to help them understand the ultimate meanings of life. People continuously seek to maintain order in their world,

so that 'all societies are constructions in the face of chaos' (Berger & Luckmann 1966: 121). Religion is a phenomenon whereby ultimate meaning in the existential problems of life, suffering, joy and death, may be shared with humanity because these matters are experienced by all human beings (Berger 1967: 37). Humanity creates a *sacred* canopy where social order and ultimate meaning are able to be part of daily life. Religion helps human beings perceive themselves as being significant to not only their society and world, but the entire universe (Berger 1967: 37). By being part of the world, people feel 'sane' and protected from isolation and 'insanity' (Berger 1969: 24). *Sacred* stories help human beings to answer the ultimate identity questions: Who am I? Why am I here? How did I get here? Where am I going? To answer these questions human beings respond by constructing *sacred* stories using myth and symbols.

As was previously discussed, as children, our regulators and protectors, our 'big Other', are initially our parents and thereafter society; the 'big Other' from a Western perspective is the Western culture/world where capitalism and consumerism play a dominant role. This 'big Other' is both regulator and protector from chaos and insanity. It tells us how to behave and what to buy in order to be part of consumerist Western society, so as to belong and not be 'outcasts'.

Western society had in the past been able to answer people's questions of the *sacred*/faith/spirituality through the dogmas of institutionalized religion. However, as Western society has become more secularized, church attendance, as was mentioned in the previous chapter, has declined so that answers to the questions of the *sacred*/spiritual are being sought in alternative localities. Human beings are now seeking spirituality and morality elsewhere, in places such as in literature and art (Zock 2008: ix). People are more open to *sacred* experiences that have nothing to do with 'formal religion', and although these *sacred* experiences are not 'traditional church

theology', they fulfil people's *sacred* needs, and are lived theology. Hence, practical theologians need to pay attention to and to understand how these experiences may shape peoples' understanding of the *sacred/divine* (Gräb 2012: 81).

Research findings by Francis (2000: 170) indicate that two-thirds of kids in the United Kingdom, between the ages of thirteen and fifteen, had never read the Bible, while Egerton (2010: 1)<sup>15</sup> adds that 'millions of people [in the United Kingdom] have never heard or read the story of Jesus Christ.' However, even though people are living in more secularized societies, this does not mean that they have stopped seeking spirituality, morality or even God (Copley et al 2004: 8). This, emphasizes Gerkin (1997: 97), presents pastoral practitioners with 'an altered context for their ministries'. In other words, pastors now find themselves having to amend their ministering to suit the context presented to them, as was noted in the previous chapter. The *Harry Potter* series, as was said above, may offer pastoral practitioners with just such an alternative context, to dialogue with kids in their social context about spiritual matters that may alter the path of their lives. According to Osmer and Salazar-Newton (2014: 54), explain how churches (and hence pastors), can encourage parents to realise the 'power' of literary works such as the *Harry Potter* series to help shape kids moral imagination, and thus their spiritualities. For the purpose of this study, spirituality/faith is referred to as 'a personal quality of human life and history... If faith is personal, then even in principle it is not a generic entity, but a living quality' (Smith 1962: 170). This means that, the manner in which people choose to live out their lives within their social context directly impacts their spirituality. Some choices lead to a path of growth and change.

Rowling, has in the *Harry Potter* series, looked at how choices affect individual lives (discussed in Chapter 4), and how these individuals have

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<sup>15</sup> [www.thinkingfaith.org](http://www.thinkingfaith.org)



suffered or gained by growing and changing or not, depending on their choices. It is important to note that these characters' spiritualities have a 'living quality', experienced in the everydayness of their lives helping them evolve as people. This is, as expressed by Miller-McLemore (2006: xv), about finding God in the everydayness of life, instead of only in the solitude of pray and silence (not practical in the chaos of family existence).

Rowling gives her characters the choice of living the kind of life that, rather than enhancing their popularity, offers them 'living quality'. Rowling, through her characters, tells the reader that they have the choice to follow the 'big Other's' way of conducting a dehumanized existence through material goods, or to choose an alternative *sacred* story that does not depend on material gain, but rather the accumulation of community in one's life. In essence, Rowling pits selfishness against selflessness. She places emphasis on the family, not necessarily the conventional one but the families we create through living a life in community with our fellow neighbours. Rumscheidt (1998: 36) points out how the 'global economy' has no respect for the collective, the loving and caring for neighbours or the weak. 'In the present social context, 'winners' in the 'global economy' voluntarily accommodate social attitudes and behaviour to whatever maintains a competitive advantage over others' (Rumscheidt 1998: 37). This consumerist existence not only affects ambition and the need to be a 'winner' as opposed to a 'loser', but also creates selfish individuals who ask 'How am I doing?', as opposed to 'How are we doing?' (Gerkin 1997: 232). For kids, it is not just becoming selfish that has become a problem.

Added to this, comments Mercer (2005: 91-92), kids are conditioned by consumerism to believe that if they possess all the 'new things' on the market (DVDs, toys, games etc.), they will never be bored, which 'has become the most dreaded human condition' (Mercer 2005: 91-92). This results in kids being continuously dissatisfied with whatever new things they

receive: easily becoming uninterested in them, putting pressure on their parents for the next novel item. Thus, 'childhood itself comes to be seen as a time defined by constant access to whatever is amusing, fun, and exciting' (Mercer 2005: 92). This creates a totally unrealistic and dehumanized existence for kids, who as a result carry this behaviour into adulthood.

Rowling, in her *Harry Potter* series, creates an alternative existence, allowing people to make another choice that breaks away from being captive to a 'big Other', and the selfish 'self'. She gives us the choice to be truly independent of the 'big Other' and choose to love our neighbor regardless of his/her social status and ability to acquire all desired things to fit in. Therefore, Rowling tries to free us from being bound to Western consumerism's vicious cycle of wanting, instead of giving. Nevertheless, she does not give us an alternative 'big Other'; rather, deconstructing the 'big Other' and offering us the alternative gift of exploring our own potential in an alternative world: Heidegger's Fourfold or dwelling place. Here, the reader finds a place where acting out of love, friendship and courage, similar to the actions of Christ, is far more important than what one owns/desires to own.

### **3.7.1 The way kids develop religion and spirituality**

Eaude (2006: 17) observes that spiritual development<sup>16</sup> 'concerns itself with what is most important about ourselves as people' and that children, adolescents, and even adults keep asking the ultimate questions to further their spirituality. These ultimate questions are linked to *sacred* stories, through the latter's ability to give meaningful answers to these questions (Crites 1989: 69-72). Templeton and Eccles (2006:260) make it clear that

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<sup>16</sup> Child and adult spiritual development is a huge topic that has been researched from many different perspectives. Psychologists, psychiatrists, educators, and theologians, in other words, many of those professionals who come into direct contact with children, write about what they have observed, or undertake studies on children and their spiritual experiences. The following works offer some examples: Ratcliff (2004); Eaude (2006); Roehlkepartain, et al (2006); Yust et al (2006); Harris (2007); Hyde (2008); Tracey (2010).

spiritual identity is developed over a lifetime; there is no formula that a person can follow to develop their spirituality. However, it does appear that the period where the adolescent is about to enter into adulthood can sometimes be a 'gateway' to a spiritual identity that 'transcends, but does not necessarily exclude' what the adolescent has identified with since childhood.

Coles (1998: 98) explains how from the age of five, kids have consolidated language with reasoning through reading books (or books being read to them), music, art and so on. At this early stage of development, they eagerly ask the ultimate questions and come up with imaginative and creative answers: 'This is the time of growth of the moral imagination, fueled constantly by the willingness, the eagerness of children to put themselves in the shoes of others, to experience that way of life' (Coles 1998: 98-99). In Nye's (2004: 93) experience, children possess the ability to lead a rich spiritual life that does not necessarily have anything to do with religion, but rather with their openness to imagine. As kids become intellectually competent in seeing other people's points of view, they also become emotionally compassionate: 'cooperation among individuals coordinates their points of view into reciprocity which both the autonomy of individuals and the cohesion group' (Piaget 1967: 54-55). Greenfield (2000: 51-52) explores how children can experience emotion far more intensely than an adult, but for shorter periods. With their stronger language skills, intellectual compassion and ability to reason at this stage, kids wonder self-consciously at the world; they 'wonder aloud and stop to think silently about it' (Coles 1998: 106).

A recent study has shown that kids from the age of five understand that God creates all things that are natural in the world, while people create artefacts (Barret 2000: 30). From this age, kids also ask, along with the Why? question, the How? question. Pulaski (1980: 101) emphasizes that if adults

do not give kids satisfactory answers to their questions, they lose faith in adults which then leads to them not speaking to adults about things that are important.. Language, especially in the form of reading narratives, provides kids with the skills to engage in an introspective dialectic with society about the ultimate questions and helps adults answer kids' questions in a more satisfactory manner, while keeping the channels of communication open. Coles (1998: 106) explores how through stories, 'all sorts of others', some long gone, others imagined, 'become remembered companions of sorts: their words their stories, are taken up and in various ways, wittingly or unwittingly, are taken to heart.' From here on language is not only a means of saying 'yes' and 'no', but a means of opinion and asserting the self to society (Coles 1998: 107).

When kids reach adolescence, they do so 'understandably self- consciously' and 'accompanied by a blaze of self-awareness' (Coles 1998: 135). This is the stage of their search for independence, and 'the sexual life come alive, and with it a host of moral quandaries' (Coles 1998: 134). While kids at this stage start rejecting their parents, they embrace 'youth-culture', a social culture created by adolescence as a means of self-expression. Often as adolescents start fighting for independence from parents and life in general, life as they have experienced it until this point, they start feeling isolated, moody and angry. Experimentation with drugs, sex and so on often leads them to feeling guilty as this goes against what they have been morally taught and what they had morally accepted. Now is the time of choice and challenging the choices that had up until this point been made for them by their parents. This can make the adolescent feel very lonely. Coles (1998: 143) describes this loneliness as follows: 'It's a loneliness that has to do with a self-imposed judgment of sorts: I am pushed and pulled by an array of urges, yearnings, worries, fears, that I can't share with anyone, really – and don't wish to, even as I wonder about another's, their thoughts, their emotions.' This is where reading is so powerful, especially of books that

deal with the ultimate questions. Narratives about adolescent loneliness, guilt, worries, urges and so on, are a helpful resource to adolescents who are going through these stages of maturing into adults.

From the first *Harry Potter* story, where the reader meets an eleven year old orphan called Harry, through to the last book where the seventeen year old Harry must defeat Voldemort or die trying, he goes through all the above emotions. He often feels alone, pulled in many directions, and is challenged to make some difficult decisions that will have consequences not only for his life but also for those of many others. The reader journeys with Harry to work out the ultimate questions of identity and spirituality in an alternative world to discover multiple and alternative answers. Instead of feeling isolated, through reading, the adolescent reader can have a companion. While the companion has many things to say, and the narrative can go beyond the text with the reader, to spiritually respond to the ultimate questions, the reader can do so independently and in complete privacy, a state to which adolescents seem to be drawn. For those kids who are more open to discussing the content of the book, pastors can use the content to talk about actual situations without making these personal. This allows kids to question personal situations through the characters' awkward, difficult and even spiritually altering experiences.

### **3.8 How kids construct their identity and spirituality in a corporate consumer Western society**

As mentioned, kids have a great deal to assimilate as they go about constructing their identities and spiritualities: their social setting, their cultural setting and their family set-up, that may be a combination of many different aspects. They have to find a way to fit into their societies' subgroups: their families, their school communities and their social

communities. For those in Western<sup>17</sup> society a huge part of their social context involves having to deal with corporate consumerism. A kid's Fourfold unfolds itself in the following way: they dwell in a specific socio-cultural context (earth), under the sky with their peers, family and other people (mortals) and stand before the global market (gods – the *sacred* story) to whom they are accountable, to belong to and be part of the mortals with whom they share a dwelling place. However, this is in essence a damaging Fourfold, as the earth and gods' aspects of the Fourfold are selling desirable things to fulfil the mortals' lives. This means that the ultimate meaning of the *sacred* story is consumption. Hence, this *sacred* story is different to the *sacred* Christian sacred story that is based on love, friendship and community. Here again we see a selfish *sacred* story that is bound to 'pleasing me' and 'making me look good to the Jones'. As was commented earlier, as kids grow older they start trying to please the 'big Other' (capitalism), in this case the corporate consumerist society that they live in. To be functional in this society, kids feel that they have to fill the demands that are placed on them. Consumerism seems to have become the new *sacred* story; identity is now about what a person owns. This is a very important aspect of kids' identity and spiritual formation, as consumerism has a powerful way of selling and seducing people of all ages into telling them how they should conduct and construct their lives, and what things they need to have, that will allow them to 'fit in' to their social context. For example, Western consumerism puts great emphasis on sexuality (Phillips 2011: 7), so that for kids to 'fit in', they need to dress a certain way, listen to music with sexual content and watch sexually provocative music videos of their favourite music bands on TV, who all dress and act in a sexual manner.

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<sup>17</sup> I remain within a Western worldview here as this is the one in which Harry Potter was created and first became popular.

Kids discover that there is pressure on how they look and realize that the older they grow, their relationships with the opposite sex become full of sexual innuendos (Phillips 2011: 79). Kids, particularly girls, but this does not exclude boys, also have to deal with Western society telling them that skinny is equated to sexy, often leading to them developing negative self-images that are destructive and dehumanizing to their identity and their spirituality. Kids alter both physically and mentally as they approach puberty, which can all be very confusing (Phillips 2011: 26). With consumerism selling sexy identities and parents frequently reprimanding them for wearing inappropriate clothing, kids are left feeling confused by who and what to identify. After all, no kid wants to be the outsider, and it can take her/him a long while to know whether they want to embrace Western consumerism or to accept an alternative way of being (especially kids coming from conservative cultures or poor families), regardless of what their peers think.

There are also other pressures: kids must have cell phones and iPads / iPhones, because if they do not, they cannot be on the internet to interact with one another on *Facebook* and *Whatsapp* for example, to name two of many ways kids constantly communicate with each other. There are also TV, popular music, DVD games, films, books, fashion, and so on. These all cost money and not all families can afford these items of desire; consequently, kids who can't have everything, or any of it, are left out. But, argues Beaudoin (1998: 21), this is not all bad, as some of these gadgets and activities (such as movie going and reading) seem to 'fill the gap' and have become the 'new' symbols of society, as a way of replacing traditional systems such as the church and clergy, with whom kids have become disillusioned. Beaudoin (1998: 34) adds that 'people [kids] (or forms of popular culture) who profess to know little or nothing about the religious may, indeed form, or transform religious meaning of faith.' In other words, even though some kids profess not to be religious, they still express

spirituality by using their social context to transform and shape their spiritual identities. Instead of being critical of kids in terms of the way they express themselves, adults (especially pastors, youth workers and parents) need to listen to what kids are talking about, and observe how they are expressing their concerns, struggles and desires, because this will help them learn some important truths of kids' daily lived experiences.

Kids are buying into consumerism ('if they have it, so should I') and this includes books. 'It is a social thing. We want books everybody is reading (and nobody finishes) so we can talk about them' (Le Guin 2008)<sup>18</sup>. This means, as was said above, that most kids only began to read the *Harry Potter* series because everyone else was doing it, not because they themselves had a great need to read these books. It is, as was also mentioned above, part of the human need to engage with society and all that society encompasses. This has led kids to buying the series; however, most of those who began reading it have finished it and keep asking for more. Therefore, this series has not just been a passing trend but has ended up as part of society. This is a clear example of how people internalize society and then recreate it to make it part of themselves. It also demonstrates how people then re-shape their society to accommodate their needs, in this case by placing a demand on Rowling, who has responded with *Pottermore*. As was described above, sixteen years after the release of the first book Rowling still receives thousands of letters pertaining to the series. This is interesting as the *Harry Potter* series is not exactly about a person who is 'in' or for that matter even 'cool' in any way, and often Rowling's message is that material things do not matter, what you own and your status, do not need to define you. As indicated, Rowling counters and challenges the values of the *sacred* Western consumerist story, which puts emphasis on an ultimate meaning that is materialistic, with an alternative *sacred* story (a *sacred* story that is in essence an expression of the story of

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<sup>18</sup> <http://harpers.org/archive/2008/02/0081907>



Christ's love, death and resurrection) which puts emphasis on an ultimate story with alternative values, one that is about love, sacrifice and choices. Here are several examples:

- 1) Rowling's main characters are not part of the 'in crowd': Harry has been raised by the Dursleys, is given very little by them and always has to wear Dudley's oversized hand-me-downs; Ron comes from a poor family and likewise gets his brothers' hand-me-downs, even his broomstick and pet rat are hand-me-downs; while Hermione, although she has two wealthy 'Muggle' dentist parents and is clearly well off, is not fashion conscious and comes in for some terrible teasing from some of the girls and Draco, who always picks on her at school because she is not a 'pureblood';
- 2) 'Muggle' technology is of no use in the wizarding world, since wizards do everything by magic, and at Hogwarts the former is of no use at all, as the magic spells interfere with it (Rowling 2000: 661). Not to say that kids from the wizarding families don't want things, for example the latest broomstick (Rowling 1999: 43), but Rowling emphasizes the importance of courage, friendship and family over materialism.
- 3) Rowling also emphasizes how coming from wealthy 'pureblood' families (like Draco, who possesses everything), does not determine one's skill as a wizard or one's courage and compassion towards one's friends (these include friends that are not fully human, such as Hagrid who is half giant, or not human at all, such as Dobby the elf). This is an important aspect of the series since it demonstrates that money and having everything does not have to determine who one is, nor does it have to determine one's choices or actions towards oneself and others.

- 4) We saw above that people often struggle to be perceived in a certain way; but society sees them in a different light. Harry in *The Goblet of Fire* and *The Order of the Phoenix* is often perceived as attention seeking, mad and a liar. This is due to the wizarding community's denial and fears of Lord Voldemort's return, and the lies which the reporter of the *Daily Prophet*, Rita Skeeter, writes about Harry to sell newspapers. This shows kids that to tell the truth may cost you your social identity, but as Harry demonstrates to the reader, in the end, the truth pays off and can prevent worse things happening, not only to oneself, but also to others.
- 5) Although Rowling does not ignore Harry, Ron and Hermione's sexuality and having to deal with teenage hormones, she does not spend a lot of time on their sexual frustrations. Rather, she deals with the awkwardness of puberty that has a direct impact on identity formation and self image. As discussed, this is often the most confusing time in a kid's life. The way the opposite sex responds to us has an effect on how we view ourselves; or rather we allow it to affect us or not affect us, depending on our self-image, confidence and experience. The reader first becomes aware of Harry's interest in girls in *The Prisoner of Azkaban* when he is thirteen years old and takes notice of Cho Chang the day Gryffindor plays Quidditch against Ravenclaw. 'She smiled at Harry as the teams faced each other behind their captains, and he felt a slight jolt in the region of his stomach that he didn't think had anything to do with nerves' (Rowling 1999: 192). Cho is the first girl Harry kisses (Rowling 2003: 503), the first he takes out on a date (Rowling 2003: 614-620), the first to break up with Harry without telling him and the first who starts dating someone else (Rowling 2003: 951). Harry's first relationship is catastrophic and it leaves him feeling angry, hurt and confused about what it is that girls want from him. As for Hermione and Ron, the

reader is made aware of the fact that they like each other, but neither says anything for a long time; in fact several books (starting with *The Goblet of Fire*), result in some humorous reading, as they date other people, much to the annoyance of each other. As the reader accompanies Harry, Ron and Hermione through their love lives in the later books, this allows older readers to remember what it was like to be an awkward teenager trying to make sense of the opposite sex, and younger readers to identify with the awkwardness of the situation at hand. For kids, this type of reading is very helpful as they encounter themselves in the three characters, who are trying to grapple with their sexual development and finding that it is hard to balance relationships and the everydayness of life with dignity and grace. The series serves as a reminder to parents that this is a self-conscious time for their children and gives the former an opportunity to discuss these matters with their children in an indirect manner without embarrassing them. Harry also finds that relationships with the opposite sex contain signs that one needs to be able to read about the opposite sex, like gestures or silences that no one, at least not Harry or Ron, can understand. Hermione has to often point out what, she asserts, is right in front of the boys noses when it comes to girls' feelings, resulting in Ron telling her to write a book 'translating mad things girls do so boys can understand them' (Rowling 2003: 631).

Rowling also creates characters and situations that are typical of our own social world, but allows enough commonality for kids to enter the *Harry Potter* Fourfold, for example: Harry's not being in the 'in crowd' is typical of kids who struggle in their social settings. This makes Harry a character easy to identify with, as are Ron and Hermione: Ron, because he comes from a poor family and Hermione, because she is so clever, often being called 'an insufferable know it all' not only by her peers, but also by her teachers. Yet,

the three friends have each other and, together with Hagrid, they form their own community of belonging and strong friendship. Therefore, the *Harry Potter* series maximizes the identities of kids who find it hard to fit in and shows them that they can create an alternative community of friends that allows them to be who they are, without being obliged to try and belong to the 'in crowd'.

From what has been said above, kids have responded positively to Rowling's alternative story, even though it counters the *sacred* story of consumerism that they dwell in. Rowling proposes that the way in which a person chooses to conduct themselves plays a vital role in their spiritual quest to achieve adulthood and that this choice has nothing to do with material possessions. Harry's journey becomes symbolic of what may come from making hard choices rather than popular choices. Through his quest he has become a truly honorable young man by the end of the last book, putting the safety of his friends and community first. Rowling's world is similar to our world in some ways, yet very different in others. With the *Harry Potter* series, kids have gone through the three stages of fully participating and entering the narrative by pre-configuration, configuration and re-configuration the meaning of the narrative. In the pre-configuration stage kids may have brought to the book a sense of indifference: 'I don't like reading, in fact I hate reading and would much rather watch the movie, but my friends are all reading it, so to fit in with them and to be able to participate in their conversations regarding *Harry Potter*, I must read it.' The kids then internalize and understand the books and are so drawn into the stories that they forget their dislike of reading, assimilating the narrative which becomes part of their personhood, helping them further the development of their identity and spirituality. It was said above that kids are open to wonder and 'experience taking', using their imagination as a tool to explore and further their quest for spirituality and identity. As was also said above, even though traditional ways of looking for spirituality may have

declined, the thirst for spirituality is ongoing and endless. As long as humans exist, they will continue to look for answers to their existence. Rowling is not trying to convince anyone to be a Christian (Chapter 3); she has no religious agenda. Rowling subtly weaves in spiritual themes in the form of myths and symbols that are of a Christian nature, and although they classify as *mundane* stories, the reader often glimpses the sacred. Kids who are deprived of such symbolic imagery in their daily life have responded to these narratives in an unexpected way. In addition, more kids are reading again, as a result of enjoying Rowling's series.

The reader of the *Harry Potter* series is transported through a portal to a spiritual world that gives them alternative choices without making them self-conscious or causing them to worry about how sexy they are and whether they possess the latest communications gadget to allow them to be popular. Rather, Rowling has created an alternative world where the reader is under no pressure to be anyone but themselves. Rowling's alternative world with its alternative sacred story, places ultimate meaning in friendship, struggle and choice, rather than a consumerist ultimate story where what one has defines one is.

While the Dursleys are an example of people who conform to pleasing the desires of the 'big Other', Voldemort symbolizes the perversion of controlling how people conform to the 'big Other', who in this case is himself. Meylahn, like Rowling, speaks of the 'big Other' and the need to please it as a way to be desired by the 'big Other'. Meylahn then proposes the naked, wounded Christ as an alternative discourse (*sacred* story) to this 'big Other'. Meylahn's wounded Christ and Rowling's alternative *sacred* stories display some similarities, but Meylahn's wounded Christ derives from a pastoral ministering aspect, while Rowling's describes a personal spiritual journey. Therefore, Meylahn gives us a useful hermeneutical tool to interpret the *Harry Potter* series, as addressed in Chapter 4.

### 3.9 Meylahn's discourse of Christ

In his article Meylahn (2012) argues that in a multidimensional socio-political cultural environment, people have become fragmented 'selves'. These are due to the disappearance of the 'grand narratives of modernity'. Now there are multiple narratives and people participate in many of them (Meylahn 2010: 1). Consequently they exist in 'transit halls', forever taking on different characters, depending on which narrative sphere they have chosen to enter or exit. Meylahn (2010: 1) uses Lacan's theory of the four discourses (the master, the university, the hysteric and the analyst) and the basic communication model of four positions: agents, other, truth//product, that Lacan created to discuss these discourses, to 'unpack' the 'phenomenon of the fragmented self'. Lacan based this model on the assumption that communication is always a failure, which is the reason why we keep talking: because we keep searching for the 'truth'. Meylahn (2010: 2), explains that Lacan understood 'truth' as 'the half spoken 'truth', because 'truth' can never completely be put into words; there is always a certain lack or absence between 'truth' and the signifier communicating that 'truth'. If people were capable of complete 'truth', everything that could have been said would already have been said. 'Thus every discourse is open-ended and, because of this structural lack, it continues to turn and repeat itself' (Meylahn 2010: 2). Meylahn proceeds to apply the above discourses to current social phenomena that cause the fragmented 'self'.

The most relevant discourse (for the purpose of this study) that Meylahn uses is that of the 'hysteric'. This is placed in the context of the discourse of the capitalist to examine the 'truth of who the 'real me' is. Lacan's basic communication model is applied to the discourse of the capitalist by placing the 'market as master signifier' in place of the 'Truth', as the market has become 'the global truth' (Meylahn 2010: 3). The 'Agent' of the 'Truth' is 'Science and Technology', as it is this agent that produces the goods which

the market tells us to consume. From the above, Meylahn (2010: 3), deduces that 'the market produces its own self-sustaining truth'. This belief, 'my identity is who the market tells me to be, I cannot be identified without what the market is selling to me', then becomes the dominant discourse, the grand narrative/sacred narrative, that controls the social discourse of the 'self'. Therefore, the 'Truth' and the 'Product' are the same in this discourse. However, this 'grand/sacred narrative' would fail if people felt they were being controlled. This is how the 'grand/sacred narrative' has convinced the individual that s/he is a free agent who is free to choose what s/he wants, as opposed to being a 'slave or victim to the market' (Meylahn 2010:3). Although the individual is apparently free to choose, s/he is actually only free to choose whatever the market has to offer. Hence the market, to compensate for its limitation of freedom, 'floods the market with objects of desire so that the subject can choose and find its individuality therein' (Meylahn 2010: 3). However, these 'objects of desire' have a short life span as they are quickly replaced by the next 'must have, can't do without' thing, leaving the individual in crisis. The individual is thus either:

a) left behind, as s/he cannot afford to keep up with the latest 'object of desire';

or

b) experiences a situation where now everyone possesses the desired object; therefore s/he no longer desires it as it impinges on her/his individuality. Therefore, the individual is never truly 'one' with the desired object.

The individual makes her/his 'Truth' to be the 'object of desire'. By doing this the individual attaches her/himself to the object, instead of other individuals, resulting in her/him being lonely, disconnected and fragmented. The desired object is supposed to counter the loneliness; 'however it remains an empty promise, preventing the subject from interpreting itself as a victim of failed

promises, which is its own fault resulting from wrong choice of object and it continues to hope the next choice will be more successful' (Meylahn 2010: 4). The lonely, fragmented individual hopes that what she/he possesses is enough to be desired by the 'master signifier'. The latter, Meylahn (2010: 4) argues, is symbolized by the Jones' whom the individual continuously strives to please and mimic.

Rowling's version of such individuals is found in the Dursleys, who spend much time worrying what the neighbours will think. Their house and garden look exactly like all the others up and down Privet Drive and they are sure to keep up with what is going on in their neighbourhood and who has what. The individual seems to want to be told what to be, so that the Jones' can desire them. Therefore, the Dursleys keep a close eye on their neighbors, to acquire everything their neighbors have, to be desirable or respected by the neighbourhood and be an accepted part of their community. Harry could cause the Dursleys (if his 'abnormality' was discovered) to become undesirable; therefore they do whatever it takes to keep him out of sight or to cause him to be the undesirable one. In this set-up, the 'hysteric' takes the role of the 'Agent', as the 'hysteric' wants the 'Other' (Jones') to answer the question 'Who am I?' The 'Other' (Jones') does so by telling the individual what object is most desired right now (by showing off their latest acquisitions). This says to the individual, 'You are the object' and 'this is your identity' (Meylahn 2010: 4).

As a result, 'The question, 'Who am I?' receives an answer, calls a subject into being as 'what you are' and thus objectifies the subject. The division of subject and object is an irrevocable effect of language and provides the foundation for continuous speaking' (Meylahn 2010: 4-5). This brings us back to what was said earlier, about how the individual continuously conducts a never-ending conversation with society to form identity and thus spirituality. The discourse of the 'hysteric', argues Meylahn (2010: 6), 'fits



our civilization today.’ The individual takes on the identity of the ‘hysteric’, who is forever asking the ‘Other’ who s/he is to be now, so s/he can be accepted and desired by the ‘Other’. Although s/he is never completely satisfied by the latest desired object, s/he also never gives up on the quest. The ‘hysteric’ perfectly represents who the ‘real me’ is, as ‘debarred, fragmented ‘self’ and, as such, an unavoidable fact of the structure of language’ (Meylahn 2010: 5). This fragmented ‘self’ had in the past been ‘hidden’ from us through the religious discourse, but now, as this discourse has started falling away and we stand in the ‘transit hall of experience’ of various narratives, being introduced to many roles, we are revealed to our ‘real selves’. Nevertheless, the individual is frightened of the ‘real me’, so people look to social media like *Facebook*, suggests Meylahn (2010: 2-3), as it apparently allows them to have complete control/hide the ‘real me’, not only from the ‘Other’, but also from themselves. In addition, *Facebook* is something that the ‘Other’ tells the individual to desire.

In conclusion, Meylahn (2010: 9) proposes an alternative discourse, but not one that must be interpreted as a new ‘master signifier’: a discourse that talks of ‘naked selves’ who are accountable for one another. This is a discourse of Christ that embraces the ‘real’. It ‘is pastoral, as it takes the real desires seriously, without the protection of the phallic signifiers. It is also redemptive, in that it heals the self from its fragmented symptom by helping it to embrace and become the symptom as well as messianic, in that it longs for a community of naked selves who no longer elude themselves’ to come about (Meylahn 2010: 9). The community that Meylahn proposes can only be created through love and grace, which can deconstruct the need to please and fulfil the ‘Others’ desires. This will then generate space for the ‘real which is still to come.’ Therefore, Meylahn’s discourse of a wounded, fragmented and naked community looks to a wounded and naked Christ for love and grace to rebuild itself. The ‘desire’ then becomes a desire for a spiritual way of living, choosing quality of life, over a life based only on

material possessions. This perfectly echoes Rowling's message in the series and may be used as a tool to interpret the series through the fragmented 'self' (Figure 1 below refers).

An example of Rowling seeking 'naked truth' is evident in the last book, at the end when Harry wakes up naked at King's Cross (Rowling 2007: 565-579). Harry's nakedness symbolizes his readiness to accept Dumbledore's confession and apology in humility. It is also interesting to note that Harry starts the series as a fragmented 'self' (without his knowledge) since he has a piece of Voldemort's soul attached to his soul. This sometimes causes Harry to think/feel in an evil manner and gives Harry powers that only Voldemort possesses.

<b>Consumerism Discourse</b> <b>'Muggle' behaviour</b>	<b>Christ Discourse</b> <b>Good Wizards behaviour</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Greatest desire:</b> to possess all the <b>material things</b> that are needed to 'fit in' to our socio cultural context, perhaps even be better than our peers.</li> <li>• Continuously caught up in the <b>vicious cycle</b> of who the Market dictates you should be and what values you must live by.</li> <li>• The <b>crucifixion</b> of <b>community/fellowship</b> and the <b>resurrection</b> of <b>consumerism/materialism.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Greatest desire:</b> for a life in <b>fellowship</b> and <b>community</b>, being loved by others for who you are rather, rather than what you possess.</li> <li>• The <b>hope</b> and <b>choice</b> of transformation, transcendence, liberation and redemption from the vicious cycle of the Market.</li> <li>• The <b>crucifixion</b> of <b>consumerism/materialism</b> and the <b>resurrection</b> of <b>community/fellowship.</b></li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This <b>discourse de-humanizes</b> people who live according to this value system.</li> <li>• Doing things out of love is perceived as weak.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This <b>discourse re-humanizes</b> people and shows them that there is more to life than material possessions.</li> <li>• Doing things out of love is the most powerful thing a person can do.</li> </ul>
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**Figure 1. The two choices presented by Rowling in her series.**

Meylahn's 'wounded Christ' is applied to the actions not only of the main protagonists (Harry, Dumbledore and Snape) but also to those of some of the other characters, such as Dobby, Ron and Hermione, discussed in Chapter 3. This discourse is applied to Rowling's constant questioning of the protagonists' choices of Christ versus Caesar. Caesar here represents the 'big Other', while Rowling goes back to the original discourse of Christ, the wounded, undesirable Christ, whom many loathed for questioning their Laws. This Christ shares a connection with Harry, who is often undesirable to those who do not like to have the 'big Other' challenged, such as for example the Dursleys, the Ministry of Magic and Voldemort's supporters. In fact, in the last *Harry Potter* book, *The Deathly Hallows*, Harry is referred to as Undesirable No 1 (Rowling 2007: 208) by the Ministry of Magic.

### 3.10 An overview

The core of the argument for this chapter was as follows:

Language is the House of Being. This House that we dwell in unfolds itself into the Fourfold (earth, sky, mortal, gods). Although the elements of the Fourfold remain the same, the ways in which these are expressed keep changing by the mortals who create them. All the elements are needed for the Fourfold to exist. This study examined how individuals (mortals), through

a dialectical relationship with society, construct their reality. Narrative plays an important role in helping the individual construct their social-individual world and their identity within it. It is through narrative, the stories our parents tell us, the stories from our cultures, fairy tales, and our parents' and grandparents' personal experiences, that we learn about our society and ourselves. From a young age the child is socialized by their parents to behave according to their social milieu. As the child develops intelligence and their emotions mature, s/he starts asking the 'why?' and 'how?' questions, using their imagination and the narratives that they are told or read, to answer these ultimate questions. S/he will ask these questions for the rest of their lives as they and the world around them change. The individual uses narrative to piece together and express their identity and their spirituality and it is often the stories that were read to them, or that they read as older kids, that stay with them as unconscious guides to living out their lives.

Reading is one of the best forms of exploring the ultimate questions, by being exposed to different narratives. Kids learn that there are many possible and alternative responses to the ultimate questions. Often they need to experience other identities and ways of living out their lives in privacy, as their peers make fun of them and make them feel self-conscious if they ask 'wrong', 'stupid' or 'not cool' questions about who?, why?, where?, in a class set-up or other social settings. As they become adolescents, they start seeking independence from their parents and society. At this stage they often feel confused, are moody, lonely, isolated and often feel guilty if they explore things that they know their parents would disapprove of, if they knew what their son or daughter was doing. When kids reach puberty they often become very confused about the sexual emotions they start feeling, and develop questions about the opposite sex and questions on spirituality and identity. It appears that in many secular societies, materialism has become the new *sacred* story, the new way of

expressing identity and, sometimes, even spirituality. Consumerism with its selfish *sacred* story tells the individual that s/he must choose from many 'objects of desire' in order to be happy. Consumerism has caused the individual in the consumerist Fourfold to become 'hysterical', always trying to find ways to please and keep up with the Jones'. This has created a new context for pastoral ministering: it needs to be conducted within the social context, in this case, that of kids. *Harry Potter* is one way of ministering to kids, by using a narrative that they enjoy and understand.

Reading allows kids not to have to suffer life's confusion, dramas and problems on their own: some books become firm companions from childhood through to adulthood. This makes reading vital: in it kids seek/choose to form/shape their identities and thus their spiritualities. By internalizing what the person reads and by recreating the narrative from a *world-in-front-of-the-text* reading, the person has the opportunity to use their imagination to go beyond the text to experience life in an alternative and a transformational way, allowing them to learn something about their identity and spirituality. Some stories have a *sacred* storyline threaded in an alternative worldview that forms part of the narrative in a subtle manner. These *sacred* stories help kids respond to the ultimate questions and thus form the core of their spirituality and the way they view the world.

Just as a life evolves over the period of a lifetime, so too does our favourite novel that we keep re-reading. With each re-reading, we bring our evolved self to re-experience the text from another angle. One such series of books is the *Harry Potter* series. This series offers an alternative fourfold, with a different *sacred* story to the story of consumerism, a new expression of what is lacking in secular societies: true friendship based on love, respect and sacrifice, rather than material possessions or status. This Fourfold gives kids alternative choices, even though these choices may be hard to make and may not be approved of by the 'big Other' (society) in which one lives.

We start our journey with a young orphan boy called Harry, and end our journey with a father and husband. Each book begins with Harry having grown a year older or about to turn a year older, and with each year he is confronted by new challenges that shape and form his identity and spirituality. By the last book Harry has changed in many ways, yet is the same: Harry's character (who Harry is) and Harry's actions (how he conducts himself from day to day) make him recognizable to the reader and stabilize his identity over the seven books in the series. In other words: This is more or less who Harry has always been, but for those aspects of Harry that have changed since he has last seen Ron, Hermione and sometimes the reader, Harry can explain by telling his story to Ron, Hermione and us, of how these changes have come about. Harry has an innate need to explain himself to Ron, Hermione and us because we are part of Harry's story and his world; By telling us his story, his personhood remains real to Ron, Hermione and us, and makes the reader part of his world for the period of time that we read about Harry.

People of all ages relate to Harry's need to tell how he has evolved over seven years, as this is how we remain real to ourselves and to others, by telling each other our stories. Our identities are in a sense made up of many bits and pieces, including other people's stories, forming a collage that is unique to us. Likewise, our unique story is part of other people's unique collages. This way of constructing identity and spirituality is significant for kids who are in their formative years, constructing what will be their foundations for adulthood. In this regard, narrative in the form of reading is essential to spirituality as stories are composed of language with sacred elements that will be woven into the explanation of kids' responses to the ultimate questions that counter the dominant sacred story of consumerism to which they are exposed in their daily existence.

## Chapter 4:

### The *Harry Potter* narrative: Through the spiritual portal of fantasy

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#### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter it is argued that fantasy narrative, more than any other literary narrative, such as the detective mystery, school story, love story and so on, may be a useful form of narrative to help kids to construct their identity and develop an alternative spirituality; in this case, the *Harry Potter* series. It may then be lived out on a daily basis. In the previous chapter it was argued that language poetically creates various worlds and that we dwell in these created worlds (Houses of Being). This language-world unfolds itself in the Fourfold (earth, sky, gods and mortals). The individuals relate to their constructed/created world by means of a dialectical process, as the world is continuously socially constructed. Individuals are born into a language and yet they help shape that language or at least the worlds that are created through that language in their specific context. For instance, kids give words whole new meanings. 'Sick' now means more than just to be ill, it is often applied to something that kids previously deemed 'brilliant'; 'cool' does not just mean cold, it is also used by kids to describe something that they think is nice, as just two examples of how kids dialectically interact with language to create their specific teenage world.

Within this dialectical process between the individual and community in the social construction of reality, the individual uses narrative in its various forms (storytelling, conversations, reading and the like), and it is this narrative that directly shapes our identity and spirituality. Story, explains Thurston (1995: 46), offers a 'sacred space' for children to be able to work out their fears, and

the story's happy conclusion gives the child the hope s/he needs to move forward. Thurston (1995: 47) adds that kids read and reread stories (or have them read to them over and over again), because these narratives help them interpret their own experiences. By doing this, the child also starts to remember the story and uses it to imagine and keep hope alive.

Hence:

The story which is true is the one that connects with their experience and because they can recognize imaginative truth, they are open to myth and poetry and truth of the biblical stories... Stories nurture the imagination, allowing us to transcend our limited experiences and to move even temporarily into another space, into the shoes of another, and thus ultimately to learn compassion (Thurston 1995: 47).

In fantasy, what Thurston explains is particularly true since the alternative fantastical world which is created through the narrative transcends all kids' limited experiences. These alternative worlds also often challenge the various worlds in which the readers live. The *Harry Potter* wizarding world challenges the western world of teenagers. By its offering teenagers an alternative narrative with which to understand and interpret their world, they are offered a new language with which to construct their own meaning, and through meaning develop their identity and spirituality. Hence, kids are offered alternative values, by which to live out their lives.

These alternative worlds have the ability to awaken the imagination of the reader in a way that no other type of narrative can, through the use of the fantastic. However, the fantastic is created in such a manner that the author usually manages to keep the correct balance between the familiarity of our world and the created alternative world, for the reader to be able to identify with the alternative world. The author does this by creating the fantastic story through the use of different *mundane* stories, those that readers can



easily identify with, and then stirs in these *mundane* stories glimpses of a particular *sacred* story. Rowling has done this by telling a *mundane* story of teenagers, and all that it means to be a teenager (heartbreak, confusion with the opposite sex, popularity, feeling isolated – no one understands me, etc.), as mentioned earlier. Rowling then weaves into the *mundane* story two *sacred* stories. In the ‘Muggle’ *sacred* story (as noted, this is similar to the dominant *sacred* story of the Western world in which teenagers live), it is that of consumerism and all that it entails to live in this world, including the values in such a world that shapes our characters. Rowling personifies the Western *sacred* story in the form of the Dursleys and their need to please their neighbours. The Dursleys, thus, become typical characters living according to values of the *sacred* story of the West. In the wizarding world, Rowling provides an alternative *sacred* story, personified by the characters and actions of some of the wizards, such as expressing love, fellowship and overcoming the temptation to be lured by power and greed. In short, Rowling’s alternative *sacred* story exhibits similarities with the core values and meaning of the Gospels, and is thus lived theology. Tolkien explains that because the writer tries to express ‘Joy’ through telling stories about the ‘Triumph of Right, of Good (or its representatives) over evil (and its representatives)’, the reader is given a glimpse of the ‘source-reality’, God (Tolkien 2008: 246).

Rowling presents the discourse of Christ as an alternative way of living, as opposed to dwelling in the Western world’s dominant *sacred* story of global capitalism and materialism. The global market explains Rumscheidt (1998:4), directly dehumanizes people, which sometimes impacts on how they choose to live their lives and where they place their values. Rowling confronts the reader with her two *sacred* stories from the first book, *The Philosopher’s Stone*. In the ‘Muggle’ world, materialism/capitalism (*sacred* story) plays a huge role in how people go about their lives, seeking to compete with one another, whereas in the wizarding world, good wizards

act out of love and fellowship for one another, willing to sacrifice everything for these fellowships. However, there are also evil wizards in this world, who share the same values as those who live in a materialistic Western society, and thus live in a manner that expresses the value of status and material possessions. These wizards are power hungry, ready to compete for power at any cost.

Rowling uses the third-person narrator to tell her story. More specifically she uses the *omniscient* narrator, who is all-knowing: s/he 'can report the characters' thoughts and feelings as well as what they say and do' (Meyer 2005: 200). By using such a narrator Rowling immediately, from the very first book, and from the very first line, takes 'you' the reader on her journey and makes 'you' not only part of the story, but also a friend. She speaks to 'you' not as a 'Muggle', but as someone who understands, someone, who unlike the Dursleys, possesses much imagination and can be involved in the strange and mysterious. Rowling assumes that 'you' the reader have made the choice not to be a 'Muggle', and she can therefore include 'you' in her secret: witches and wizards still exist all over the world, and 'Muggles' may in no way know about them. By using this narrative strategy, Rowling enchants her readers, so she can awaken them to their Western consumerist way of living. By creating these worlds, Rowling gives the reader an alternative to the one that they dwell in. Rowling challenges the readers to use their imaginations to imagine an alternative life for themselves. Thus, the *Harry Potter* series provides kids with narrative resources to re-imagine their lives differently. This may have a direct impact on their identity and thus spirituality, as people identify themselves and live by the values of their world.

In this chapter, it is argued that:

1. The *Harry Potter* novels are fantasy, where Rowling has created two worlds. 'Muggles' dwell in one, and then there is a 'Sub-Created' world where wizards dwell. Tolkien (1979: 40-41) used the term 'Secondary' for all imaginary worlds. By 'Secondary' he meant that when the imagination and fancy are linked the author is capable of creating 'Sub-Creations', derived from reality.
2. As a fantasy, the *Harry Potter* series, by means of its wizarding 'Sub-Creation', offers an alternative interpretation of reality, and therefore challenges the reader to re-examine the dominant discourses of their reality. By putting her or him in such a position, s/he is offered a narrative source that allows them to re-imagine something else for their own identity and thus spirituality. By sub-creating the wizarding world, containing both *mundane* and *sacred* stories, Rowling offers readers alternative narrative resources to construct meaning concerning their lives: to construct their identity and spirituality. Kids, especially teenagers, who are desperately seeking a different identity and spirituality from their parents, are offered a necessary narrative resource that may help them construct identity and spirituality in an alternative positive manner.
3. Rowling's alternative *sacred* story that runs through the *Harry Potter* series gives us glimpses of the Christ discourse. Meylahn's interpretation of the Christ discourse is brought into the conversation to show how this discourse liberates people from the dominant discourse, thus opening a space for alternative construction of identity, community and spirituality: lived theology.

## 4.2 *Harry Potter* as fantasy narrative and the ‘elvish’ craft of ‘Sub-Creation’

### 4.2.1 The elements of fantasy

Fantasy, Tolkien (1979: 50) tells us, is very difficult to achieve, as it requires not only many hours of labor, but also a writer that is gifted in the ‘elvish craft’ of language. The writer, who in essence becomes an ‘elf’, is able to create magic with everyday language. When done well, fantasy is then in its most ‘potent mode’, giving the reader the gift of re-imagination. Consequently it may allow the reader to re-imagine their lives in a different way and this may then directly have an impact in re-shaping the world in which they live, along with the values they express within their world.

The *Harry Potter* series is a fantasy narrative as it contains the following three elements (Figure 2 refers):

- **Magic**, and sometimes the paranormal, are prominent elements, as well as other elements that do not exist in our world (Herald & Kunz 2008: 67). The *Harry Potter* series belongs to the fantasy genre, as magic is the dominant element making it ‘squarely [a] species of fantasy’ (Duriez 2007: 219). Tolkien, as was said above, viewed writing as an ‘elvish craft’ that allows the writer to create magic through language, for words have the power to describe things that do not exist and never have existed in our world (Tolkien 2008: 61). However, the magic that the writer (an elf in Tolkien’s sense) creates is not just literal and not just a device; the fantastic language conjured up by the writer also has the ability to captivate the reader to re-imagine their lives, as was said above, and therein dwells the true magic of fantasy narratives. For Tolkien, faerie tales were stories about the faerie

world, in other words a realm where faeries and ‘many things besides elves and fays’ exist (Tolkien 1979: 16). The characters in these realms use magic secretly or in the open.

- Fantasies are always about the battle between **good and evil** (Herald & Kunz 2008: xii). Usually, the good is represented as the alternative *sacred* story, while the evil represents one of the dominant discourses (*sacred* story) from the reader’s actual world. The *Harry Potter* series is about a young boy and his friends who look after one another through a strong fellowship with values similar to the Christ discourse who are called to destroy a powerful and evil wizard who is threatening to destroy the wizarding world.
- Fantasy writers create **alternative worlds** whereby kids can explore everyday realities from a different/alternative perspective. The alternative world/‘Sub-Creation’ can be, as Tolkien (1979: 68) explains it,

sudden miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur. It does not deny the existence of dyscatastrophe, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance; it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is Evangelium, giving fleeting glimpses of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant grief.

In other words, in the fantasy world at its most ‘potent mode’ the reader may witness ‘Joy’, but this ‘Joy’ can sometimes only occur through deep sorrow. This sorrow then allows the reader to bring into their world the ‘Joy’ of the ‘Evangelium’ [Gospel] from the alternative/‘Sub-Creation’. In Rowling’s ‘Sub-Creation’ she can present, and make kids aware of, the downfalls of

Western consumerism. Rowling does not leave her narrative at this point: she also presents an alternative way of existing in her 'Sub-Creation' by making the discourse of Christ another choice to live by. Failure, and then sorrow because of that failure, where the reader glimpses the discourse of Christ, is experienced by many of the characters, such as Dumbledore, Snape and even Harry. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

<b>Magic</b>	<b>Battle between Good and Evil</b>	<b>Alternative Worlds</b>
<p>The main protagonists (Harry, Ron, Hermione, Dumbledore and so on) are all part of the wizarding world, with the ability to do <b>magic</b>.</p> <p>Each wizard has a wand, a necessary tool to perform <b>magic</b>.</p>	<p>This is predominant in the wizarding world, where there is a fierce battle between good and evil.</p> <p><b>Voldemort (evil)</b> and his corrupted idea of power <b>versus the good</b> wizards who live according to Christ like values.</p>	<p>The 'Sub-Creation' of the wizarding world (with all its fantastic elements, which do not exist in our 'reality') is a place where kids can glimpse and explore Rowling's subtly woven <b>sacred story (alternative story)</b> of the Christ discourse.</p>

**Figure 2. The Three Elements of Fantasy in the Harry Potter Series**

Rowling has created a story containing a 'Sub-Creation' enriched with the Christ discourse in such an 'elvish' manner that the reader is able to re-imagine themselves liberated from the dominant discourse of Western consumerism, living an alternative life amongst friends and community who hold them in high regard, regardless of their possessions. To do this, Rowling uses the traditional primary elements of narrative, yet she mixes

into this narrative enough 'elvish craft' (magic) to provide the reader with glimpses of the Gospel as follows:

1. **Setting:** The character is framed by the setting, which consists of major elements such as time, place and social environment. It is necessary for the reader to be sensitive to the setting the author has provided in order to understand fully why the characters behave and act in a certain way. Settings are used to produce 'mood or atmosphere that will prepare the reader for what is to come' (Meyer 2005: 167). Rowling, for example, creates various settings that have a specific atmosphere, creating a certain world-of-meaning. Rowling creates a world (similar to our world), where 'Muggles' dwell and then creates a 'Sub-Creation' where witches and wizards dwell. The 'god element' of Rowling's world gives that particular world its ultimate meaning, offering values by which people (both 'Muggles' and wizards) live, and in some instances, acts as the controlling force behind the way people (mortals) behave in that world. It is the ultimate reference (*sacred* story) and legitimization of that world. In creating this world as an alternative to contemporary London, Rowling has successfully managed to master one of the key elements of fantasy literature, the ability to achieve the correct balance in the setting of the narrative, between familiarity and difference, for the reader to identify with the alternative world. In the world where 'Muggles' dwell, which closely resembles Western society, ultimate meaning (*sacred* story) emphasizes materialism and consumerism. Thus in the 'Muggle' world, the reader glimpses the 'capitalist' discourse (Meylahn 2010: 3) where individuals think they are free through the choices they make, yet are enslaved to the very market (and desired objects it sells) they think they are free from. In the meantime, in the wizarding 'Sub-Creation', of which Harry and his friends are part, ultimate meaning places value on an alternative

understanding of life, which is characterized by values such as love, friendship, conquering the fear of death and the like. The *sacred* story, with its core values, that the *Harry Potter* series tells the reader, is a story free of being enslaved to the 'big Other' (market). Rowling does this through telling a story about love defeating evil, or keeping evil at bay, allowing the reader to glimpse Christ.

2. **Characters:** without well developed characters, the plot would disappear as the story needs to be populated with characters for it to exist. 'The agents who move its action are 'persons', not mere behaviors or minds or motives or symptoms but characters that are mysterious and whole, undivided, underway' (Crites 1975:26). A good writer creates characters that seem real to us, through the process known as *characterization*. The author breathes life into her/his characters and introduces the reader to characters they would not meet outside of these narratives; for example wizards, giants, house-elves, werewolves and so forth. These characters may be from different worlds and from different ages (past, present and future). The reader becomes interested in the plot because s/he cares what will happen to the character: sometimes identifying with the characters' plight, at other times disappointed/saddened by their actions. Characters are usually people, but can also be animals or inanimate objects that are given human qualities by the author. 'We evaluate fictional characters in much the same way we understand people in our lives. By piecing together bits of information, we create a context that allows us to interpret their behaviour' (Meyer 2005:118). Taylor (2002:412) explains that the predominant reason people read stories is that the characters have to make choices and then deal with the consequences of those choices. Stories emphasize the difficulty in making good choices, above easy and wrong ones, which may fascinate people if they imagine themselves



in these situations, nudging them to ask themselves: What would I do in this situation? 'Answering this question does not simply entail *discovering* who we are, but allows us in part to *determine* who we are. Every powerful character we encounter in a story is a challenge to our own character, and holds the possibility of changing us' (Taylor 2002:412). Rowling has created rich and diverse characters who are authentically human in every way, including their eccentricities. An example is Hagrid, who is kind hearted, and a loyal friend, with the eccentric habit of collecting interesting and dangerous 'pets'. The teenage characters of Harry, Ron and Hermione are typical teenagers exhibiting all the anguishes that accompany this period. These characters are so well developed and so real that it is easy for kids reading the books to identify with them. Rowling's characters are complex and subtle and she allows us to know more about them, through the discoveries they make about themselves and others, with each book; they become people about whom we know and care. Nevertheless, the reader is also sometimes surprised and challenged by certain characters, because some turn out to be different to who the reader initially thought them to be. An example of this is Professor Snape, acting out of love for Lily, in secret, all the years. Rowling's characters are therefore human in every way, imperfect, often failing to do the right thing, because of arrogance, pride and ignorance, trying to do the best they can. Rowling has created many different characters that the reader can identify with, or that may cause them to question the way that they have been living their lives up until now.

3. **Time:** it can be manipulated; for example some stories are set in the future, while others are in the past. An example of Rowling manipulating time occurs when one wizard can travel back in time through the thoughts of another wizard, by using a device known as

the Pensieve (2000: 634). In the final book, *The Deathly Hallows*, it is through this device that both the reader and Harry share a very intimate moment of grace with Snape: with Harry, the reader enters Snape's difficult childhood through to his adolescence and adulthood, revealing to Harry and the reader Snape's absolute love for Lily (Rowling 2007: 529-553). Another example is to be found in the ghosts, such as 'Nearly Headless Nick' (Rowling 1997: 92), and the 'Bloody Baron', who lived during previous centuries (Rowling 1997: 93), and 'Moaning Myrtle' (Rowling 1998: 102) who had died when Voldemort and Hagrid were at school. They belong to the past, but are wandering around Hogwarts in the present and belong to the different school houses: Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw and Slytherin.

#### 4.2.1 Rowling's 'elvish' magical language of 'Sub-Creation'

The *Harry Potter* series has been classified as children's and young adult fantasy fiction, but it is also very popular with adults<sup>19</sup> (Wagner 2003: 4; Mendlesohn 2008: 114; Trevarthen 2008: 15). Tolkien and Lewis both believed that fantasy is also an adult genre and was the best way for a writer to awaken the adult reader from their dominant discourse, making them question the values of that discourse. Fairy tales, says Lewis, not only induce enchantments, but break them: 'And you and I have need of the strongest spell that can be found to wake us from the evil enchantment of worldliness which has been laid upon us for nearly a hundred years' (Lewis 1962: 201). By exposing readers, through fantasy, to Christianity in an alternative way, the reader may be able to awaken their stunted spirituality and to be woken up from the spell of consumerism and material things that we desire, as we think our 'friends' will like us if we have these possessions.

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<sup>19</sup> The *Harry Potter* novels are so popular with adults that they were the first children's books to be re-printed with so called adult covers, so that adults are not embarrassed to be seen reading them in public (Trevarthen 2008:15).

By using glimpses of the Christ discourse in her own spiritual quest, Rowling awakens our own spirituality. When she was twenty-five years old, her mother died of multiple sclerosis, aged forty-five years. This resulted in Rowling plunging into deep depression, and although she had started to write the *Harry Potter* series, she then carried on writing as a way to cope with the loss of her mother. Death and love also became a sharp focus of the story, as it became her personal spiritual struggle. 'If she [mom] hadn't died, I don't think it's too strong to say that there wouldn't be *Harry Potter*,' she says. 'The books are what they are because she died...because I loved her and she died.'<sup>20</sup> Rowling puts forward the choice of valuing family, friends and neighbors, and the wealth gained through these relationships, above material things that cannot love us or value us in return. These values are mingled with the *mundane* story of being a teenager and all the struggle this brings until one eventually becomes one's own person. Rowling also uses mythological creatures and sacred symbols, making them part of her 'elvish craft', such as those below, to create a work rich in theological discourse, and to further emphasize Christ's love, suffering for our sake, death and resurrection. Here are a few examples:

- **The Phoenix**

We meet Fawkes, Dumbledore's pet phoenix, for the first time in *Chamber of Secrets*, on a 'Burning day' (Rowling 1998: 155). Much to Harry's distress Fawkes bursts into flames when he is alone with him, but Dumbledore tells Harry to watch as Fawkes rises from his own ashes as a chick. This bird was written about in the ancient cultures of the Egyptians, Persians, Greeks, Jews, Chinese and Japanese (Colbert 2007:240). The phoenix was associated with the sun and fire. Rowling (2001: 32) explains that the phoenix song has magical powers, and 'it is reputed to increase the courage of the pure of heart and to strike fear into the heart of the impure.' Rowling clearly wants the phoenix

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.oprah.com/>

associated with all that is good and pure, stating that this creature never kills anything, and eats only herbs (Rowling 2001: 32).

The phoenix symbolized transformation, resurrection and immortality. It was said that only one of these birds could exist at a time and that it could live between 500–1000 years. It was believed that when the bird was dying, it then either cremated itself and then was reborn from the ashes or shrivelled into an egg and re-emerged as a chick. The phoenix was subsequently co-opted by the Church and became the symbol of eternal life, Christ's birth and resurrection and life after death. Granger (2006:94) comments on the scene in *The Order of the Phoenix*, where the phoenix saves Dumbledore's life by swallowing the death curse and then rising from the ashes as follows: the phoenix here 'portrays not only the resurrection of Christ but also his having intervened for us and taken the curse of death upon himself' (Granger 2006:94).

It was known as the 'resurrection bird' during the Middle Ages (Shepherd & Shepherd 2002: 233). According to Taliaferro (2010: 230-231), Rowling uses the phoenix's ability to be resurrected to further symbolize remorse, confession and need to change to be reborn. However, the person who is reborn has to enter into a '*reborn*' relationship within their community and friendships, for the process to be complete. In other words, the 'wounded naked' person needs to be accepted by a 'wounded naked' community or friend for the relationship to be rebuilt through love and grace, or the process will fail (Meylahn 2010: 9). Taliaferro uses Dumbledore, Harry and Voldemort as an example: 'Remorse and rebirth serve to foster a deeper, more natural life for Harry and Dumbledore, whereas Voldemort's pursuit of evil makes him increasingly unnatural' (Taliaferro 2010: 238). Voldemort never shows remorse for his evil-doing, and when he is physically reborn it is a perverted action that results in his new body having a snake-like face.

Taliaferro (2010: 243) concludes that in his opinion, Fawkes leaves after Dumbledore's funeral because the reader should have by then grasped: 'that sometimes spiritual or actual death may have to be endured for there to be a regeneration of life, reconciliation, and triumph of good over evil.' This clearly links the phoenix to the story of Christ: his redeeming death and resurrection on the cross.

- **The Unicorn**

On Harry's first trip into the Forbidden Forest (*Philosopher's Stone*), he sees a unicorn for the first time. It is dead, and Voldemort is drinking its blood. Firenze<sup>21</sup> tells Harry that killing a unicorn is regarded as one of the worst crimes to commit. Firenze goes on to explain to Harry, 'The blood of a unicorn will keep you alive, even if you are an inch from death, but at a terrible price. You have slain something pure and defenceless to save yourself, and you will have but a half-life, a cursed life, from the moment the blood touches your lips' (Rowling 1997: 188). In the 'Sub-Creation' Voldemort, living a perverted, 'cursed life' by feeding off innocence and purity, corrupts the divine element. Voldemort's sucking blood from the unicorn is also a powerful symbol of how the market 'sucks' their identity from consumers, telling them what identity they need to have to be loved by the 'big Other'. Voldemort's perversion of the 'Sub-Creation' is destroyed only through sacrifice and love.

Unicorns have held humankind's imagination captive for centuries. The unicorn was habitually depicted as a gentle creature who could never step on any living thing, not even grass. Jewish scholars associate the unicorn's single horn with the unity of the spirit. The unicorn was a symbol of purity and chastity. It was believed that only virgins could

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<sup>21</sup> Firenze is a centaur (possessing the upper body of a man and the lower body of a horse) who lives in the Forbidden Forest.

capture unicorns and would help trap them for hunters<sup>22</sup>. This led to the unicorn becoming a symbol of Christ, 'resting in the Virgin Mary's lap and laying himself open to suffering and death' (Shepherd & Shepherd 2002: 232).

- **The Philosopher's Stone**

We encounter the Philosopher's Stone in the first book with the same title. Rowling uses a myth surrounding an actual historical figure, Nicholas Flamel, an alchemist who was said to have successfully made the Stone. The Philosopher's Stone was known as the 'pill of immortality' in the East. From an esoteric perspective, the act of changing a base metal to gold is seen 'as an attempt to transform humans from base matter to refined spirit and to produce nothing less than the gold of spiritual illumination' (Marshall 2002: 13). Western alchemists thought the Philosopher's Stone to be an unknown substance that could transform any base metal into silver or gold. It was further believed that an 'Elixir of Life' could be derived from the Philosopher's Stone; it would prolong life and enlighten the soul. 'Inasmuch as alchemy was concerned with the perfection of the human soul, the Philosopher's Stone was thought to cure illness, prolong life, and bring about spiritual revitalization.'<sup>23</sup> Some believe that this is a stone that must be found, while others believe that it is 'the culmination of a process of spiritual development' (Shepherd & Shepherd 2002). Others (Granger 2008: 106; Marshall 2009: 373) regard the Philosopher's Stone as a symbol of Christ.

Trevarthen (2008: 181-212), explains that in her view, Harry is the Stone, which is why Rowling introduces this symbol in her first book. We

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<sup>22</sup> In her book, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, Rowling (2001: 41) says that the unicorn is more likely to 'allow a witch to approach it than a wizard, and is so fleet of foot that it is very difficult to capture.' Therefore, Rowling keeps to the mythology of the unicorn.

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.britannica.com/>

all possess the Stone within us, but often we do not notice that we have this gift. We can only attain our Stone by sacrificing ourselves for the good of others. 'We fully attain our stone by giving to others, as Harry does. We multiply our wealth by focusing it where it will do the most good, where the cost of a cup of coffee saves a life' (Trevarthen 2008: 211). To attain the Stone, Harry has to be sacrificed (as he was in *The Deathly Hallows*) to be transformed into the Stone. Harry gained the power to use it by deciding to go back and fight Voldemort and putting an end to his evil reign of terror. Rowling continuously emphasizes the need to purge the wizarding 'Sub-Creation' of the corruption/greed of Voldemort to make the 'Sub-Creation' whole/healthy again.

#### •The Basilisk

With the help of Fawkes, Harry meets and defeats the Basilisk in *The Chamber of Secrets*. It had been placed there by one of the original founders of Hogwarts, Salazar Slytherin, to be unleashed on, and purge all, those not worthy of the school – those who come from 'Muggle' families – by his rightful heir, when the time was right. This mythological creature, although described by Rowling as a monstrous snake,<sup>24</sup> was believed to have the upper body of a cock and the lower body of a snake, its breath being poisonous. 'It can kill other serpents with its smell and men with a mere look' (Murgatroyd 2007: 20). The only way a Basilisk could be killed was by looking at its own reflection, in other words, when it was forced to look at itself in a mirror. It was believed that the basilisk was the offspring of a rooster and a snake. 'In the Christian tradition, the basilisk became a symbol of the Antichrist and during the Middle Ages was associated with sins such as lust, treachery and disease (especially syphilis)' (O'Conner & Airey 2007:61). While

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<sup>24</sup> Rowling says in *Fantastic Beasts & Where To Find Them*, that 'a chicken egg beneath a toad' produces the Basilisk (Rowling 2001: 3)

Voldemort is not portrayed as the Antichrist (discussed in detail later), he is certainly associated with treachery.

#### 4.2.2 Going through the portal of the *Harry Potter* ‘Sub-Creation’

All the above images are powerful mythological symbols of spirituality and Christianity. The first three are all somehow connected with Christ and all that is good and pure, while the last one is connected to Voldemort and a perversion of good. By choosing to utilize these symbols, Rowling allows the reader to imagine other similar <sup>25</sup> symbols that may open up their imagination to become a gateway to spiritual experiences that may re-shape the readers’ life. ‘Imagination is not only the uniquely human capacity to envision that which is not, and therefore the fount of all invention. In its arguably most transformative and revelatory capacity, it is the power that enables us to empathize with humans whose experiences we have never shared’ (Rowling 2008)<sup>26</sup>.

For Natov (2001: 315) the magical world of *Harry Potter* does not exist as a distinct world apart from the ordinary world, like the ones created by Tolkien and Lewis; there is, rather, an ‘interpenetration of the two worlds’. This ‘interpenetration’ represents how people actually live on more than one plane, with our imaginary world and our daily life sometimes moving and interpenetrating our consciousness. Mendlesohn (2008:1), on the other hand, calls the *Harry Potter* series portal-quest fantasies, with C.S. Lewis’<sup>27</sup> *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* being the ‘classic portal fantasy’.

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<sup>25</sup> ‘Myth is a language that can provide insight and a novel perspective that takes us from our normal, everyday world into another place in the mind.’ (Greenwood 2009:77).

Mythology is a huge topic and includes the many cultures of the world, it is also discussed by many academics from different fields such as theology, psychiatry and philosophy. Please see the following for some examples: Thury & Devinney 2009; Coupe 2009; Segal 2000; Segal 1998; Campbell 1993; Spence 1994; Dundes 1984; Campbell 1973.

<sup>26</sup> This quote is from a commencement speech Rowling delivered at Harvard University to the Class of 2008, in Tatar (2009:197).

<sup>27</sup> *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* was first published in 1950, the first of seven books from the series called the *Chronicles of Narnia*, written by C.S Lewis. This series is about the



In portal fantasies the protagonist/s of the story leave her/his familiar world, passing through a portal to an unknown place ('Sub-Creations'). 'When someone goes through a portal, the reader can be sure that he or she must face wonders and strangeness, and new dimensions of reality' (Duriez 2007: 246). Kids seem to identify well with protagonists who leave the familiar in search of the unfamiliar. Most often fantasy narratives are coming-of-age stories. Harry begins his journey at a crucial time in his life, aged eleven, 'an age associated with coming into consciousness, particularly for boys, and in particular in England, when children begin their 'serious' study to prepare them for adult life' (Natov 2001: 310). Adolescents are seeking independence from their parents. They seek to make different choices from their parents, challenging the choices their parents have made for them up to this point. This may cause the adolescent to feel confused and lonely, as they leave their realm of familiarity and enter into the unfamiliar. Therefore, when they go through the portal with Harry and his friends to the wizarding world, kids are delighted to be able to leave their world and seek alternative discourses to the ones in which their parents have brought them up. Harry, Ron and Hermione are challenged through friendship and its implications (sacrifice and loyalty to mention just two instances), to make life changing choices that have a direct impact on their identities and perhaps even on the readers' identity/spirituality.

In the first book, *The Philosopher's Stone*, Harry goes through a wall (Hagrid taps one of the bricks in the wall three times; a hole appears and becomes big enough to allow both Harry and Hagrid through) in the courtyard at the back of the Leaky Cauldron, located in London, to get to Diagon Alley (Rowling 1997: 56). Harry wishes that he had more eyes to take in all the extraordinary things that he is seeing: shops selling cauldrons, owls, dragon liver, books of spells and so on. Harry also sees non-humans

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adventures of four children who go through a cupboard and find themselves in the world of Narnia. They become kings and queens and face an ongoing battle between good and evil. Lewis based his stories on Christian theology.

for the first time, goblins, in the wizarding bank, Gringotts. Rowling has used everyday language to construct another world, where the same words that the reader uses on a daily basis now hold magical meaning as they describe magical creatures and things. Rowling continues her 'elvish craft' later when Harry travels to Hogwarts. He is told to go through another portal, this time through the barrier between platforms nine and ten at King's Cross station (in London), to reach Platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$  (Rowling 1997: 71). Upon crossing that portal, he sees a scarlet steam engine by which he and the reader are transported to the magical world of Hogwarts.

The reader is accorded the position of 'companion-audience', and relies on the protagonist for an explanation of the new world that the reader and protagonist have entered. The fantasy world does not 'leak' into the normal world; although the protagonist/s can come and go, the magic world does not, with the exception of the *Harry Potter* series. The books in the series sometimes begin with intrusion fantasy<sup>28</sup> as in, for example *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, where the arrival of the owls causes chaos in the Dursley's home) (Rowling 1997: 35) 'but then rapidly transmute into almost archetypal portal fantasies, reliant on elaborate descriptions and continual new imaginings' (Mendlesohn 2008: 2). Rowling's 'elaborate description' and 'new imaginings' come in the form of using magic<sup>29</sup> and mythology (as was seen above), detective mystery<sup>30</sup> and school stories<sup>31</sup>, as tools to

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<sup>28</sup> Intrusion fantasy exists when the fantastic intrudes into the 'normal' world, causing chaos. 'The intrusion fantasy is not necessarily unpleasant, but it has at its base the assumption that normality is organized, and that when the fantastic retreats the world, while not necessarily unchanged, returns to predictability – at least until the next element of the fantastic intrudes' (Mendlesohn 2008:xxii).

<sup>29</sup> When Harry is nearly eleven years old Hagrid tells him who he is and that he is famous in the wizarding world for being the only person to survive the killing curse as well as for the mysterious disappearance of the evil Lord Voldemort. He learns from Hagrid that there are witches and wizards living 'up an' down the country' (Rowling 1997:51), but that they do not want 'Muggles' to know about them as the latter would want magical solutions for all their problems. Harry then becomes a wizard-in-training at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

<sup>30</sup> Each year Harry, Ron and Hermione find themselves trying to solve some mysterious circumstance, usually involving Lord Voldemort's identity and why he is so obsessed with Harry (Routledge 2001: 205).

<sup>31</sup> Alton (2003:149-152), explains that Hogwarts follows the British public school system: students are assigned houses, eat all meals with their fellow housemates, sleep in dormitories belonging to

weave into her fantastic world<sup>32</sup>. The portal fantasy sees the protagonist *enter* through a portal, where s/he then *transforms* in some way, and then *negotiates* with the fantastic as regards the quest that s/he has been given. Harry is called to adventure by Hagrid, who also serves as Harry's magical guide and protector. By taking Harry to Diagon Alley, Hagrid equips Harry with his wand, one of his most important tools in negotiating his way through the adventure ahead.

A fantasy narrative takes the reader on a journey of the imagination. When it is well written, a narrative has the ability to instantaneously enchant our imagination and keeps us in a transported state until we either put the book down or the book ends. 'There is no use', said Lewis, 'in sending a reader to 'faerie' only to be presented with the ordinary' (Lewis 1943: 10). Once the reader is sent to 'faerie' the supernatural needs to be presented as a reality. This, as was said above, may be created by the detail of the atmosphere and setting to perform several functions, the most significant being spiritual. Fantasy narratives not only have the ability to transport the reader to another place in their imagination, but are also able to permit them to imagine themselves as other people, acting in a different manner. This ability of the fantasy may then create awe and wonder in the reader (Herald & Kunzel 2008: xii). For example, Rowling first transports the reader to modern day London. She then transports Harry and the reader to a magical world and school. Lastly, she transforms Harry into a wizard and the reader can 'try on' all the characters' identities by experience-taking, both 'Muggle'

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their houses and spend all their free time in the common rooms of their houses. The houses also compete for points for the school cup. The structure of the school story is as follows: the boy enters school feeling lonely and nervous, but he eventually makes friends, flourishes and may even start to rebel. At school the boy learns about duty, how to rely on himself and loyalty. When he leaves the school for the grown up world he does so permanently formed by the conduct learned at school. The school story contains practical jokes, sports, mischief and study. Harry Potter, says Alton (2003:150), 'signifies a return to the traditional Victorian boarding school or public school story, but with the element of fantasy added.'

<sup>32</sup> Because the Harry Potter series seems to be constructed from so many types of genres, Alton (2003:141-162), argues that there is no one genre to fit the series. Alton calls the series a 'generic fusion'. But most academics (Hunt & Lenz 2001; O'Keefe 2004; Mendlesohn 2008; Tatar 2009) term the series a fantasy, with the other genres being used as tools to create Rowling's fantastic world.

and wizard or just observe their actions. The narrative is not only created by the writer but co-created by the reader, as each reader brings with them their own experiences (prejudgments) to the narrative. Therefore, no two people interpret and experience a narrative in exactly the same way: this makes for diverse interpretations of narratives, enriching the readers' understanding of specific texts.

Bloom (2001: 143) points out that the reader wants to encounter not only aspects of friends and themselves, but also something familiar in the societies created by the writer, in the narrative that they read, whether these narratives are historical, contemporary or somewhere in the future. As was said in Chapter 3, people relate well to characters who are similar to them, because this enhances their sense of their own identity. Rowling weaves fantasy and reality into one another so well that the reader easily makes the journey from the created 'Muggle' world to the wizarding 'Sub-Creation'. By reading about a contemporary London, the reader is easily able to identify with Harry's surroundings. Furthermore, when readers subsequently journey with him to the wizarding community and meet wizards for the first time, they quickly realize that although the wizards perform magic, dress differently to them, and have no or little use for 'Muggle' technology, they still remain 'normal' people. In that the wizards still deal with the vicissitudes of life in a real manner, it makes them familiar to the reader. Therefore, in the created 'Muggle' world, Rowling draws the reader into the narrative by describing the *mundane* story of contemporary London, containing people such as the Dursleys who spend much of their time and effort worrying about what the neighbors might or might not think of them. In the 'Sub-Created' world of the wizarding community, Rowling draws us in, firstly by describing the fantastic to entertain us, but secondly keeping us there with characters with whom we can easily identify.

#### 4.2.3 Challenging the readers' 'Primary World' with an alternative 'Secondary World'

Fantasy fiction is often accused of teaching children to escape reality (O'Keef 2004: 16). As Tolkien and Lewis both agreed, that is not so, as fantasy is based on reality; otherwise it cannot exist. Natov explains that although Rowling's stories are, in her opinion, experienced on two planes, the imaginary world of wizards is 'created by and rooted in the details of everyday life. In fantasy, always we are grounded; the unconscious creates nothing' (Natov 2001: 314). On the surface, fantasy seems impossible. As Tolkien (2008: 27) says, fantasies are filled with 'all manner of beasts and birds...beauty that is an enchantment, and an ever present peril; both joy and sorrow as sharp as a sword.' At its core, fantasy tries to expose the reader to the dominant discourses in which we exist. For example, as noted above, Lewis wanted to wake people up from the 'evil enchantment' of the corruption of the everydayness of our lives, through the fantastic. Rowling wants to awaken the reader to the selfish discourse of Western consumerism that saps the consumer of their humanity, and then shows them an alternative discourse that is about a shared give and take, about fellowship with the gift of love.

Zipes (1979: 141) explains how fantasy 'plays upon the imagination not to open it up to escape into a never-never land but to make a greater contact to reality.' Taylor (2002: 422) recalls how when reading *The Lord of the Rings* he never escaped reality: rather 'I found myself going along on the journey, dealing like the non-heroic, comfort loving hobbits with weariness, fear, uncertainty, and agonizing choices. With them I felt terror when confronted with undisguised evil and enormous gratefulness for unexpected good.' So it is with the *Harry Potter* series: the reader is confronted with choices (as was said above) stemming from the 'Muggle' world and 'Sub-Creation' that Rowling creates. The two worlds present the reader with two

different *sacred* stories (Jones' vs wizards) echoing the choices of the early church: (Caesar vs. Christ). Rowling does this by not only exposing the reader to their everyday reality (consumerism/materialism), but also creating an alternative interpretation, another 'reality', where the reader is in a position to choose between consumerism or liberation from it: fellowship is the result.

Fantasy, while entertaining, also helps human development through hope. 'While the fantasy is *unreal*, the good feelings it gives us about ourselves and our future *are real*, and these real good feelings are what we need to sustain us' (Bettelheim 1976:12). In the last book, *The Deathly Hallows*, when Harry 'dies' and he meets Dumbledore at Kings Cross, Harry asks him if the conversation they are having is real: "Is this real? Or has this been happening inside my head?" Dumbledore answers him as follows: "Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?" (Rowling 2007: 579). Just because the reader goes beyond the text to experience hope in their imagination does not mean that it is not 'real'. Fantasy demonstrates to the reader that there is hope in chaotic events and that human beings have the ability to bring order to chaos by making other choices. By using the fantasy genre to offer the reader an alternative interpretation to the dominant discourse with which the reader is confronted on a daily basis, the author tries, through the alternative reality that s/he proposes, to liberate the reader from the captivity that the dominant discourse has imposed on them (to undermine the dominant discourse of materialism). In the case of Rowling, the reader has to choose between being a 'Muggle' who tries to fulfil the 'big Others' desires, so that they too can be desired. Alternatively they can choose to be a wizard who, through love and grace, is liberated from consumerism and thus is re-born a new liberated self, free of the desire to please someone/something so they can be liked/loved.

Children's literature, and especially the fantasy genre, deals with the questions people ask from childhood. Fantasy narratives ask not only the questions we ask in developing our identity and spirituality mentioned earlier, but also go on and endeavour to give answers to these questions in an enchanting manner. Fantasy narratives have the ability to engage the reader's imagination by producing a safe place where the reader can try on other identities and play out different life scenarios, re-imagining their lives.

Many fantasies also utilize spiritual experiences, allowing the reader to imagine and perhaps even experience moments of wonder and awe that go beyond what the text intended. In a successful 'Sub-Creation' the writer creates something 'pure' and 'free from greed' that does not try to delude the reader (Tolkien 2008:64). Rather, through the fantastic, the writer attempts to make the reader sensitive to the dominant discourse and how it is degrading to human beings, and then provides another discourse that may be chosen, alternative to the one that they exist in, usually a life that includes glimpsing the Christ discourse indirectly. 'Uncorrupted, it does not seek delusion, nor bewitchment and domination; it seeks shared enrichment, partners in making and delight, not slaves' (Tolkien 2008:64). This 'pure' narrative enables the reader to enter through her/his imagination into an alternative world where the fantastic exists to achieve 'Secondary-Belief', accepting the created world as real while 'visiting' this alternative world and the rules that govern it (Tolkien 2008: 64). Therefore, while in the 'Secondary World' the 'elfish' writer should be able to shape the created world in such a solid manner that the reader is released from their world to temporarily re-imagine themselves as a person who is liberated from their dominant discourse, free and willing to take up the journey of fellowship. O'Keef (2004: 18) considers how fantasy connects the human, the natural and the supernatural: it is 'a totality, a pattern, a network of connection in a fictional world that provides the satisfaction. Even when the total world presented is a grim one, its fullness is a revelation and a comfort.'

As Bettelheim (1976: 5) emphasizes, for a story to capture a child, it must be entertaining and arouse curiosity. However, for it to enrich the child and help them develop her/his identity and thus her/his spirituality, it must:

- 1) stimulate her/his imagination;
- 2) help develop her/his intelligence;
- 3) help make sense of their emotions by tuning in to their anxieties and hopes;
- 4) recognize her/his difficulties and offer solutions to these through the protagonist's story; 'in short, it must at one and the same time relate to all aspects of his personality – and this without ever belittling but, on the contrary, giving full credence to the seriousness of the child's predicament, while simultaneously promoting confidence in himself and in his future' (Bettelheim 1976: 5).

Rowling addresses the issues raised by Bettelheim's suggestions for capturing kids' imaginations as follows:

- She entertains her readers and fully recognizes Harry's difficulties without 'belittling' him. Rowling empowers Harry by making him a wizard, but challenges him at the same time because some of his most unique wizarding skills (like the ability to speak to snakes) come from Voldemort who inadvertently transferred some of his powers to him. She also empowers Harry by giving him a very special kind of power, that of love; and unlike the powers Voldemort has given Harry, this is a power the reader can also choose to have. The fact that Harry's mother dies to save Harry creates a special kind of protective magic, love that even Voldemort cannot destroy.



- Rowling also gives Harry good friends and a substitute family in the form of the Weasleys who treat Harry as a brother and son. This allows Harry to move forward and face the challenge of destroying Voldemort, not only to be rid of the personal burden of him, but also to save his community.
- Rowling does not shy away from teenage anxiety and the complexity of puberty. In *The Order of the Phoenix* and *The Half Blood Prince*, she eloquently approaches teenage fears about first time relationships and the confusion these cause adolescents. Rowling also deals intimately with love and death in an adult manner, two subjects that are innately of a spiritual nature. She does not undermine kids by assuming that they are too young to understand. Harry experiences death and love in many forms, drawing the reader into his symbolic world to experience these emotions alongside of him, confronting issues that the reader may either fear or be curious about.

#### **4.3 ‘Baptism of the imagination’ and finding alternative identity and spirituality through a glimpse of ‘Joy’**

Tolkien and Lewis used the story of the Gospel to ‘baptize the imagination’ with the discourse of Christ and make the alternative ‘Sub-Creation’ a choice between Christ or corruption. Lewis (1960: 218) explained how fantasy can do so by exposing the reader to a ‘real though unfocused gleam of divine truth.’ Through ‘baptizing the imagination’, Lewis was aiming to make it ‘easier for children to accept Christianity when they meet it in later life’ (Lewis 1947: 21). Thus, fantasy has the ability to do so for the reader to embrace an alternative interpretation of reality and live a new life.

Through glimpsing the ‘source-reality’ in a ‘Sub-Creation’ the reader may become more open to the possibilities/choices created from an in-front-of-text-reading, allowing the reader, as Ricoeur (1981:112) points out, to

project her / his 'ownmost possibilities' on this world, freeing the reader to imagine themselves acting or living in an alternative manner, possessing an alternative identity and spirituality (lived theology). As the reader is challenged in their dominant discourse (with its specific *sacred* stories) they then look for alternative answers to their ultimate questions.

Pierce (1993: 50) points out that fantasy urges the reader to keep asking questions, nagging at their subconscious to discover answers. Therefore, even though we may not immediately obtain a satisfactory answer to a particular question, it does not mean we should stop asking that question. Fantasy shows the reader that certain questions have more than one answer; often the dominant *sacred* story gives / allows for only one answer. Fantasy also demonstrates to the reader that there are alternative answers and ways of existing and that answers to the same question can alter over the course of a lifetime, when we evolve as people, taking in different narratives.

The act of creating fantasy is, according to Tolkien, a noble act, the highest form of creativity and a tribute to God when carried out successfully. 'Fantasy remains a human right: we make in our derivative mode, because we are made: and not only are we made: but made in the image and likeness of the Maker' (Tolkien 2008: 66). The Gospels, Tolkien insisted, were fairy-stories: 'they contain marvels, peculiarly artistic, beautiful and moving ones: 'mythical' in their perfect self-contained significance, and yet symbolical and allegorical as well' (Tolkien 2008: 246). For Lewis, the Gospels are myth, but a 'myth become fact' (Lewis 1944: 270). He did not demythologize Christ, as in him is found 'the essential meaning of all things down from the 'heaven' of myth to the 'earth' of history, without ceasing to be myth' (Lewis 1944: 270). As Christians we must agree to both the historical fact of Christ, and at the same time to the imaginative myth of Christ, as we do with all myth. For Lewis, fantasy has the ability to capture profound experiences, retrieving 'all mistakes, head[ing] you off from false

paths' (Lewis 1943: 10). This act has the ability to draw the reader into a world that 'wakes you up' to your dominant tainted surroundings. The writer then shows the reader an alternative world that is free of these tainted surroundings and enriches the reader with a dominant discourse that offers glimpses of the divine.

According to Tolkien (2008: 246), stories that contain glimpses of the 'Truth' have the ability to go beyond the 'Secondary World' and into the 'Primary World'. Fantasy has the ability to interact in such a manner with the reader that he or she can go beyond the text, allowing her or him to glimpse the 'Joy' of the resurrection. In the Gospels, particularly, 'the greatest artistry has 'come true', affecting the reader in their own world. In other words, the reader may then use what they have glimpsed in the 'Secondary World' and apply it to their lives, directly affecting their identity and thus their spirituality.

Frequent comparisons of Rowling's work to the work of Tolkien and Lewis are made. She, like Tolkien and Lewis, has produced a successful epic fantasy about the struggle of good and evil from a Christian perspective. Both Lewis' and Tolkien's books have been called 'alternative theology', 'religious fantasy' and so on. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series is considered by many to be Christian, upholding and reintroducing Christian morals and values (Le Blanc 2002; Neal 2008; Granger 2008). While others, such as, Blake (2002:96) and Fenske (2006:349), find no religion within the novels. Speaking in America during October 2007 after the seventh and final book had been published; Rowling admitted that Christianity had been a major inspiration for the *Harry Potter* books. 'To me, the religious parallels have always been obvious,' Rowling said. 'But, I never wanted to talk too openly about it because I thought it might show people just where the story was going.'<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/>

However, while Rowling's wizarding 'Sub-Creation' offers a very similar choice to those of Lewis and Tolkien, that between Christ and corruption, it does not make the Christ discourse the only choice. Rather, Rowling gives the reader a gift by telling them that there is more to people than their possessions, as is so often understood in the dominant Western discourse. The Christ discourse places value in fellowship, and does not require people to have any possessions in order to be loved by those with whom they are in fellowship. What is required of them is things that cannot be bought such as love, loyalty and honesty, in other words, qualities that do not try to delude a fellowship.

#### **4.3.1 Harry in the 'Sub-Creation': Crucifying the consumerist superhero and glimpsing the Gospel**

Harry is neither a typical superhero nor a romantic hero, although many have labelled him one or the other (Natov 2001: 311; Skulnick & Goodman 2003: 262; Nikolajeva 2003: 127). He may exhibit some of these traits, but none in abundance. He is not even an alternative hero: rather, he chooses an alternative way to live, a lived theology, showing the reader that you do not need to be any kind of hero, to choose a life of fellowship. This is an important aspect of the *Harry Potter* series, as superheroes have become a huge part of the consumerist market. Unlike, for example Spiderman, Superman and Batman, who are superheroes with superpowers, Harry is rather average. Also, unlike the above superheroes that possess two identities, being ordinary citizens and invincible crime busters, Harry is part of the wizarding world that prefers not to let 'Muggles' know that it exists.

Although Harry owns a wand and is a wizard, he is an average one and an average student at Hogwarts. Voldemort (Rowling 1998: 146) accidentally bestowed whatever extra powers or gifts Harry has, such as his ability to speak to snakes in Parseltongue (Rowling 1998: 245), on him when he tried

to kill him. Harry's ability to ward off Voldemort comes from his mother's sacrifice to save his life. Also, he does not achieve greatness nor does he foil Voldemort's plans on his own; rather, his achievements are due to the direct help and advice he receives from Ron, Hermione, Dumbledore, Snape (although in secrecy) and so on, in other words his friends and guardians.

Harry frequently behaves like a typical teenager, insensitive, arrogant, stubborn, breaking rules and sometimes lying. His weakness is his redeeming quality. Once he has understood his weaknesses, revealed at the end of his journey, he is then able to measure his strength by his weaknesses and do what is necessary. His weaknesses and his greatest powers are his ability to love, and to be compassionate towards others: even those he does not know or who have continuously been cruel to him. Three such examples occur as follows:

- 1) when Harry is kind to Dobby, even though he does not initially know him (Rowling 1998: 16);
- 2) when Harry saves Dudley from the Dementors' kiss (meaning Dudley would exist without a soul) (Rowling 2003: 26);
- 3) when Harry saves Malfoy and Goyle from being burnt to death, even after all the terrible things that they have done to him over the years (Rowling 2007: 509).

Harry's failures are part of his learning and developmental experiences and identity formation. His failures, however, do not diminish his integrity and ability to care for others; rather, they show that he is human, a young man trying to find out who he is, and to grow from his experiences. This is a very useful part of the narrative for teenagers who can identify with Harry's

weaknesses. This may awaken them to their own strength of love and compassion that may help them overcome their own failures. Harry shows the reader that sometimes we all act badly, but we do not have to let our bad behaviour become part of our identity or define who we are; rather, we should accept our mistakes and use these experiences to become better people.

Although Harry cannot imagine how love is going to help him against Voldemort, Dumbledore explains it in the following manner to Harry, firstly in *The Half Blood Prince*: ‘You are protected, in short, by your ability to love!’ said Dumbledore loudly. ‘The only protection that can possibly work against the lure of power like Voldemort’s!’ (Rowling 2005: 477). Thereafter, in *The Deathly Hallows*, Dumbledore says to Harry: ‘that which Voldemort does not value, he takes no trouble to comprehend. Of house-elves and children’s tales, love, loyalty and innocence Voldemort knows and understands nothing. That they have power beyond his own, a power beyond the reach of magic, is a truth he has never grasped’ (Rowling 2007: 568). Love, in the *Harry Potter* series, and as Dumbledore explains to Harry in *The Philosopher’s Stone*, is a very powerful force, a force that will do anything to protect that love. When a person loves and has loved very deeply (more on love below), it leaves a mark: ‘Not a scar, no visible sign... to have been loved so deeply, even though the person who loved us is gone, will give us protection forever’ (Rowling 1997: 216). In essence, that which Voldemort identifies as weak, such as innocence, children and love, has power that has nothing to do with magic, rather these are powerful because of their weakness because those who love them will do anything to protect them. Their weakness is their strength. This is discussed further below.

As indicated, Harry’s ability to love and be compassionate are due to his mother’s sacrificial love, which is also what has kept him safe from leading a corrupt life, unlike Voldemort who has damaged himself beyond repair;

physically he now resembles a snake more than a human being. Harry's ability to love others is a far more powerful tool to possess against Voldemort, who is so obsessed with his desire for immortality and power, preferring to have servants rather than friends.

#### **4.4 Spiritual identity through the choice of the love for the wounded Christ: The crucifixion of consumerism and the resurrection of community**

As was mentioned above, there are two *sacred* stories in the *Harry Potter* series:

- 1) the *sacred* story of capitalism/materialism ('Muggle' world), which is represented in the series as power and greed;
- 2) and the *sacred* story of the Christ discourse (wizarding world) where, through the actions of some of the protagonists, the reader glimpses love, fellowship, hope and so on.

However, the *sacred* story of capitalism/materialism also intrudes in the wizarding world and challenges its *sacred* story of the Christ discourse. This intrusion is personified by Voldemort.

##### **4.4.1 Voldemort: The perversion of consumerism**

Voldemort represents greed/consumerism, that which is gained by stealth. Just as the market captures buyers by stealth, through marketing, the buyer believes that s/he has choices. However, s/he is in fact a slave to that very market that they think they control. Rowling pits this against community and fellowship and the 'Joy' that these open us up to. 'Wherever communities gather around acts of redeeming love, there we may look for the presence

of Christ' (Berger 1969: 116). In the discourse of the 'Capitalist', Voldemort takes on the role of the 'Truth' (in a corrupted and unnatural manner, like that of consumerism) as he wants to be the 'object of desire'. The Death Eaters (Voldemort's supporters) only desire to please him, hoping to be counted as one of his most faithful servants. At school the forerunners of the Death Eaters gathered around Voldemort, as Dumbledore so aptly explains: they 'were a motley collection; a mixture of the weak seeking protection, the ambitious seeking some shared glory, and the thuggish, gravitating towards a leader who could show them more refined forms of cruelty' (Rowling 2005: 338). As noted, Voldemort prefers servitude to fellowship. He has no friends, only servants vying for the position of 'most faithful servant' (Rowling 2000: 19). He, like the market's most 'desired object', gives nothing in return to his followers. He rewards loyalty by allowing his Death Eaters to be part of his gang of evildoers and disposes of those who make mistakes or try to leave him. Flotmann (2013:128-129) points out that Voldemort 'has no moral qualms and shuns human contact' because he has also 'freed' himself from belief, be it religious or moral belief. This, has resulted in Voldemort not caring about anyone but himself. Hence, community is of no importance to Voldemort.

Voldemort wants only to be the ultimate desired/feared one, to be so powerful that even Death cannot touch him. Death is part of life, an issue that he refuses to accept, fearing it. As Rowling explains: 'He's [Voldemort] terrified by death, he'll do anything not to die.'<sup>34</sup> *Vol de mort* means flight from death: Voldemort perverts all forms of nature to become immortal. Apart from killing a unicorn to drink its blood in order to cling to life, Voldemort goes on to create a new body for himself. This, Griesinger (2002: 313) calls a 'perversion of Christ's resurrection': the scene is diabolical. For Voldemort to have a body once more, Wormtail has to supply his hand as an ingredient, along with Harry's blood and a bone from Voldemort's dead

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<sup>34</sup> J.K. Rowling interview with 'Dateline', NBC News, 29 July 2007.



father. Although this scene is Satanic, there is nothing Satanic about Voldemort, nor is he represented as some form of supernatural evil; rather he is a powerful symbol of humankind's evil<sup>35</sup>. 'Voldemort is most frightening because he is human...Voldemort chills us most because he is one of us and represents the possibility of choosing evil freely' (Deavel & Deavel 2007: 136).

In *The Philosopher's Stone*, when Harry confronts Professor Quirrel, who shares a body with Voldemort, he says to Harry that, 'There is no good and evil, there is only power, and those too weak to seek it' (Rowling 1997: 211). Weakness of any form is a terrible thing for Voldemort, for whom good and evil do not exist. Only the ability to attain power is a precious thing to him, who represents consumerism and materialism gone too far. This also symbolizes consumers who feel the need to be liked by the 'big Other', often going into debt to keep up with all the gadgets and items that they think will make them more desirable to the 'big Other'.

The reason why Voldemort stayed alive after killing himself in his attempt to kill Harry (even though Voldemort remained a mere shadow or vapour, only having form when he possessed someone), was that he had created Horcruxes (Rowling 2005: 464-465). By ripping out pieces of his soul and putting them into inanimate objects such as jewellery and in living creatures, Voldemort could stay alive. Apart from inanimate objects, he uses his pet snake Nagini; also, without his knowledge Harry too is a Horcrux (Rowling 2007: 550). Even here, Voldemort goes further than other evil wizards who have made a Horcrux, ripping their soul in half. He wanted to create seven Horcruxes, killing not being hard for him (murdering another person being the only way of splitting one's soul). Professor Slughorn<sup>36</sup> explains to Tom

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<sup>35</sup> Evil is a massive topic and beyond the scope of this study. For some examples please see J Hick (1966); M M Adams & R M Adams (1990; 1999); R Swinburn (1998); D Z Phillips (2005).

<sup>36</sup> Professor Horace Slughorn is a Potions teacher at Hogwarts, who then becomes the Head of Slytherin when Snape becomes Headmaster.

Riddle, the young Voldemort, that splitting the soul in half is a violation of nature as it is, but to try and create seven would be abominable. He tells Tom that it would be better to be dead than to be alive as a shadow (Rowling 2005: 467). Nevertheless, Voldemort is blinded by his desire for immortality, wanting to ensure that nothing can destroy him. On his returning to a body, his servants come back to him out of fear more than faithfulness. Now he has surpassed any other wizard, perverting all forms of nature to enable his return to power. Voldemort, in the 'Sub-Creation' of the wizarding world, again threatens to pervert the Christ-like *sacred* story of that world in having fearful servants instead of community/fellowship, and love/sacrifice for it. Harry is the exact opposite of Voldemort, even though they both experience the same beginnings, as explored further below.

#### **4.4.2 Harry, Ron, Hermione, Lily and Dobby: Resurrection of community through love, transformation and redemption– The wounded Christ**

In the *Harry Potter* series, the battle against power and greed is won through the 'weaknesses' of love, and sacrifice for that love. This is in essence the Christ discourse. It is not by any great strength that the battle is won, but rather by the 'wounds' that are received during 'battle'. The character of Harry is briefly discussed here and again in Chapter 5, along with Dumbledore's and Snape's characters who act out of love, either for another or others, as well as the sacrifices they make for those whom they love.

Harry and Voldemort have the same beginnings, both orphans, both wizards; however, while Harry never used magic to hurt anyone, Voldemort was torturing the other children at the orphanage where he was raised (Rowling 2007:259). Harry has no cruelty within him, except for the piece of Voldemort's soul, which to his credit he never gives in to, while the latter

relishes power and the ability to control others with his power. Although Harry has been raised by the Dursleys and despite his cousin Dudley's efforts to ensure that Harry has no friends, the first thing he does when he boards the train to go to Hogwarts for the first time, is to make friends with Ron and then Hermione. Harry, unlike Voldemort, seeks community, preferring companionship and having friends to confide in, rather than trusted servants who delude themselves into thinking that they know Voldemort. Hence, unlike the latter, Harry wants people to know who he truly is.

#### 4.4.2.1 Ron and Hermione

Through the characters of Harry, Ron and Hermione, Rowling employs the symbol of community through friendship/fellowship, acting out of love for one another and for their wizarding community. These three, each in their turn, 'sacrifice' themselves for each other's safety. For example, Harry always prefers to face Voldemort on his own, rather than risk the lives of Ron and Hermione. In *The Deathly Hallows*, Ron and Hermione decide not to return to school, but to go with Harry to search for and destroy the Horcruxes. For Hermione this means having to relocate her parents to Australia, and modify their memories into believing that they have no daughter; in this way, if she dies, they will not be heartbroken (Rowling 2007: 84). Ron's family has to agree to transform the family ghoul that lives in the attic, to look like Ron with a very serious and contagious illness (spattergroit), so that his family is left alone after he does not turn up at school (Rowling 2007: 86). Both Ron and Hermione give up their families to go and help Harry who has no other family than his friends. Another example, from *The Deathly Hallows*, is an event that occurs when Harry is in the Forest of Dean. Harry follows a silver doe (Snape's Patronus – a person's protective shield) to a small frozen pool where he can make out, in the light shed by his wand, a 'great silver cross' (Rowling 2007: 299). Harry

realizes that the cross is actually the sword of Gryffindor. Harry plunges into the freezing cold water to retrieve it, but the Horcrux he is wearing around his neck knows that the sword can destroy it, begins to strangle him and he starts to drown. Harry is sure this is his end, but someone saves his life and retrieves the sword. This turns out to be Ron, who regretted leaving earlier. He had deserted Harry and Hermione, allowing the Horcrux to influence his thoughts and sow doubts in his mind. By saving Harry and retrieving the sword, Ron is transformed into a saviour figure and, when he destroys the Horcrux with the sword, is also redeemed in his friends' eyes for his cowardly behaviour. Ron stands before Harry and Hermione, 'wounded and naked', liberated from the hold that the Horcrux had on him, ready to re-commit himself to their fellowship. Harry, Ron and Hermione, although they have their differences throughout the series, act in true fellowship/community, making whatever sacrifices are necessary to keep each other safe, as well as others. Here consumerism is crucified and community is resurrected.

Rowling also places great emphasis on issues such as choices, transformation and redemption; how each of us has the ability to transform if we choose to do so. Whether like Ron, who experiences a moment of complete cowardice, or Snape, who acts out of the need to impress Voldemort and then lives to regret it, we too can eventually choose courage over selfishness, fellowship over consumerism. Rowling uses the cross as a symbol of transformation. In the scene described above where Harry initially thinks he sees a cross in the frozen water, Ron's sacrifice shows the reader a significant transformation. After this sacrifice on Ron's part, he never lets Hermione and Harry down again. Borg (2006: 290) explains how the cross is a powerful symbol of Christianity. To follow the ways of good and ultimately of Christ, a person must die to her/his old ways of existing, and be reborn to a new way of existing. This transformation is necessary, not only to follow Christ, but also to know him. 'Personal transformation is utterly

important. Without it, we remain within the world of our socialization, a world marked by limited vision, anxiety, preoccupation, confused loyalties, unhealed wounds, exile, and bondage' (Borg 2006: 290). Therefore, Christ's resurrection is not only hope for the future of being with God but also the hope that we can change, no matter what our lives are, until the moment we seek to be transformed, to seek Christ. Nevertheless, to transform, a person must also have the courage of their convictions, as courageous action or decisions often bring hardship:

Courage is doing what's right, not what's easy. Its doing what seems morally required, rather than what seems physically safe or socially expected... A courageous person properly perceives when there is danger and then overcomes the natural urge for self-preservation, self-protection, comfort, personal gain, or even the solicitude for gaining the feelings of others that might counsel avoidance of that threat (Morris 2007: 12-13).

In other words, it is courage that gives us the strength to seek 'naked truth'. 'There are all kinds of courage,' said Dumbledore, smiling. 'It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends' (Rowling 1997: 221). This quote comes from the *Philosopher's Stone*, where Dumbledore awards Neville Longbottom ten points for trying to stop Harry, Ron and Hermione from getting into more trouble.

#### **4.4.2.2 Harry**

Although Harry is not represented as a Christ figure, Rowling often gives us glimpses of the Gospel and of Christ's love, death and resurrection through Harry's story. 'Harry is not a fictional messiah or a Jesus-double as much as he is an Everyman figure...He struggles, but by force of the example of people (and one house-elf) who believe and those who do not, he chooses

the right path of obedience, love, and sacrifice' (Granger 2008: 233-241). For humanity to be restored to God, Christ had to be crucified and thus sacrificed in order for the restoration to take place. Christ's death revealed to humankind his love for them; as was Christ's weakness an act of love. This sacrificial act on Christ's part was a very powerful expression of love towards humanity.

We catch a glimpse of Christ's sacrifice when Harry allows himself to be killed by Voldemort so that the wizarding world, as well as the 'Muggle' one, can be restored to a world without Voldemort, his lust for power and murder of 'Muggles' (of whom he wants to rid the world). When Harry 'dies' in *The Deathly Hallows*, he meets Dumbledore at King's Cross, who tells Harry that he is the true master of death, 'because the true master does not seek to run away from Death. He accepts he must die, and understands that there are far, far worse things in the living world than dying' (Rowling 2007: 577). Therefore, rather than watch his friends die, Harry chooses to stop this by allowing himself to be killed by Voldemort. However, Harry's death actually results in his evil piece of soul, Voldemort's, dying; allowing Harry to be 'resurrected' a new man without evil attached to him, free of the burden he has been carrying around since he was a year old.

The discourse of consumerism dictates to people, while the discourse of Christ seeks to liberate people from discourses that try to control people. Rowling symbolically crucifies the dominant discourse of the consumerist West, allowing for re-birth (resurrection) of a free world whose inhabitants are no longer bound to things, but act out of love for their neighbors. Here Meylahn's discourse of the 'wounded naked' Christ (Meylahn 2010: 9) may be brought into conversation with Harry's actions towards his community. Harry and the 'good' wizards represent what Meylahn refers to as 'naked selves', who want to be accountable for and to one another. Harry is 'wounded' and 'fragmented' through all that he has endured in both the

‘Muggle’ world and the wizarding world. It is these ‘wounds’ that help a ‘fragmented’ Harry act with love and grace when he returns from King’s Cross to defeat Voldemort and restore order to the ‘fragmented’ wizarding community: a community that he loves and who love him in return. The ‘wounded, fragmented and naked’ community, with Harry, will now embrace the ‘real’ through love and grace, deconstructing the threat that Voldemort (‘big Other’) had held over them, to rebuild itself. In this way, Rowling awakens the reader from the spell under which consumerism has set them and reminds them that love for others, and others’ love for them, is far more precious than things to buy, that may manipulate others into loving them. Therefore, like the ‘desire’ in Meylahn’s discourse of Christ, the desire of the wizarding community is for fellowship and all it takes to look after that fellowship. Rowling, as Tolkien would say, has not tried to delude the reader, but has created something ‘pure’, showing how greed cannot lead to love, grace or the healing of the ‘fragmented self’. In the *Harry Potter* series, Rowling opens a space for an alternative construction of identity and spirituality for kids to use.

In the characters of Lily and Dobby, the reader witnesses love and grace, precisely the kind of which Voldemort has no understanding:

#### **4.4.2.3 Lily**

It has been pointed out that ‘A mother’s love is said to be unconditional. It cannot be acquired or lost, since it involves an attitude of pure acceptance and complete generosity towards the child that the latter does not need to earn or even reciprocate. In this sense, a mother’s love is absolute and she is capable of any sacrifice – physical, emotional, or even moral – for the sake of her child’ (White 2001: 79).

Motherhood plays a crucial role in all the seven books of the series. Rowling describes the mothers she writes about as very loving and compassionate towards their children, even Petunia Dursley, who completely spoils Dudley (Dinky Duddydums, as she sometimes refers to him), but does so out of love. Not only did Rowling lose her mother, whom she loved dearly, but Rowling herself is also a mother, and is aware of the complexities of motherhood. Mothers have a powerful connection to their children and through this powerful connection also experience spirituality on another level.

Dumbledore introduces the theme of sacrificial love in the *Philosopher's Stone* by telling Harry that Lily's sacrifice has left Harry with a special kind of magical protection (Rowling 1997: 216). This is an important thing for him to learn, as Griesinger (2002: 312) points out, since Harry has spent the last ten years of his young life unloved by the Dursleys. Harry discovers that not only did his parents love him very much, but also that his mother died in order to save her little boy's life. Lily's sacrificial love serves as a reminder that love will always be far greater and more powerful than what one owns. By reading about parental love, kids also benefit from the *Harry Potter* series through seeing love through their own parents' eyes. Often kids feel misunderstood by their parents, especially if a parent does not allow their child to do something, often for their safety and out of love. Parents reading the novels identify with the sacrifices not only of Harry's parents, but also of the Weasleys who struggle to raise their seven children on very little, except an abundance of love.

Love, says Rowling<sup>37</sup>, always wins: 'It does win; we know it wins. When the person dies, love isn't turned off like a faucet. It is an amazingly resilient part of us.' Walls (2007:75) explains that this is like the resurrection of Jesus, which demonstrates that love is stronger than death: 'So understood,

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<sup>37</sup> <http://www.oprah.com/>



Christianity is a great love story and is based on the belief that love is the deepest reality and evil cannot defeat it.' There is also Rowling's choice in naming Harry's mother Lily. In alchemy the lily symbolizes purity, while in Christianity it is 'associated with the Virgin Mary, particularly in scenes of the Annunciation, where the lily is often held by the Archangel Gabriel' (Shepherd & Shepherd 2002:261). In Colbert's opinion (2007:287-288), Rowling has elevated Lily to a Madonna figure: 'Lily is the only important character who isn't brought down to a human level in the course of the story. Harry's father had his moments of cruelty. Dumbledore, too. Sirius Black mistreated Kreacher. Harry himself is no saint, as Rowling herself has said many times.'

In the end, it is also a mother's love that again saves Harry: this time it is the mother of Harry's enemy, Draco Malfoy, Narcissa, who is frantic about her own son's life. Narcissa lies to Voldemort, telling him that Harry is dead, when in fact he is not. Narcissa lies in order to enter Hogwarts to see what has become of Draco. As much as Narcissa fears Voldemort, her love for Draco overcomes her fear. This is again a display of sacrificial love knowing no boundaries.

#### **4.4.2.4 Dobby**

Dobby's death, the death of innocence, is moving and one that touches Harry and the reader very deeply. For Tolkien (1979: 68), one of the indications of a good fantasy is the ability of the writer to move the reader to tears or near to tears through a 'sudden turn', such as Dobby's death in the narrative. It is from these 'sudden turns' in the narrative that readers, young and old, 'get a piercing glimpse of joy' (Tolkien 1979: 69). For Neal (2008: 284), it is Dobby who is the Christ-like figure, a 'servant at heart', and although he is freed from being a servant to the Malfoys he chooses to stay loyal to Harry. Therefore, out of love for Harry, Dobby chooses to fight,

sacrificing himself to save Harry and his friends escape Voldemort in *The Deathly Hallows*. Dobby has never forgotten the kindness that Harry has always shown him, as most wizards treat elves and other non-human or part-human magical creatures in an inferior manner. We first meet Dobby in *The Chamber of Secrets*, where it initially appears that he is trying to harm Harry. At the risk of his own life, while still bound to the Malfoys, Dobby tries to keep Harry from coming to any harm from the Basilisk. Dobby remains a true friend to Harry until the end of his life. Neal (2008: 249) goes on to explain that Dobby serves to remind us of Christ, who died so willingly for us, and 'reminds me that all who have been saved by the one who died for us should pause to give sincere thanks', as Luna thanks Dobby at his burial. Dobby begins and ends the series wounded and naked, never wavering in his love for Harry, showing Harry that true fellowship makes huge sacrifices to protect that fellowship at any cost.

Through these characters, Rowling shows the reader how choosing to love another so selflessly can lead to greater things. Lily's death served to create a powerful protective magic that becomes part of Harry, making it impossible for Voldemort to kill him. Through this protective love and the addition of a piece of Voldemort's soul attached to him Harry becomes the only person who can defeat Voldemort. The latter therefore creates his own worst enemy through undermining love. In *The Half-Blood Prince*, when Harry enters one of Dumbledore's memories, we see Dumbledore warning Voldemort not to underestimate the powerful force of love. Voldemort answers as follows: 'The old argument,' he said softly. 'But nothing I have seen in the world has supported your famous pronouncements that love is more powerful than my kind of magic, Dumbledore' (Rowling 2005: 415). Nevertheless, it is out of love that Dobby saves Harry and his friends at precisely the right moment, giving up his own life, allowing Harry to live on, so he can die at exactly the right time, the way Dumbledore had intended it.

Without Harry to conquer Voldemort, the wizarding world and the ‘Muggle’ world would be completely corrupted and enslaved by him.

Voldemort, who cannot love, underestimates those who do love and the great lengths they will go to, to protect those they love. Lily and Dobby show the reader how love can only lead to doing what is good and right. Ron and Hermione stick by Harry from the age of eleven, often at great cost to themselves. As Cabasila (1974: 225) argues, if a person chooses to act out of love and makes this action a habit, s/he will always arrive to God, even if that love requires some kind of sacrifice. ‘It is by actions that the soul is disposed towards one habit or the other, so that men may partake of goodness or wickedness, just as in the case of crafts we acquire skill and learn them by becoming accustomed to their exercise.’ We choose our spiritual path to arrive at our spiritual identity and, although this journey is never quite complete, the direction it takes is our choice, just as Lily, Harry, Ron, Hermione and Dobby chose their path. Rowling emphasizes that by choosing to love, these characters had no need for material things/power or the need to impress a ‘big Other’. Using these characters, Rowling renders material things irrelevant and trivial in comparison to loved ones, again crucifying consumerism and resurrecting community/fellowship.

### 4.3 An overview

The *Harry Potter* series are fantasy novels about two different *sacred* stories that belong to two different worlds. The ‘Muggle’ world has its *sacred* story of Western consumerism, whereas the wizarding world has its *sacred* story of the Christ discourse. It has been argued in this chapter that the fantasy genre, more than any other genre, and in particular the *Harry Potter* series, may have the ability to show kids an alternative identity and spirituality different from the dominant discourse in which they live, and indicate to them the way in which the latter directly impacts their identity and thus

spirituality. Thus, if narratives impact our identity and spirituality, then fantasy narratives directly challenge and make us aware of our dominant discourses through the use of enchanted 'Sub-Creations' that offer alternative discourses. As fantastic as the 'Sub-Creation' may be, it still contains enough similarities to the reader's world, for the reader to comfortably believe the fantastic world that they have arrived in. The writer primarily achieves this by telling a *mundane* story to which the reader may easily relate, offering glimpses of a particular *sacred* story. Rowling's *sacred* story displays certain similarities with the core values of the Gospel.

Rowling's story also echoes Meylahn's 'naked wounded' Christ, a discourse that crucifies consumerism and resurrects community/fellowship. Rowling's *sacred* story is told through the diverse characters that she has created. All her characters possess very human characters traits and, like all people, are flawed in some way. The reader assesses fictional characters the same way she/he does people, through their behaviour. Because of the choices that Rowling's characters make, the reader frequently glimpses fellowship, love, community, sacrifice and resurrection, in short, a glance at the Christ discourse. As said above, sometimes the reader is directly impacted by the 'Secondary World' as they use the narrative and apply it to their lives in their 'Primary World'. Many fantasy novels are of a Christian nature (for example *Lord of the Rings* and *The Narnia Chronicles*), but the *Harry Potter* series, being a contemporary series, draws in the reader by engaging with present-day protagonists and other characters who are complicated people, imperfect, so much like themselves.

Rowling's story is a coming of age story, a time in a kid's life when things become rather complicated and sometimes downright difficult. She takes up the challenge of being a teenager in a consumerist Western environment, but does not try to give kids simple, romantic solutions, nor does she try and

gloss over these difficulties; rather, she chooses to give kids hope, courage and above all to expose them to the *sacred* story of Western consumerism.

Harry, Ron and Hermione face challenges that directly influence their identities and thus their spiritualities. Through the choices these three characters make as regards each challenge (and the choices adult characters make when faced with the same challenges), the reader is exposed to the same challenge and is also faced with making a choice. The reader may make a choice before the protagonist does and then find that the protagonist has made an alternative choice. The reader may make a choice that would please the world that they exist in, but is now suddenly presented with something different, an alternative choice. This may challenge their identity and thus spirituality in the same way Harry, Ron and Hermione are challenged.

The alternative choices that the characters make expose the readers to 'Joy' and are usually the most difficult ones. The former choose to act out of love, friendship and loyalty. These choices are not always easy and often mean a sacrifice of some kind on their part. In the *Harry Potter* series, what one owns does not define one, but rather the choices one makes for fellowship. Rowling makes it clear: you can either be a 'Muggle' who worries what the 'big Other' thinks of you or you can be a wizard and place value in people, wounded, naked selves that do not delude or elude themselves or their communities by trying to impress others with possessions.

Employing her themes of love, death, courage, hope, transformation and compassion, Rowling explores the foundations of Christianity, challenging us to take up our own spiritual quest. She discovers along the way that love can conquer all, and that she understands the way to Christ. Rowling also discovers that the path to Christ does not have to be walked alone, but can also be covered, at least part of the journey, with community and friends

within that community. Rowling also knows that understanding the path which needs to be followed to get to Christ is not always enough, as she struggles with herself, with her courage to transform. Like all of us, she is imperfect, trying hard to make sense of her life, and the world that she exists in. She does not ask the reader to become a Christian, nor does she tell the reader to stop being a consumerist.

Instead, she asks the reader to accompany her on her spiritual quest for *who*, *why*, *where* and *what*, that exposes the reader to an alternative life where value is placed in people and community rather than objects/material possessions/material gain. She asks the reader to re-examine their world, by re-humanizing the reader and reminding them of the value of community and family.

## Chapter 5:

### Kids seeking identity and spirituality through the characters of Harry, Dumbledore and Snape

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#### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter it is argued that the *Harry Potter* series may be used by pastors and youth workers to help adolescents re-imagine alternative stories for their lives. The Gospel values are threads running through these alternative stories and are lived theology. Following Ricoeur's (1984: 45) argument, of pre-figuration of meaning, it may then be assumed that Western kids' identity in terms of what they bring to the text is largely determined by the dominant *sacred* story of Western materialism and consumerism. Readers make 'prejudgments', which determine how a person deals with the text that they enter (Gadamer 1989: 265-379). People would not be able to interpret a text without their biases, questions and expectations that are part of their 'prejudgment' tools. A text may challenge these 'prejudgment' tools, even alter the said tools as readers encounter new texts and have other life experiences.

Upon entering the text, kids are confronted with the narrative of the *Harry Potter* series, a text, which although similar to some of the values in their pre-figuration, also contains some opposing values to their pre-figuration the latter (for example Harry and his friends do not put value in material things). This allows pastors and youth workers the opportunity to help kids re-figure their understanding of the world, and more specifically their identity and spirituality, to re-imagine an alternative life within the wizarding world, that may then carry over into their 'Primary World' where they live. This re-imagined discourse is free of the dominant discourse of Western

consumerism/materialism, allowing the kid to place her/his values (as Harry and the other characters show readers glimpses of placing values in an alternative discourse) within the Christ discourse, through many of the characters actions in the series.

Fantasy stories are able to function as liberating and transformative alternatives, to the dominant discourses in Western culture, showing kids that there are other ways to live out one's life. As mentioned in Chapter 3, pastors and youth workers need to develop the capacity to really observe and listen to what kids are saying. Observant pastors and youth workers will have by now noticed that the *Harry Potter* series is very popular with many kids, thus giving them an opportunity to open conversations with kids on the many subjects the series presents (love, death, being unpopular and the like), once trust has been established. Rowling gives pastors and youth workers a gift, as they are presented with a tool that creates a space to converse with kids about spiritual matters from within their own social context. Meylahn (2012: 57) calls these conversations, second level narratives, as these are the conversations that 'people share once they have learnt to trust the listener.' These are the stories that may be conceived as weak by others (social peers); therefore, they will only share these stories with a trusted person, and someone whom they know will talk them through this story without judging them. 'In listening to this second layer of narratives the cracks, discrepancies and wounds of the dominant common language is revealed' (Meylahn 2012: 57).

Consumerism/materialism places a great burden on kids to be 'cool' people with all the desired objects that allow them to 'fit in' to their socio-cultural environment. Often the 'cooler' the kid tries to be, the more they are hiding brokenness; they may have an unstable home life, or be labelled a 'geek' because they do well at school (Hermione is taunted for being too clever). Desired objects may then become a way for the kid to at least 'fit in' with



their social peers, or to feel 'superior' to them. When a pastor or youth worker opens a conversation of trust with the kid, they may discover that the kid has shadow stories that have been hidden in the cracks of their 'cool' narratives, in order to maintain their 'superior coolness'. These 'cracks' become space openers that expose the problems generated by the dominant discourses, and create a platform for the alternative suppressed story to emerge. This consequently gives pastors and youth workers who have gained kids' trust the opportunity to use the much-loved stories of the *Harry Potter* series, to open a space for a conversation with kids on the Christ discourse as an alternative way of living life that is not dominated by the dominant *sacred* discourses of their world; but rather to live a life according to Christ's values of love, fellowship and community (lived theology). Rowling places a great deal of emphasis on community and the importance of taking care of one another within communities; that closely resembles the effort of the early Church. Rowling stresses the importance of the 'daily living out' of Christ's values, and how these values expose the people that we 'really' are, as opposed to being who others (from the 'big Other') want us to be.

In the Chapter 3, it was argued that people poetically create the world that they live in (language is the House of Being). Language creates world. People relate to this created world by means of a dialectical relationship between their individual language/stories and the inherited language/stories of a particular socio-cultural world that they live in. Therefore, they live in co-constructed worlds. This dialectic then is the basis of how they socially construct their reality and understand themselves within reality, which then shapes their identity. The way a person constructs their reality, in dialectic within their socio-cultural world, is how the person forms identity: by finding their place within this constructed world. Using narrative, people navigate their way in this constructed world, weaving different narratives into their identity story. Human beings live in story. In other words, by telling their

stories and by listening to other people's stories, they are able to understand themselves; the world they live in and how they fit into that world of *mundane* stories. Fitting into their world becomes a priority to the person, as this means that s/he is part of something ordered and 'sane', as opposed to 'isolation' and disorder (Berger 1969: 24). These *mundane* stories of the everyday lives of people are anchored in dominant *sacred* stories. The dominant *sacred* story of each world is the founding myth that functions as the explanation of why people do what they do, and therefore, legitimizes their actions.

The dominant *sacred* story plays a huge role in how people conduct their lives and this then influences their identity and ultimately their spirituality. In Western society, as was said above, one such dominant *sacred* story is that of consumerism or materialism, with its numerous fantasies of having the object of desire and ultimately the happiness it will give a person once they have acquired this item. Nevertheless, this object can never give the owner the unique identity which they hoped it would bestow upon them. Once the much coveted or desired object is bought and their social peers have acquired the same desired object, they now feel that they are no longer unique and the object loses its power to boost their identity, the new acquisition becomes redundant. This leads to the individual going on an 'hysterical' search to find the next object of desire. This drives the hysteric's discourse where the 'big Other' (in the form of the market) continuously tells the individual who they are and the individual keeps asking the market, Who am I? (Meylahn 2010: 4). This, 'hysterical' chase to find the next object of desire leads the individual to become fragmented, continuously confused about their identity and spirituality, because consumerism or materialism has a dehumanizing effect on people (Rumscheidt 1998: 5).

It tells a person what they must acquire to be desired by society, that is the 'big Other'. The possessions that need to be acquired change frequently,

leaving many people (those who cannot afford to keep up or whose parents' cannot afford to keep up) left out. Some people in a consumerist society become more attached to objects as opposed to people, or are only desired for the objects they have. This results in those who do not possess the desired objects or those who look to the desired object for happiness feeling alone and fragmented because only other people can like or love one. Objects cannot counter loneliness; only people and living in community can do that. In the *Harry Potter* series, the Dursleys are an effective characterisation of the hysteric's discourse: always seeking recognition from the 'big Other' and asking it Who am I? Throughout the series they are portrayed as trying to live up to the expectations of their neighbors (the Jones'), making sure that their house and lawn look exactly like that of their neighbors.

Rowling, as was said in previous chapters, has created her fantasy using two *sacred* stories: in the 'Muggle' world, much like in our world, Western consumerism is that world's *sacred* story with all its downfalls, whereas in the wizarding world Rowling has given the reader the possibility of an alternative *sacred* story, a story that echoes the Christ discourse. However, it needs to be noted that there are also those in the wizarding world, who do live according to Western consumerist or materialistic values. The *sacred* story of the wizarding world is threatened by those (like the Malfoys) who only believe in 'pure blood' wizards who hold high status in the wizarding community or who, like Voldemort, are power hungry or greedy, wanting to control both the 'Muggle' world and the wizarding world. The 'Muggle' world is how the wizarding world will become, if Voldemort and his supporters are to succeed: I am what I own and I put myself before all others. An example of this is yet again the Dursleys, who only care about themselves, wishing Harry did not exist. Had Harry grown up with the Weasleys instead, he would have been completely part of the family, no different from any of the other Weasley children. On his 17<sup>th</sup> birthday, Mrs. Weasley gives Harry her

brother Fabian's old watch, treating Harry like a son. He occupies a very special place in the Weasley family and Mrs. Weasley is his surrogate mother throughout the series (Rowling 2007: 97). Harry is touched by Mrs. Weasley's action as he has never been given anything so personal, and certainly not by the Dursleys. The gesture touches Harry deeply....Here Harry is touched by the gesture far more than the watch.

By exposing the reader to the dominant *sacred* Western discourse of consumerism, Rowling puts the reader in a position to choose something besides material things for their lives. Her personal 'something else' is the glimpses of the discourse of Christ that she alludes to, which is why the whole series, as was shown in the previous chapter, contains glimpses of the Gospel. This consequently makes the *Harry Potter* series unique, as it is a contemporary story of lived theology that adolescents enjoy and with which they easily identify while at the same time it offers kids a glimpse of the Gospel through the choices that the characters make.

This chapter describes ways in which the *Harry Potter* series can help kids to re-imagine their story by offering them the alternative narrative resources (alternative configuration of the world) gained from reading, which will add to their 'prejudgment' tools. Rowling's alternative *sacred* story shows kids an additional way of living their lives, with values that strongly oppose Western consumerism. The series can enable them, with the help of pastors and youth workers, to weave into their identity story elements of the wounded Christ narrative such as love and fellowship, as kids can glimpse this alternative narrative in the *Harry Potter* series. The means are presented below.

1. The **problem story** is examined: Consumerism is the problem story. Western consumerism affects kids, as they identify themselves by the objects they possess (I am what I own). Consumerism is the story that

wounds and fragments people (Chapter 4 of Meylahn 2010). Dudley Dursley and the way he conducts himself is the supreme example of how consumerism dehumanizes kids and how they hope to which Rowling exposes Dudley, helps re-humanize him.

**2.** Ideas from the **narrative approach** may help kids identify previously neglected aspects of their past through the *Harry Potter* series that places its values in fellowship and love, and thus re-imagine their future with alternative values. This can include other books that they have read.

**3.** The **re-imagining of kids' futures through the *Harry Potter* series**, and the actions of the characters of **Dumbledore, Harry and Snape**, which are lived theology: these actions are examined for glimpses of the discourse of the wounded Christ and how this discourse can liberate a person from fragmentation.

## **5.2 The problem stories within the dominant discourse of consumerism: The consumerist pre-figuration of kids and the loss of identity in Western society**

Many problem stories that are encountered by people today; for example, loneliness, emptiness and disconnectedness, by young and old alike, are directly connected to the vicious cycle of consumerism. In Western society people are measured by what they own, their identity defined by what material things they can offer to their society. This leads to loss of identity and spirituality, relationships based on materialism rather than friendship, and so on. Rowling uses the characters of the Dursleys, and particularly of Dudley, to address the dominant discourse of consumption or materialism in the 'Muggle' world, and its effect on people. The argument here is that the pastor or youth worker can make use of the *Harry Potter* narrative to

address the direct effect of the dominant consumerist or materialistic *sacred* story, on kids' lived experiences. They can then offer kids Rowling's narrative resources (through her alternative *sacred* story with glimpses of the Christ discourse) to re-author their lives, according to an alternative story. What follows is a case study on Dudley Dursley and the direct effect consumerism exerts on his behaviour towards others.

### 5.2.1 A case study of the effect of consumerism on Dudley Dursley

Dudley Dursley is a clear example of the direct dehumanizing effect consumerism has on kids and the problem stories they experience. Dudley measures being loved by how many presents his parents and others (like his aunt Marge) give him. He has many problems, even though he does not perceive them as such. He is overweight and a bully who picks on smaller kids. The only friends he has are other bullies like him. Dudley is not a happy kid. These are Dudley's problem stories that are brought on by the consumerist discourse. Jacques Lacan depicts the 'Capitalist discourse' (Meylahn 2010); within the latter the 'Hysteric's discourse' can be interpreted as the continuous search for a person to be accepted by what the 'big Other' (capitalist discourse, in this case) demands s/he buy from the market to 'fit in'. Rowling clearly empathizes with the character of Dudley, and how damaging the effect of the consumerist discourse has been on him. His narrative can be used as one example, and therefore be a useful tool, to help kids externalize how the dominant problem story affects them, by seeing it reflected in the *Harry Potter* narrative<sup>38</sup>.

In the first book, *The Philosopher's Stone*, on Dudley's eleventh birthday (Rowling 1997: 21), after having counted his gifts he throws a massive temper tantrum as he discovers that he has only been given 37, one less than the previous year. His mother, Petunia, responds by immediately

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<sup>38</sup> For more information on externalization see Freedman & Combs 1996: 63ff.

promising to get her 'Popkin' another two gifts when they take him out with his friend to the zoo for his birthday. His father proudly responds by saying: 'Little tyke wants his money's worth, just like his father. Atta boy, Dudley!' (Rowling 1997: 21). A few days later, when it is Harry's birthday, he receives nothing from the Dursleys. For Dudley, this creates a vicious cycle as he comes to expect more presents from his parents on every birthday and Christmas. He has an extra bedroom where he keeps the toys he is bored with, after having played with them once or twice (Rowling 1997: 32). Therefore, Dudley may be regarded as also a clear example of a person who is never satisfied with the desired objects that he demands, leading to his dehumanized behaviour towards those who are weaker than him.

Dudley's problem, as for many kids, has developed within a particular social context and needs to be identified before a space is able to be opened to live an alternative story, free of the problem story, or at least being aware of the problem. If a pastor or youth worker were to contextualize his problem, Dudley might come to understand that his problem has occurred over a certain period (White 2007: 62). For example: his parents have always given him everything he demands. Therefore, they have taught him that 'desired' things are the way to be happy or gain happiness. This has also taught Dudley that if he screams loudly enough he will get whatever he demands. His problem of consumerism or materialism in essence begins with Mr. and Mrs. Dursley, who measure their happiness against what their neighbors and friends possess. For example, in the *Philosopher's Stone* (the first book), Mrs. Dursley mentions that a friend of hers has gone on holiday to her house in Majorca (1997: 22). By the second book, Mr. Dursley hopes to close a big business deal so that the Dursleys can also shop for a holiday home in Majorca (1998: 11). This means that the problem is not primarily Dudley, but his parents, who are themselves caught up in the vicious cycle of the effects of consumerism. Mr. and Mrs. Dursley are their son's external problem while the effect of consumerism on them is their external problem.

Dumbledore captures very well the effect Dudley's parents have had on him in the second last book, *The Half-Blood Prince*, when he goes to pick up Harry: 'The best that can be said is that he [Harry] has at least escaped the appalling damage you have inflicted upon the unfortunate boy [Dudley] sitting between you [Mr. and Mrs. Dursley]' (Rowling 2005: 57). Mr. and Mrs. Dursley do not think that they or their son have any issues: they are, in their frame of reference, perfectly 'normal', whereas Harry is 'abnormal' (Rowling 1997: 44). Rowling pits the 'abnormal' Harry (wizard) against the 'normal' Dudley (often the typical Western consumerist teenager); to show kids that normality is not necessarily what the dominant discourse says is 'normal'. This shapes Dudley's social-cultural world, and what Dudley perceives as 'normal', but 'normal' does not equate to happiness.

The Dursleys are so blinded by what 'normality' is, that they push away Harry. Although Dudley and Harry should have a sibling relationship, Dudley has been brought up to see him as a family burden and embarrassment. Dudley would have benefited from sharing with Harry, as would have been the case had they been actual brothers. This would have perhaps resulted in his being a much more tolerant and compassionate person. Instead, he is a spoilt bully. However, there is hope for him, as Rowling shows us in the last book. It takes even bigger bullies (the Dementors) to make him rethink his values and actions towards Harry. Only after Dudley encounters and is attacked by the Dementors, does he appreciate Harry and the fact that he had saved him, regardless of Dudley's treatment of Harry (Rowling 2007: 39). The experience of the Dementors re-humanizes him and this becomes a redeeming event.

By deconstructing a problem, people can gain perspective on it, helping them understand that they often seem to 'organize' their lives around a particular issue (White 1990: 4). In the case of consumerism, people try and live their lives around what the Market is selling to them to 'fit in'. They try



and interpret how to do so through the contextual lens of the *sacred* dominant discourse of their socio-cultural environment. It is important to note here, that from a narrative therapy perspective, the pastor or youth worker does not view the person as the problem, but that there is an external reason causing a difficulty in the person's life (Freedman & Combs 1996: 47). Therefore, the kid is not perceived as the problem, but rather the effects of consumerism, with all its traps, are perceived as the problem that affects the kid's life, and therefore, her/his identity and thus her/his spirituality.

### **5.2.2 Kids as valuable assets to the 'Market'**

Western kids are brought up with consumerist values, as these are the dominant values of their socio-cultural context. Therefore, kids growing up like Dudley, in a consumerist environment, are valuable assets to the Market. There is much money to be made from parents and kids who interpret the value of love through material possessions. As kids are born into a consumerist society, marketers see kids, says Mercer (2005: 96), as people with 'purchasing power in the future' who may become loyal to certain brands. As was said above, they are shaped by their socio-cultural environment, and this knowledge gained by them becomes a manual 'on how to' belong in their environment. It is therefore; essential for kids to belong to or to be perceived by others as possessing the desired things they need to own to belong.

To belong to a consumerist culture, kids have to understand what items they need to acquire (they need to know how to play the game of the Market), to be perceived by their social peers as individuals with any sort of worth (Mercer 2005: 97). As the market offers so many desirable things to choose from, depending on how much one is able to spend, this may become a difficult game to play. Often what kids can afford, does not include the much

desired brand. This means that they must learn what similar thing they can buy that may still be acceptable, even though it does not belong to the popular brand. The desired item becomes a way of boosting their identities amongst their peers. This is why young people move on to the next best thing if all their friends have exactly what they have, as their identity is no longer boosted, but equalled. In a competitive world people want to belong, but still remain individuals who differ in some way from their peers. Individuality is also something the Market sells as an important aspect of how others perceive people.

Mercer (2005: 98) also explains that the Market not only values kids as consumerists who will be loyal to brands in the future, but also values what their parents consume to satisfy their kids, under the guise (the Market's) that if the latter do not own certain age appropriate educational toys or gadgets this may hinder their kid's development. This trend continues as kids grow older, especially with technology, and parents worrying that their kids may get left behind. Consumerism creates a vicious circle. Kids become adults and continue on the same path with their own children (as can be seen with the Dursleys and Dudley). The problem with the Consumer discourse is not the fact that people buy desirable things, but the amount of value they place in the desirable things they consume. This attachment to things also impacts their identities and how they value themselves, as well as others. Here narratives, and especially fantasy narratives, which are created by the author to give hope through the *sacred* story of the alternative world, can show the reader the impact that the dominant story of placing value in desirable goods is having in their world (Primary World). Lewis (1962: 29), was convinced, as was said in the previous chapter, that through fantasy the reader is not only enchanted to enter into an alternative world, but also that the enchantment that the reader's 'Primary World' has imposed on them for years, can be broken. The alternative story of the *Harry Potter* series configures a different world

with a different *sacred* story. Thus, kids' consumerist pre-figuration is confronted with an alternative configuration, challenging kid's primary pre-figuration. The *Harry Potter* series focuses on the dehumanizing effect that materialism/consumerism has on individuals, by placing the reader in a unique situation in the imagination to choose or re-imagine another way to live. As the series is popular with kids, it means that most kids are familiar with the story, and have been so for over a decade (kids who read the book when it first appeared are now adults).

### **5.3 Re-imagined / re-figured futures through the configuration of the fantasy narrative of the *Harry Potter* series with its alternative *sacred* story**

Narratives, with their particular configuration, may challenge people to question their pre-figuration, and thus open up the possibility for an alternative re-figuration or re-interpretation of their worlds. Narratives, through the telling of characters' stories, make people aware of their own story and of the possibility that one is able to choose to change one's story to include or be transformed to live a different life. Fantasy narratives in particular, illustrate to readers that they can 're-story' their lives to include or live according to other configurations, with alternative values. Fantasy does this by allowing the reader to imagine diversity and difference in an alternative way as it incorporates the valuable aspect of fellowship. In other words, by imagining fantastic things, the reader is liberated from their daily life to go beyond their dominant discourses to follow a lived religion of community. As was observed in Chapter 4, Tolkien (2008: 64) pointed out that unlike the dominant story, alternative worlds (Secondary Worlds), do not seek to delude the reader, but to awaken them to their dominant discourse of being oppressed.

In the *Harry Potter* series, Rowling, by telling the story of Harry's unhappiness in living according to the Dursleys' values (materialistic and always going out of their way to make sure that they 'fit in' with their neighborhood), allows the reader to live out, in their imagination, Harry's choice to transform in the series. When Harry returns to the wizarding world and often stays with the Weasley's during the holidays, he enjoys living according to their values. Lived theology always includes the outcasts/undesirables such as Hagrid (a half giant) and Lupin (a werewolf), making them a part of their family. Therefore, Harry re-stories his life to live according to the Weasleys' values and some of those who live in the wizarding world. Harry's story may, in short, put matters in an alternative perspective for kids, showing them that there are more ways to live in their socio-cultural world, than just in following the dominant discourse of their world to 'fit in'. 'Fitting in' does not equate with happiness, but simply means that the kid is enslaved to the greedy market, much as Voldemort's supporters are enslaved to him in order to help him gain more power, yet receive nothing in return for their loyalty.

By reading Harry's story and then talking about it, the reader and the pastor or youth worker, co-author another story, sometimes more than one story: as conversation leads from one thing to another, putting emphasis on stories that the person may not have noticed before; but by voicing these, they are awakened to the 'hidden story'. It has been argued: 'Those aspects of lived experience that fall outside of the dominant story provide a rich and fertile source for the generation, or re-generation, of alternative story' (White & Epston 1990: 15). Once the reader has read the *Harry Potter* series, they too will have lived through all that the characters have lived through; this will then become part of their 'lived experience' (part of their 'prejudgment tool'), rich in experiencing something outside of the dominant discourse, even though they may be unaware of it. This 'lived experience' is there, ready to be re-generated when paid attention to, pulling it out of its shadowed

existence and making the kids aware of a particular story. The pastor or youth worker can facilitate the wizarding world's configuration becoming part of the kids' re-imagination, by making the latter aware of their struggle with their identity and spirituality in a consumerist or materialistic world. It can also be pointed out to kids that they are not unique in their struggle, and therefore, are not obliged to feel alienated from their peers, as many of these are likely to be going through the same feelings of despair.

Through Harry's story, with its alternative magical world, kids can learn that a consumerist life dehumanizes, while the alternative *sacred* story that Rowling presents re-humanizes. By putting characters into context and seeing how they make choices, the reader also places her/himself in the situation (experience taking) to be re-humanized by and live according to the story of the wounded Christ (lived theology).

The narrative approach looks at the 'realities' or socio-cultural worlds that people are born into and take for granted. These 'realities' are lived out in *mundane* stories, and are threaded with that particular 'realities' *sacred* story. In other words, this is how people experience their lives. Narrative therapy seeks to discover alternative stories to the dominant ones in which people may have become helplessly trapped. The therapist helps the person identify the story, as stories that were always there, but perhaps overshadowed by what their social peers may think if they actually voice something alternative to what their social peers are saying. White (2007: 61), calls these stories 'neglected'; but once voiced they become 'unique outcomes', that provide an entrance to something else. These 'neglected' stories may also originate from fantasy stories. For example, as was said before, a kid may have started reading *Harry Potter* because that is what all her/his friends were doing at a particular point in time; it was the 'in thing' to do at that time. However, long after her/his friends may have stopped reading the series; the kid may find that s/he enjoyed it so much that s/he

finishes all seven books. Nevertheless, s/he might not discuss this with any of her/his friends, in fear of what they may think, as the latter may have moved onto the next sought after desired book/item. The kid may have remained with the novels to the very end out of loyalty to Harry, to see what Harry's outcome would be. This means that s/he may have, for example, acquired the tools to be faithful to a fellowship, via the friendship s/he has experienced through Harry, Ron and Hermione. The novels subconsciously become part of the kid, but since s/he is invariably worried about what her/his peers may think, these stories remain 'neglected'. As the reader evaluates characters in the same way as they evaluate people in their lives, the characters and their story demonstrate to the reader that they too have the capability to change if they choose to do so. This is the true magic of fantasy: it creates a space in the reader's mind to re-imagine alternative configurations with alternative choices that may 'leak' into their 'Primary World', generating the possibility of change. The kids may now seek true friendship, instead of basing friendships on material gain.

In a discussion between a pastor or youth worker who follows the narrative approach with a kid, aspects of the *Harry Potter* story can 're-generate' the story that was eclipsed by the dominant story of the kid's world (White 1990: 15). The pastor or youth worker, and kid, can now use this series to discuss the many themes of the series that Rowling brings up, for example, love, friendship, death, courage and others. Research done by Osmer and Salazar-Newton (2014: 51-71), in a project called *Growing Up with Harry Potter*, where 93 interviews were conducted with 93 young adults, who had grown up reading and sometimes re-reading the *Harry Potter* novels, have made some interesting findings. One of these findings, and one that pertains to this thesis is the finding that 'readers easily identified a number of moral themes like death, love, choice, friendship, sacrifice, prejudice/intolerance, the ambiguity of evil/good, family and mother love' (Osmer & Salazar-Newton 2014:69). However, Osmer and Salazar-Newton

(2014: 69) were disappointed by how many readers had not reflected on the above themes. It appears that while many readers had discussed the novels with family and friends they had never had the opportunity to analyse them in a more meaningful way in a school, church or even a book group setup. For most of the participants involved in this project this had been the first opportunity that they had had to reflect on the above mentioned themes. The participants indicated that they wanted to re-read these novels and re-think the questions that were posed to them in the project. Osmer and Salazar-Newton explain how this reveals 'a readiness and eagerness for this kind of discussion' (Osmer & Salazar-Newton 2014:69). Hence, pastors would benefit well to use the novels in conjunction with narrative therapy.

The narrative approach helps readers understand that an alternative existence is in no way wrong ('un-cool'), but a choice that needs to be made by the individual to live according to other values. 'In narrative therapy we are interested in thickening the alternative story and preferred identities of children' (White & Morgan 2006: 109). To 'thicken' the outcome of the story, all sorts of items that tell a story can be used to serve as 'thickeners', such as documents, letters, certificates and the like, as all such things have a story behind them (Freedman & Combs 1996: 232). As was remarked in Chapter 3, creative work such as drawing and writing is essential to kids' development (Bond & Michelson 2003:109). In narrative therapy, the development can be used to thicken the alternative story. In the case of the *Harry Potter* series, kids can be encouraged to talk, write and draw about the different aspects of the series; for example, friendship, love, sacrifice and suchlike, and how these are matters that cannot be commercially bought; rather they are features we choose to give of ourselves to others (*Pottermore* in Chapter 3 refers). By doing this, the alternative story comes out of 'hiding' to become a way of living (lived theology). These 'unique outcomes' create a space for the person to be able to start their journey and to use the resources (love, friendship and others) that they have gained

through the series, that are alternative to the dominant story, to move away from the problem. The *Harry Potter* series may help not only to provide kids with values alternate to Western consumerism or materialism, but also help them ‘thicken’ their understanding of the discourse of Christ. As conversations move from one topic to another, Christ’s actions towards humanity may be brought into the conversation by the pastor or youth worker, in a contemporary manner.

Consumerism or materialism in Western society is one *sacred* story that legitimizes the *mundane* story. This has, in some instances, completely engulfed people’s lives. In other words, a person’s ‘reality’ or world view is driven by consumerism and the need to please and impress others with their material things. The narrative therapist seeks to help the person open a space for alternative stories that ‘haven’t yet been storied’ (Freedman & Combs 1996: 46). The alternative ‘hidden’ *sacred* story and particularly fantasy narratives that are usually free from the dominant discourses of a person’s world view are valuable in helping a person to experience liberation and transformation. Usually a person is so trapped within their dominant discourse that they have few opportunities in imagining transformation and liberation, and fantasy allows them to re-imagining themselves liberated and transformed.

When kids reach adolescence, they start questioning and resisting their parents’ way of living: this may include the values with which they have been raised. Dudley rejects his parents’ values when he considerately leaves Harry tea outside his bedroom door, or thanks Harry for saving his life (Rowling 2007: 39). As kids’ values are woven with the consumerist *sacred* story, many adolescents feel fragmented and lonely. By opening a conversation with a kid about the values in the *Harry Potter* series that may have been eclipsed by the dominant story, she or he can re-imagine the ‘neglected’ story. Each person will construct their story and focus on what



they deem important within their 'reality'. These conversations are not about discovering hidden truths, but rather, start focusing on issues that may not have been focused on previously, as these were overshadowed by the dominant story (White & Morgan 2006: 109).

Stories can be changed (Dudley chooses to alter his), as we are in control of the story. Fantasy narratives show the reader that they possess the power to choose to do so. The only magic required is the courage in choosing to liberate oneself from the dominant discourse of one's 'Primary World'. We can change the story to something alternative to the dominant discourse, something that we better identify with, for example, being friends with someone for who they are, rather than what they possess.

#### **5.4 Re-imagined futures and living-out of theology through the characters of Harry, Dumbledore and Snape: Following in the actions of the wounded Christ**

The characters of Harry, Dumbledore and Snape are pitted against the discourse of consumerism, showing the reader how the alternative path may turn out when the path of love and fellowship are taken. These characters' lives are lived theology, never backing down from their chosen values.

##### **5.4.1 The sometimes undesirable characters of Harry, Dumbledore and Snape**

Like Christ, all the above characters are at certain times in the series, and in Snape's case, most of the time, perceived as undesirable by their community. In other words, there are times, and particularly so for Dumbledore and Harry, when these characters do not comply with the views of those in the wizarding world, especially those who possess social status and an influence on the Ministry of Magic. However, none of the characters

are put off by what others have to say about them, firm in their values, choosing to help others out of love: as Christ chose to show love and kindness to those who were undesirable in his society, making him in turn undesirable to those in his society who did possess socio-political status. These three characters choose not to act in ways that go against their values and refuse to put innocent lives (wizard or 'Muggle') in jeopardy. The characters of Dumbledore, Harry and Snape show parallels between the choices they make, with the choices of the early Church whose members were not afraid to sacrifice themselves for their beliefs.

The way in which the characters of Harry, Dumbledore and Snape conduct themselves, reveals them to be the three most powerful and courageous characters of the series, choosing to follow the path of integrity. Although, as was explained in Chapter 4, there are also other characters that show great courage in sacrificing themselves for the sake of love, friendship and community, such as Lily and Dobby; the characters of Harry, Dumbledore and Snape are the three characters whom we eventually come to know most intimately.

As with people in our own socio-cultural communities, Rowling lets us get to know these characters over all seven books. All three characters sacrifice themselves for love and fellowship, and by the final book of the series, *The Deathly Hallows*, the reader is exposed to the extent of their integrity. These characters, their character traits, how they face challenges, and the choices they make when they are confronted with self-sacrifice are laid bare for the reader. The choices they make are not always in their best interest, but rather in the interest of their loved ones, friends and community. When these three characters are at their very weakest, they are full of grace, resembling the wounded Christ (see Granger 2011: 52). Through their actions the reader is exposed to and experiences a 'lived theology' of true fellowship that may 'leak' into their 'Primary World'. S/he witnesses these

characters' weaknesses and vulnerability and how their actions crucify the dominant discourse, deconstructing consumerism and materialism, resurrecting a community that places its values in the Christ discourse. The Christ event, as Meylahn (2012: 43) points out, 'in weakness and vulnerability...deconstructs the dominant laws that hold people captive, through both the incarnation and solidarity with the marginalized as well as through the crucifixion.' Through Harry, Dumbledore and Snape's crucifixions of the dominant discourse (Voldemort's greed to be in control of the two worlds and lust for immortality, refer back to Chapter 4) that threatens to engulf the wizarding community as it has the 'Muggle' world; these characters resurrect, with the help of other undesirables, a community of fellowship and love. In sacrificing themselves, Harry, Dumbledore and Snape surrender themselves to their community, giving up their earthly existence so that their community can continue, free of Voldemort (sin). These characters' acts of sacrifice strongly echo Christ's sacrifice of freeing humanity from its sinful existence.

All three characters are only fully appreciated by their community, once it understands the extent of their sacrifices, which emerges only at the very end of the final book. This appreciation comes only through confession; the unloading of the burden with which these three people are encumbered: Dumbledore's guilt, Snape's pride, Harry's fragmented identity. By offloading these burdens, these characters can go on, free of the weight that they have been carrying for years. For Dumbledore and Snape this is only achieved through death. Harry, however, has the opportunity to live free of his burden from the day Voldemort dies, and is given the gift of liberating Dumbledore and Snape from their burdens. In liberating these men from their burden the reader gets to experience with Harry a glimpse of 'Joy' through healing these men's wounds. It is because of the actions of Dumbledore and Snape that Harry understands the depth of their integrity, helping him to completely accept who they were, and the pivotal role they

played in who he (Harry) has become; this gives him the courage to accept who he is, to truly know himself and his self-worth. All these aspects of the other characters' narratives (and these include the sacrifices of Dobby and Lily), are woven into Harry's personal narrative, becoming a part of his identity and thus spirituality. These aspects of the narrative have served to keep Harry humble, as he now knows that great men are not born, but that they struggle to come to wisdom.

Dumbledore was devastated by guilt, but once he has confessed to Harry at King's Cross, he is free of that guilt. Ironically this burden that each is carrying also makes them the exceptional people they are. In other words, suffering and overcoming it may lead to Christ-like actions. The humility learned by Harry shows the reader that accepting others as they are and by them accepting her or him as s/she is, there, in that instant, this provides an opportunity to know Christ through another person, without being deluded by material gain.

By speaking and reading about these three characters' choices, the reader has the opportunity of re-imagining her/himself making choices that may not be according to the dominant discourses that the reader lives in, and that may not please those whom they call their friends. Here, with the pastor or youth worker, the reader has the opportunity to open a space in their 'Primary World' so as to co-author an alternative reality to include honest friendships that are not based on material possessions, but rather love of the person. This alternative story takes courage to accomplish, as in this case, kids need to learn to love and be loved for who they are and likewise whom their friends are, and not what they possess or can materially gain from a friendship. Also through living out Harry's story, the reader experiences in their imagination how Harry co-authors his own story with the help of those in the wizarding world (Dumbledore, Hagrid, Ron, and Hermione amongst others). This means that he co-authors his story with the

help and love of others and does not undertake his journey of self-discovery on his own; he co-authors his story in community. The community where Harry encounters fellowship, love and acceptance for the first time in his life (the Weasleys and the other undesirables) is where the reader encounters a powerful glimpse of a Christ like community, free of the pretentious discourse of those (the Dursleys in the 'Muggle' world and the Malfoys in the wizarding world) who try to keep up with the consumerist discourse.

#### **5.4.2 Harry – The fragmented seeker**

We meet Harry as a one-year-old orphan who will spend the next ten years of his life not knowing that he is a wizard. Not only is Harry orphaned, but also lives those ten years exclusively with the Dursleys, who treat Harry as a terrible burden to them as a family. As noted, he is perceived by the Dursleys as something of an embarrassment. They continuously attempt to conceal Harry from their neighbors and Uncle Vernon's business acquaintances (Rowling 1998:11). Harry's subjection to his only living relatives is dehumanizing, wounding his identity and thus his spirituality, making him feel worthless.

His aunt and uncle told Harry that he and his parents had been in a car crash, in which his parents died and Harry received the lightning shaped scar on his forehead (Rowling 1997: 20). The scar becomes part of Harry's identity. On the one hand, it becomes a way for others to identify him, while on the other, the scar is Harry's 'supernatural' connection to Voldemort. It is also a continuous reminder of Voldemort killing his parents and of his mother's sacrifice that makes Harry the only person to have survived the killing curse. However, it also allows him to see and experience Voldemort's cruelty and anger (Rowling 2003: 522). The scar causes Harry extreme pain whenever he dreams of Voldemort or Voldemort is near him. In the same section Rowling links the pain that Harry experiences with a form of torture,

showing him visions of how Voldemort killed his parents (Rowling 2003: 522). Harry's scar stops hurting once Voldemort kills the Horcrux that he had unintentionally placed in Harry when he tried to kill him as an infant. Further discussion on the Horcrux follows below.

There are apparently no pictures of Harry's parents and his aunt and uncle never talk about them. Harry is in fact repeatedly told by his aunt and uncle not to ask questions if he wants to live a 'quiet life' (Rowling 1997: 20). Once Harry does find out that he is a wizard and that his parents were killed by Lord Voldemort, he is able to start piecing his parents' life together. This also explains to Harry why he can make things happen when he is scared or angry (Rowling 1997: 47). Harry has always been confused about some of his abilities when angry, but has not dared to bring this issue up with the Dursleys. Harry discovers truths about himself and his parents throughout all seven books, until all the pieces fit together, almost like a jigsaw puzzle that has to be completed before the bigger picture can be seen and understood.

He will spend the next seven years of his life (between the ages of 11 – 17), with the reader, seeking out who his parents were as people, who their friends were, why they did the things they did. In short, Harry is exploring his identity, as identity begins with our parents, even if that identity is later rejected. Harry, in the beginning of the series is fragmented; never knowing the full story of his parents, but by the last book, he is liberated from fragmentation in two ways:

- 1) He comes to know and accept who his parents were;
- 2) He is liberated from the Horcrux that Voldemort had unintentionally placed in him.

The Horcrux ironically plays a huge role in the person that Harry becomes. By placing the Horcrux in Harry, Voldemort places a heavy burden on Harry; Voldemort makes Harry the only person that can get rid of him. This displays some parallels with the Christ discourse, of Christ taking on human form and sin to liberate human beings from their sin. Harry takes on the Horcrux, but like Christ never gives into sin. Harry, as Dumbledore explains, has a pure heart. Protected by his mother's love, Harry ultimately takes the right path. Even when, like Christ he is tempted, Harry overcomes his temptation and follows the path of love. However, without the burden of the Horcrux, Harry would have just been another teenage wizard. His Horcrux becomes a powerful symbol of the spiritual struggle, death and rebirth that a person may have to undergo to be truly regenerated and reborn to glimpse the pure joy of a life in Christ.

Through struggle, a person may come to find a depth to their lives they never knew was possible. Harry experiences this pure 'joy' when he is rid of the Horcrux. Trevarthen (2008: 181-212) (as was said in Chapter 4), explains that in her view, Harry is the Philosopher's Stone. The Stone was thought to spiritually enhance those who possessed it. However, in Trevarthen's view we all possess the Stone; we just do not know it until we have sacrificed ourselves for others. Millbank (2005: 4) explains that this type of sacrifice to prevent others from coming to harm, this 'loss of the self', is one that 'the gospels seek to recommend' to attain true liberation. Once Harry is rid of the Horcrux, he is spiritually illuminated by the Stone that he has always had within him and which the Horcrux overshadowed. The Philosopher's Stone is the symbol of the possibility that we all have within us to find the path to Christ. Rowling, therefore, begins the series with the possibility of change, and the possibility of getting to know Christ as one that is always there; in the 'cracks' and 'shadows' waiting to be known. The Christ story, here, becomes the neglected story that can bring about a 'unique outcome', to choose an alternative way to live.

Finding out that his parents were wizards is just the starting point for Harry: it will take years for him to understand that his parents were not only talented wizards, but that they were also wizards who made mistakes. Rowling places emphasis on accepting 'being human' (the embracing of our fragmented and wounded state). It is only through accepting our human condition and our community's human condition that we can begin to heal and close the wounds.

It is hard for Harry, who worships his idea of his late father (James Potter), later in the series to have to acknowledge that his dad was arrogant and sometimes did spiteful and hurtful things to other people, especially Snape, whom James and his friends (and this includes Harry's godfather Sirius) had nicknamed 'Snivellus' (Rowling 2003: 710). Harry has to learn, and does in time, that although his dad may have made mistakes as a schoolboy, these did not define the totality of who he was as a person. James fought against Voldemort together with the Order of the Phoenix, when Voldemort came to power the first time (Rowling 2003: 196), and died protecting Harry and his mother. James was in fact a noble person. Learning these things about his parents, although sometimes difficult, helps Harry put his parents in context, and therefore, himself. By putting himself in context within the wizarding world Harry heightens his identity, whereas, in the Dursleys' context, Harry's identity is diminished and dehumanized. Although Harry finds out he is a wizard in the first book, and this helps him understand himself better, each summer when Harry returns to the Dursleys he again becomes – and feels – worthless. Therefore, Harry loses his identity and is again dehumanized in the 'Muggle' world, which, as was said before, Rowling uses to symbolize the dehumanizing effects of consumerism/materialism, and the fragmentation and worthlessness caused by consumerist identities: especially those who do not 'fit in' for whatever reason.



In the wizarding world, Harry has friends whom he loves like siblings, whereas Dudley has made sure he never had any in the 'Muggle' world. In sharp contrast to Dudley, who, as was said above, should have been a sibling to Harry, Hermione, who is also an only child, is compassionate towards him. Harry and Hermione develop a very close relationship over the years, looking out for one another as siblings would. Harry, who is an innately compassionate person, does not think twice when it comes to the safety of his friends. Even when faced with death, he would much rather die, than see one more friend die, trying to defend him (Rowling 2007: 563). Harry's friendships do not depend on status or wealth. In fact, his closest friends are either humble working people (the Weasleys), not human (Hagrid, Dobby and others) or those who are not popular at school, or sometimes even within the wizarding community; for example, Hermione, who is a 'Mudblood', Ron, who is poor, and Neville, whom everyone makes fun of because of his absent-minded ways. Harry values these people and non-humans for their friendship and loyalty towards him. Until he arrives in the wizarding world Harry has no worth to anyone. His worthlessness in the 'Muggle' world is in sharp contrast to his worth in the wizarding world.

In the latter Harry is allowed to know what it is to belong to a family (through the Weasleys and Hagrid), to have friends and self worth. This shows kids that one can have worth without having money or status: there are those who will value you for who one is. It shows kids that they can create alternative friendships and communities that are free of the values of consumerism and materialism. Harry, as was said in Chapter 4, crucifies consumerism and resurrects community above material wealth. Here, the Christ discourse, as was said above, appears through Harry's choice of love of others, rather than the love of material goods. There are those in the story, especially Draco, who perceive Harry's actions as weak and undesirable, even embarrassing: who would befriend Hagrid? Yet, Harry's

actions are filled with grace and love, not at all in accordance with those in the wizarding world, or the 'Muggle' world, who seek status.

Harry's parents have left him with a vault of wizarding money in the wizarding bank Gringotts. Harry is in essence financially quite 'well off'. However, in *The Philosopher's Stone* Harry is more excited to have friends than money (Rowling 1997: 50). Blake (2002: 71-72) points out that Harry is like any other contemporary kid, regardless of being 'wizard cloaked and wand in hand', as he desires 'the pleasure of retail', such as wanting the latest broomstick and other desirable commodities. Harry's desire for the latest broomstick makes him human, and kids can easily identify with his wanting something. However, Harry never places material wants over any friendship and would rather have friendship than money. He always shares his money and material things with his friends. On his first train ride to Hogwarts, he is thrilled to have someone (Ron) to share the edibles that he buys from the trolley. 'It was a nice feeling, sitting there with Ron, eating their way through all Harry's pasties and cakes' (Rowling 1997: 76). Harry is glad to have companionship.

Although Harry has been deprived of both money and friends, he instinctively knows where to place value. Harry also chooses to be friends with Ron, rather than Draco, whom Harry immediately recognizes as a bully who likes people with influence, having had plenty of experience with his cousin Dudley (Rowling 1997: 81). Now Harry benefits from true companionship through Ron, something that cannot be bought. Kids experience Harry's delight at finding money and friends. They also experience the importance of the 'joy' of having friends over owning money and desirable objects. Through expressing 'joy' in their stories, writers, Tolkien (2008: 246) tells us, allows the reader to experience the 'source-reality' (Christ). Therefore, through the 'joy' of Harry finding companionship, the reader also glimpses Christ and the friendship/companionship that

comes from knowing him, as through a friendship a person can experience the 'joy' of Christ.

In the last book, Harry has run away to complete the job of getting rid of the Horcruxes, which he began with Dumbledore. The Ministry of Magic puts out a poster with Harry's picture on it, with the caption 'Undesirable Number One' (Rowling 2007: 207-208). The Ministry of Magic, under the influence of Voldemort, who wants Harry captured so he can kill Harry himself, does this. Voldemort fears Harry's power, even though to his followers he maintains he is more powerful than Harry is (Rowling 2007: 582). Harry has, throughout the series, been undesirable to not only to the Dursleys, but also at times to much of the wizarding world. For instance, no one likes Harry when they think he is the heir of Slytherin, in *The Chamber of Secrets*, but at least he keeps his friends' support (Rowling 1998: 146). Subsequently in the series, in *The Goblet of Fire*, when, without Harry's consent, Harry becomes one of the school champions, he is again unpopular with his peers and with Ron (who thinks that he has left him out, but then comes to realize that Harry had nothing to do with being chosen as school champion) (Rowling 2000: 393). In *The Order of the Phoenix* when he tells people he has seen Voldemort regain a body, the Ministry of Magic make him out be an attention seeking little boy (Rowling 2003:109). Yet Harry ploughs on, miserable though he may be in these circumstances. With the aid of Dumbledore, Ron, Hermione and some others, Harry and the reader learn that there are values worth fighting for and that his true friends will support him through these challenges, even if it hurts their social status or their popularity.

#### **5.4.3 Dumbledore – Harry's story 'space opener'**

Professor Dumbledore is one of the first characters from the wizarding world whom we meet in the series, as it is he who leaves Harry on the Dursleys'

front doorstep. There is an air of mystery surrounding him as he walks down Privet Drive for the first time:

‘Nothing like this man had ever been seen on Privet Drive. He was tall, thin, and very old, judging by the silver of his hair and beard, which were both long enough to tuck into his belt. He was wearing long robes, a purple cloak that swept the ground and high-heeled, buckled boots’ (Rowling 1997: 12).

By the second last and last books we have come to see Dumbledore as more than just a mysterious and powerful wizard whom even Voldemort fears. We come to regard him as a man who made many mistakes as an adolescent and then spent the rest of his life regretting earlier actions he could not rectify. For more information on externalization see Freedman & Combs 1996: 63ff He is also a fragmented character: in the wizarding community during most of his career Dumbledore is viewed as an all-powerful wizard, a role he maintains in school, and the Ministry of Magic; yet, he is also mortified and wounded by his past actions that had resulted in the death of his sister and his estrangement from his brother.

To Harry, Dumbledore is the wise grandfather or father figure he never had. Dumbledore creates a space for Harry, from the end of the first book, to re-imagine his parents’ sacrifice for him. From here on, Harry knows that he was loved. Love becomes the ‘space-opener’ that Harry needs to move forward and re-imagine a life that was filled with love when his parents were alive. When Dumbledore is killed by Snape, Harry is crushed, as not only has he lost yet another parent figure (having lost his godfather, Sirius first); Hogwarts will also never be the same again for Harry and many of the other students. In other words, Harry feels as though he has lost not only a father, but also the only true home he has ever had. He trusts and respects Dumbledore and although towards the end he has some doubts and is even

disappointed in him, Harry remains loyal to him to the very end; he is 'Dumbledore's man through and through' (Rowling 2005: 326).

In *The Deathly Hallows*, Harry is shocked to realise that Dumbledore has kept him alive all these years so that he can die at the hands of Voldemort at the right time. Harry, without Voldemort's or his own knowledge, became a Horcrux, carrying a piece of Voldemort's soul within him for sixteen years of his life. Harry, in Snape's words, is 'a pig for slaughter' (Rowling 2007: 551). Nevertheless, Dumbledore had had a strong suspicion that Harry would not die, just the piece of Voldemort's soul, as he explains at King's Cross. When Harry sets out to let Voldemort kill him, he does so with the knowledge that his sacrifice is crucial, placing his complete trust in Dumbledore, expecting to die.

In *The Half-Blood Prince* Dumbledore dies, and the reader finds out in *The Deathly Hallows* (through Snape's memory) that he had asked Snape to kill him for three reasons:

- 1) so that Snape apparently remains Voldemort's faithful servant so as to keep Harry alive;
- 2) so that he (Dumbledore) can die quickly and with dignity;
- 3) to keep Draco from committing murder and ripping his soul apart.

Therefore, Dumbledore, rather than cling to life as long as possible, sacrifices himself for Snape, Harry and Draco. For Dumbledore, his responsibilities towards Harry, Snape and Draco are far more important than a few more days of life. He is a man of integrity, honoring his responsibilities and symbolizing to the reader what it actually means to live a life of integrity without fail (lived theology). Although Dumbledore had

made a huge mistake as a young man, once he decided to turn his life around, he re-storied it to live according to different values, to the end of his life. To troubled adolescents, Dumbledore can become a symbol of how one's life can be completely turned around if one so chooses to do so and of the truth that even great people make bad choices.

When Harry meets Dumbledore at King's Cross, in the last book, Dumbledore stands before him, 'wounded' and 'naked', no longer fragmented, playing more than one role:

- 1) the role of the great wizard;
- 2) the role of a man living with regrets.

At King's Cross, through sharing his remorse with a 'wounded' and 'naked' Harry, Dumbledore is restored to being the great wizard whom Harry loves and respects, the more so for being honest, 'wounded' and 'naked'. Harry honours Dumbledore a few years later by calling his youngest son Albus. Through Dumbledore's 'wounded' and 'naked' state, the reader experiences how confession to another can allow one to re-story one's life and allow one to become whole, free of delusions and fragmentation. Meylahn (2012: 66) would call Dumbledore's confession and act of selflessness, 'transformational', a 're-birth', a death of the 'old-self'. 'This openness to God's involvement in the community (Christ event) brings about radical transformation in the sense of re-birth, dying to the old self (under the dominant myth) and being born as a new creation, liberated by the power of the cross' (Meylahn 2012: 66).

Dumbledore died to his youthful lust for power, and was reborn free of the dominant discourse's need for status and power, reborn a liberated man, seeking only the downfall of the dominant discourse. From then on,

Dumbledore continuously tries to awaken others in his community to the downfall of power and status, seeking only to protect those, not only in his community, but also the 'Muggle' world. The final time the reader encounters him is at King's Cross, a powerful symbol of his liberation and transformation through the cross. Transformation and liberation are presented by Rowling as actions that can only be achieved by choosing to do so, not through some magical incantation or expensive object.

By focusing on the act of confession to another, Rowling gives the reader a view into the intimate side of fellowship. Confessing to another a deed that one deems to be embarrassing or hurtful takes courage, trust and sometimes even a leap of faith; it requires giving another person a part of one that may also liberate one. Therefore, to Rowling friendship/fellowship are essential parts of being human, as through these fellowships/friendships a person gains the integrity to be liberated from an issue that may be causing fear, embarrassment and so on. Even Dudley, through thanking Harry in the very last book for saving him from the Dementors, is liberated from being a Dursley (Rowling 2007: 39). By shaking Harry's hand and by being concerned for Harry, where his parents only show concern for themselves, Dudley is redeemed to Harry and to the reader.

Dumbledore is himself despised by some wizards who try their best to get rid of him in the course of the series. In *The Order of the Phoenix*, the Ministry of Magic paints him, like Harry, as undesirable: as an insane old man who believes that Voldemort has returned (Rowling 2003:111). Eventually Dumbledore flees from the Ministry, escaping imprisonment, but returns to run the school until his death (Rowling 2003:685), remaining faithful to the school, the pupils and the other teachers to the end.

#### 5.4.4 Snape – Harry’s liberator to the alternative story

Snape has an ambiguous nature: the reader is never truly sure of how good or evil he is, until the last book. Snape always appears as the villain, from the very first book; Harry knows that ‘Snape didn’t dislike Harry - he *hated* him’ (Rowling 1997: 101). The truth is he never does really like Harry, whom he often refers to as ‘Potter’s son’. In conversation with Dumbledore, Snape says Harry is ‘mediocre, arrogant as his father, a determined rule-breaker, delighted to find himself famous, attention seeking and impertinent’ (Rowling 2007: 545).

Snape is the character the reader loves to hate, and the one who surprises the reader and touches her or him through his choices and actions in the end. The reader discovers that it is love which has motivated Snape to sacrifice himself by playing the double agent, on Dumbledore’s orders, to take care of Harry for Lily, to the end. The turning point for Snape’s decision to play a double agent and turn against Voldemort came about through the latter’s killing Lily, although Snape had asked him to spare Lily’s life. Snape is beside himself with grief and remorse, promising Dumbledore to help him protect Harry for his beloved Lily.

Snape’s love for Lily, the man whom he never trusted and often hated, protected Harry. Love has had a powerful impact on Harry’s safety, through his mother. When Dumbledore questions Snape’s love for Lily after all these years since her death, Snape’s reply is that he has always loved Lily (Rowling 2007: 552). Snape proves this to Dumbledore by showing him his Patronus, which is exactly that of Lily’s, a silver doe (Rowling 2007: 551). By loving Lily, Snape’s actions are good and noble, instead of being those of a Death Eater and a servant faithful to Voldemort. Snape is redeemed to Harry and the reader for his choice to keep on loving Lily even though she never returns his love, nor does Snape stop loving Lily after she dies. The



character of Snape, say Deavel and Deavel (2010: 55), shows that love is a choice, and not just an emotion, as Snape continuously chooses to do good for the sake of others 'despite his emotional indifference to or even dislike of these individuals, [which] testifies to the strength of his love for Lily.' Snape for most of the series is a 'fragmented self':

- 1) he dislikes Harry yet protects him for his beloved Lily;
- 2) plays a dual role, that of a Death Eater and also a member of the Order of the Phoenix. Snape never wants anyone to perceive him as weak or kind.

When Harry enters Snape's memory through the Pensieve, in *The Deathly Hallows*, Harry sees him having a conversation with Dumbledore about Lily. Lily is dead and Dumbledore asks a grieving Snape, as was said above, to help him protect Harry. Snape agrees, but makes Dumbledore give his word never to tell anyone. Dumbledore answers as follows: 'My word, Severus, that I shall never reveal the best of you?' (Rowling 2007: 545). Snape's best is his weakness, his love for Lily, which Snape perceives as a terrible flaw on his part, and yet it is his saving grace for Harry and to the reader. In the Pensieve, both Harry and the reader encounter a 'wounded' and 'naked' Snape, no longer deluded by Voldemort's power, after Lily's death. We see how Snape's relationship with Dumbledore is reborn in grace. Through Snape's choice to protect Harry, sacrificing himself to do so, he achieves what Millbank (2005: 5) calls 'innocence', as he has defended innocence (Harry): Snape, having defended Harry, develops his spirituality in an 'unsullied manner'. Snape stays faithful to Dumbledore and the memory of Lily to the end. Harry and the reader also perceive Snape with 'reborn' eyes, forgiving him for his pride.

Both Snape and Harry are liberated through Snape's confession: Harry lets go of all the hatred and anger he has felt for Snape since he was eleven years old; Harry also understands how true love cannot allow any more harm to come to those whom he loves. This liberates Harry to move on and do what he needs to do. Snape's confession, through giving his memory to Harry, allows him to die a whole person – free from fragmentation. Snape dies only as the man who loved Lily. Again here, confession to another helps not only the character, but also the reader to understand that by putting a problem in context one may be liberated, as Snape was, from the role of traitor to the role of savior. Rowling continuously emphasizes all people's ability to transform, if they choose to do so, and Snape becomes the ultimate symbol of transformation.

While Harry and Dumbledore have some firm friends and supporters who rally around them and their cause (to get rid of Voldemort), Snape has no one. No one likes or trusts Snape, not even the members of the Order of the Phoenix. Snape is undesirable to most of the other characters. People, such as Prof McGonagall (who is a member of the Order of the Phoenix and vice-headmistress at Hogwarts), only tolerate Snape, as Dumbledore says that he has reason to believe in Snape's loyalty (Rowling 2005: 574). Yet it is Snape who makes the biggest sacrifice, for the boy he never likes, and the woman who never returned his love. He shows Christ-like sacrificial love, more even than Harry and Dumbledore, who sacrifice themselves for their loved ones.

Snape's sacrifice touches Harry and the reader the most, as he chooses to die to protect Harry, regardless of his dislike for him. His sacrifice does not gain him any glory or material gain but, like that of Christ's, is made out of choice. The reader here gleans the 'joy' of love (Christ's love), something pure without intention or gain.

## 5.5 An overview

In this chapter, it was argued that the *Harry Potter* series may be used by pastors and youth workers to help adolescents re-imagine an alternative *sacred* story with glimpses of the wounded Christ. There is an eloquent simplicity to Rowling's fantasy narrative and the very simplicity of her narrative makes it so extraordinarily powerful. Rowling has not tried to impress with new theology, nor does she directly mention Christ in any way; rather she has taken a step back and given the reader glimpses, through some of the characters' actions, of sacrificial love that may be lived out on a daily basis.

Kids growing up in a Western society socially learn to place a huge emphasis on consumerism and materialism. This creates difficulties in their lives (loneliness, fragmented identities and so on), that can be directly linked to the problem story of consumerism and materialism (the dominant *sacred* story), faced by most people, and especially kids who so much want to 'fit in' to their socio-cultural context together with their peers. This leads to kids' identities and spiritualities, being predominantly determined by consumerism/materialism. Consumerism and materialism fragments people as they struggle to keep up with the social demands of their world. Rowling challenges kids within the configuration of the meaning of the text, by suddenly confronting them with a text that contains opposing values to those, to which they are accustomed.

She presents an alternative *sacred* story, one that includes the wounded Christ, shown through the actions of some of the characters, that may present pastoral therapists and youth workers with the unique ability to point out to kids the 'cracks' within their socio-cultural world, and thereafter open a space for them to re-imagine an alternative world that does not include the dominant discourse of consumerism. The path of liberation from

fragmentation for the characters of Harry, Dumbledore and Snape is not an easy one. All three characters have to make some courageous choices, putting others first. However, their choices are rewarded by others' forgiveness (as in the case of Snape), love, loyalty, and friendship (including courageous sacrifices by others to help and protect Harry and Dumbledore).

Rowling has created distinctly authentic characters, in not only Harry, Ron, Hermione, Dumbledore and Snape, but others too, as discussed in Chapter 4. Rowling has the ability to see life, and ask and confront the ultimate questions that adolescents struggle with through kids' eyes. This means that kids can 'step into the shoes' of these characters in their imaginations, to experience the characters' struggles as they make hard choices, find 'Joy' along the way, and liberation from fragmentation. This places them in a unique position to 'step into the shoes' of living a Christ-like existence (lived religion), liberated from the bondage of the vicious and 'hysterical' cycle of consumerism and materialism. Hence, kids are placed in an alternative position to make an alternative choice in an informed manner.

Rowling's series, through her magical and alternative world, allows the reader to experience both the shallow world of materialism and the rich experience that rejects materialism and embraces true fellowship and community. Kids have the opportunity to re-imagine the neglected aspects of their lives as are represented by Harry, Dumbledore, Snape and some of the other characters of the series through the use of the narrative discourse. Values such as love, fellowship and community that have been overshadowed by consumerism and materialism can now be thickened with the narrative approach, to become an alternative way of conducting their lives. This also allows for the person to be liberated from the fragmentation and confusion in identity caused by consumerism/materialism; the ultimate gift of this fantasy lies in giving the individual the gift of understanding that

the need for fellowship and community is far more valuable and full of grace than any material possession.

Fantasy narratives confront 'ultimate' questions, showing the reader that there can be many responses to the latter, and these do not have to be the ones that others want to hear, but rather the choice to do what is right for oneself. Fantasy narratives of alternative worlds allow the reader to go beyond their own shallow 'reality' and to gain access to other ways of living their lives. Rowling fantastically etches, in the reader's imagination, the actions of liberation, transformation and redemption as choices that the reader can then choose to make theirs. These actions are possible for all people; it is a matter of having the courage to choose to take an alternative path. Fantasy, therefore, creates hope, which tells the reader that change is not magical, but an attainable choice.

This alternative path entails for the person to stand wounded in front of a wounded Christ within a wounded community, ready to rebuild their community and themselves through grace, love and fellowship. These wounds are often painful and filled with sorrow and this becomes part of the reading-experience of fantasy; the ability to experience so much grief, sorrow and liberation through the actions of the characters may give the reader the courage to forgo the search of maintaining or gaining a 'cool' status and to follow the path of 'true' fellowship. This wounded community will be ready to expose the 'cracks' within their lives; such as, for example, accepting the dehumanizing effects of consumerism and using the 'cracks' as space openers to start a new life filled with grace. This could well be a community of a few friends (like Harry, Ron and Hermione) that make the choice to live according to Christ-like values (lived religion) liberated from the need to please their consumerist and materialistic socio-cultural world.

## Chapter 6

### Concluding thoughts and the way forward with *Harry Potter*

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#### 6.1 Concluding thoughts

The *Harry Potter* series has become a socio-cultural phenomenon that has had, and continues to have, a significant impact on kids' lives. For some this has been over an extended period as they "journeyed" with the characters over sixteen years. Consequently, for many kids the series, through the Gospels (Christ discourse), has directly and indirectly affected their identities and spiritualities. As pointed out in earlier chapters, Practical theology pursues the goal of reacting to shifts that have direct implications on how people's lives are lived out daily in response to their socio-cultural world. One such shift is the way in which people are now seeking ultimate answers from alternative and innovative places such as for example, the *Harry Potter* series. While people may not feel drawn to or even have any awareness of the Church or the Gospels in a secularized Western society, this does not imply that people have stopped being spiritual/religious/Christian or that they have ceased asking, and seeking answers to, the ultimate questions.

From the perspective of a lived theology, the understanding of how people apply and practice the *sacred* (especially, for this thesis, from a Christian perspective) outside the Church and the Gospels is essential. Practical theology seeks to understand how people live out their religious/*sacred* practices in a meaningful way on a daily basis, no matter how small the gesture. It seeks to know if people apply their values of the Gospels every day as well as seeking to understand how these values (people's practices, actions towards others in their society and their personal *sacred*

experiences that might affect their identity and spirituality) may affect practical theology.

The magic of the fantasy in the *Harry Potter* series is not in its wizards and witches that possess the magical abilities of being able to alter situations, or make items appear and disappear by casting spells with their wands. Rather, this magic lies in its ability to allow the reader to see their world/ 'reality' from a different perspective. The series illustrates that there are more ways to live than those dictated by the dominant discourses of a person's socio-cultural world.

Rowling, through the fantastic alternative wizarding world that she has created, reminds readers, not to take things at face value, but to question the discourses that shape their 'realities' and that ultimately impact who they are (in terms of both identity and spirituality), through the *sacred* story that underlies dominant discourses. An example of this is the way in which Mr. Dursley perceives and talks about Harry and other wizards as 'freaks', and Hogwarts as that 'freak school'. Yet, because the reader is exposed to the wizarding world, they see a selfless, loving community that acts out the values of Christ on a daily basis. On the other hand, the reader also experiences and is exposed to the Dursleys, and sees how selfishly many people live their lives, choosing to follow the consumerist and materialistic values of the *sacred* story of the consumerist discourse.

The 'big Other' of the Consumerist discourse places a great burden on people to keep up with, or face up to not belonging to, their socio-cultural world. Most people do not want to be considered as outcasts, so they keep trying to live up to the expectations of their peers. Therefore, when a fantasy, with values alternate to the dominant discourse, makes such an impression on kids, as the *Harry Potter* series does, it is important to

question what kind of transformational impact it may have had, or may be having, on kids' identities and spiritualities.

## 6.2 The research question

The focus of this study was to answer the following **research question**:

**What is the possibility for kids' to transform their identities and to thus develop alternative spiritualities to the dominant identities that they have developed within a Western capitalist world, through the lived theology experienced by the reader in the *Harry Potter* series?**

### 6.2.2. A summary of how the chapters went about answering the research question

#### •*Harry Potter* as lived theology

To answer this question; firstly, Chapter 1, argued that the *Harry Potter* series is lived theology, explaining that the characteristics of the latter are transformation, transcendence and normativity. These stem from sources other than institutional religion or the Gospels, but consist of and express values of the Gospels (Christ discourse). Some people live out these values every day on some level. and therefore, live out religion daily from values that they have incorporated into their lives from sources such as fantasy.

The *Harry Potter* series is an expression of lived religion existing outside of the Church and Gospels. The narrative of the series, threaded with glimpses of the ethos of the Christ discourse, is therefore in line with the



normative values of the Gospels. Beyond the normative, and of the essence as regards lived theology, the Christ discourse has been woven into the alternative *sacred* story allowing the reader to glimpse (even momentarily) what it could be like to choose to transform her/his values and actions. This may lead her or him to experience transcendence on some level and inspire them to apply some of these values and actions towards another person in their 'reality'. Through choosing to live according to the Gospel values, kids are then living out religion, even though they may not call it religion, or be aware that these actions are Christ-like.

Narrative, and in particular fantasy narrative, puts kids in a situation where they are asked to question their socio-cultural context and the values within this context. As the series is a phenomenon that has made a huge impact on kids, it is possible that some kids now live according to the Christian ethos, rejecting the dehumanizing effects of consumerism and materialism. In other words, although people seek spirituality outside of organized religion, this does not mean that they do not establish answers to their ultimate questions outside of the four Gospels, but rather that they find the Gospel message more accessible in places that are more creative, such as the arts.

#### •Narrative, identity and spirituality

Secondly, it was argued that the *sacred* plays a vital role in the social construction of people's identities, and thus their spiritualities. In Chapter 2, the researcher argued that people dwell in the House of Being (Heidegger 1971: 130), which is articulated in the Fourfold, unfolding itself as earth, sky, gods and mortals. The elements of the Fourfold cannot exist without one another. Therefore, people have an instinctive need for the 'god'/divine aspect of the Fourfold, seeking this aspect in

their socio-cultural context to help them understand the ultimate meanings of life. The *sacred* stories that make up the 'god'/divine aspect of the Fourfold assist human beings to answer the ultimate identity questions of: Who am I? Why am I here? How did I get here? Where am I going? To answer these questions, they respond by constructing *sacred* stories using myth and symbols. Narrative, therefore, is vital in a person's life.

Stories (the stories our parents tell us, the stories from our cultures, fairy tales, and our parents' and grandparents' personal experiences) teach people about their socio-cultural context and how they initially fit into that society. Once a kid reaches their teens, they generally want to break away from their parents' social context and be part of youth culture. This leads them to want to impress their peers and often translates into needing all the latest desired items (material goods) for them to 'fit into' their social context. Because one of the influential *sacred* stories of Western society is consumerism/materialism, these younger people also try to use material objects to answer the said ultimate questions that make up their identity and spirituality within that discourse. This corrupts the 'god' aspect of the Fourfold, The *sacred* story of Western consumerism and materialism is in total opposition to the *sacred* alternative story of the *Harry Potter* wizarding world, which places far more value on things that cannot be bought, such as love, friendship and community.

- **Lived theology seen through the lens of the fantasy in *Harry Potter***

Thirdly, Chapter 4 indicated, that the *Harry Potter* series offers an alternative lived religion, outside of the Church and Gospels, by providing glimpses of the Christ discourse. The *Harry Potter* series

exposes kids to alternative identities and spiritualities (through the glimpses the characters give the reader of the said discourse) which oppose the dominant *sacred* story of Western consumerism and materialism. *Harry Potter* could become part of the reader's 'prejudgment' tools and part of her/his pre-figurations in later life. The true magic of fantasy has nothing to do with wands and spells; rather in fantasy novels it has the ability to open a space in the reader's imagination to re-imagine her/himself liberated and re-humanized to go beyond the dominant discourse of their 'Primary World' and live a life in fellowship (lived religion). This space created in the imagination of kids also has the ability to 'leak' into the readers' 'Primary World', allowing the latter to transform their behaviour into that of the protagonists. Fantasy gives the reader hope that 'Joy' can be glimpsed in fellowship, no matter how terrible things may be at a particular moment in time. As with some fantasies (and this includes the fantasies of Tolkien and Lewis), Rowling wants to make the reader aware of a particular social problem and then give him or her alternatives by which to live. Rowling, therefore, offers the reader two *sacred* stories. In the 'Muggle' world the reader is given one of the *sacred* stories present in their own 'Primary World', the *sacred* story of consumerism which causes a person to become fragmented, leading to confusion of identity and, therefore, of spirituality.

Rowling awakens the reader to how many social and personal problems may be linked directly to the Western *sacred* story. Through characters such as the Dursleys, in the 'Muggle' world, and the Malfoys in the wizarding world, she emphasizes the selfish aspect of slavishly following the 'big Other'. In the wizarding world, along with the consumerist *sacred* story, Rowling conveys an alternative *sacred* story, one which is also present in the reader's 'Primary World', but which has been overshadowed by consumerism and materialism in the 'Primary World'.

For those who know the story well, it is a reminder of the Christ discourse without the ‘frills’: a man once lived who was very unpopular within his socio-cultural world, as he chose to help the undesirable and downtrodden in his society, without concern for his own popularity. Rowling subtly weaves this story into her narrative, which becomes a reminder of the Christ discourse. Christ took on human sin, was crucified and resurrected free of it; the reader may glimpse these features in the narrative, through the various characters’ actions towards one another. Rowling’s alternative *sacred* story gives glimpses of the Christ discourse, which directly opposes the value placed on the consumerist discourse in Western society.

Rowling has created both worlds in such a realistic manner that kids are easily able to identify with the characters in both worlds. Rowling’s creative skills are so powerful that the reader may readily imagine a society of wizards living in hiding, parallel to our ‘Muggle’ society. Harry, Ron and Hermione hold to very strong values when it comes to friendship and responsibility towards their friends. Rowling pits these alternative values against Western consumerism and materialism. Unlike many Western kids who place great emphasis on material things, the characters of Harry, Ron and Hermione emphasize friendship. Rowling makes fellowship and the value of family and community the most powerful theme in the series through love, sacrifice and the courage it takes to stick to one’s values even though they fly in the face of those held by many who rather value social status. Therefore, the *Harry Potter* series is a fantasy narrative that confronts the reader and puts him or her in a position to examine the dehumanizing effects of Western consumerism/materialism. This confrontation of consumerism also serves to remind the reader to continuously question the dominant discourses of their social context and the values by which they choose to live. Rowling furthermore reminds the reader that they have the

choice to transform their lives and not follow the dominant sacred story of consumerism and materialism.

- **Kids' identity and spiritual choices through glimpsing the wounded Christ of the lived theology of *Harry Potter***

Lastly, the researcher demonstrated how, using the *Harry Potter* narrative, with its many themes (love, fellowship and the like) that have an impact on the development of identity and spirituality, offers working pastors and youth workers the opportunity to communicate with kids within their own social context. These are now in a better position to help kids, especially adolescents, to re-imagine alternative stories for their lives that liberate them from the fragmented and dehumanizing discourse of consumerism and materialism. Pastors are continuously looking for ways to help people express their problems and thereafter to help them find answers and ways to solve these problems (Gerkin 1997:125). The *Harry Potter* series offers another way to approach narrative therapy and to live out a life in Christ (lived theology). With characters such as Harry, Dumbledore, Snape and many others acting out of love, the reader may glimpse, and even fleetingly experience, 'Joy' (Christ). These characters show kids that fellowship and love are far more valuable than any desirable and expensive possession. They are aspects of community or friendship that cannot be bought. Rowling places great emphasis on gaining personal values that have nothing to do with money or social status. This makes the series a much needed resource in Western society where the dominant discourse of consumerism and materialism has bound people to a vicious cycle that is often difficult for many people, both young and old, to put into perspective.

Rowling's characters live theology by crucifying consumerism and resurrecting a community that revolves around love of others, never tempted by status or material gain. These characters live out their Christ-like values each day, without fail. The members of this community of wizards have been wounded in many ways, some physically, others also emotionally (representing a wounded Christ within a wounded community, according to Meylahn (2010: 9)).

At the end of the series, they stand before each other a wounded community, ready to be healed through grace. This community of wizards gives us glimpses of choosing to live a life in Christ, over choosing a life of greed and power: these wizards deconstruct the need to please the 'big Other' and create a space out of the shadows to live a life liberated from consumerism and materialism, inviting Christ's presence in their community. These wizards are transformed and are 're-born' as a new community filled with grace. Rowling is very clear that consumerist behaviour may lead people to behave in a dehumanized selfish manner. Those that choose to live by the values of the consumerist discourse do not only do others an injustice by acting selfishly towards them, but also themselves as they cut themselves off from community, choosing themselves above others. Those that live according to the Christ discourse, in a community of fellowship, are more likely to act selflessly in order to protect those they care for, and are in turn embraced by their community for their actions.

### **6.3 The way forward with *Harry Potter* and looking for lived theology in virtual reality**

This study did not consider the movies, website and gaming of the *Harry Potter* series. The *Pottermore*<sup>39</sup> website needs to be paid attention to,

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<sup>39</sup> <http://www.pottermore.com>

as the followers of the books now use this website on a regular basis. This is another shift in people's socio-cultural world involving the Gospel discourse from a source outside the Church and Bible.

Thirteen years after the first *Harry Potter* book was published in 1997, Rowling created *Pottermore*, a website of the *Harry Potter*<sup>40</sup> world that includes 'You', the reader, in the story: as Rowling points out, the reader's imagination is a crucial tool to the story. 'You', the reader, become a part of the wizarding world by creating an account and being given a username. The Sorting Hat also places 'You' into a Hogwarts House. 'You', the reader, can go to Diagon Alley and buy school supplies, most importantly a wand, learn how to cast spells, brew potions and even duel with other on-line users. Rowling states that this is a safe place for young and old to enjoy and participate in their much-loved stories. Therefore, she has created a website where the individual is able to feel like a wizard, and as a wizard, the individual is now part of the wizarding community.

In June 2012 Rowling, in conjunction with Sony, released *Wonderbooks: Book of Spells*<sup>41</sup>, using 'augmented reality'<sup>42</sup>: 'a live, direct or indirect, view of a physical, real-world environment whose elements are *augmented* by computer-generated sensory input such as sound, video, graphics or GPS data.'<sup>43</sup> The book in essence 'comes to life', with dragons and fire emerging from the book. In other words, the reader comes very close to what it would 'actually be like' to be able really to cast spells.

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<sup>40</sup> <http://www.pottermore.com>

<sup>41</sup> [http://www.jkrowling.com/en\\_GB/#/timeline/wonderbook-book-of-spells/](http://www.jkrowling.com/en_GB/#/timeline/wonderbook-book-of-spells/)

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/news/jk-rowling-to-revive-harry-potter-as-sony-launches-book-of-spells-game-for-playstation-3-7817752.html>

<sup>43</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augmented\\_reality](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augmented_reality)

Now that Harry has gone virtual, with many<sup>44</sup> enthusing over how the series in book form has been a wonderful tool to enhance reading in kids and their imagination, many questions come to mind that could be explored in future research:

- Do Rowling's glimpses of the Christ discourse come through to the virtual world or do they remain in the book? Even if the values of good and evil are very clear in virtual reality, they would not necessarily constitute Christ-like values.
- If there is a spiritual aspect to the *Harry Potter* virtual world, is it a more generic spirituality?
- How would a virtual *Harry Potter* affect kids' formation of their identity and spirituality?
- In what way would the virtual world be experienced in a different manner to the books?
- What of living in a virtual community and then perhaps not being able to live in a 'Primary Reality'?
- Is the virtual community enough to develop a life in Christ?
- Many studies have been carried out which are critical of gaming and its negative effect on kids. Where do these results leave this type of gaming?

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<sup>44</sup> Examples: <http://www.commonsensemedia.org/website-reviews/pottermore>,  
<http://collider.com/pottermore-review/>



The researcher would need to become a gamer/wizard in *Pottermore*, to explore the world that Rowling has brought to life on the website. Then a blog could be created where the researcher would be able to discuss with other 'wizards' how and why they belong to this community of wizards.

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