

Ask a Priest!
August 30, 2021

Question: Dear Father, this is a question concerning the issue of watching and being entertained by content that have sin in it. I have been wondering whether it is a sin or not if I'm being entertained by movies, books, generally any content that promotes a worldly view, portraying characters committing murder, adultery, ignorance, and all kinds of sins in a good light? Because they are the main character I tend to root for them. Is delving into and dwelling in the world of magic, fantasies and daydreaming if I could live in that world... a sin? I have sympathized with a lot of characters that committed lots of sins and have a worldly view in the movies I watched, I sometimes even let it convinced me into imagining myself doing the same things because these things are portrayed as right and cool in the movies. It is only now that I think this is bad. Do I have to confess these facts? What should I do? I know this is long but please help me. Thank you so much!!
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A. Is it a sin or not if I'm being entertained by movies, books, etc. ... portraying characters committing sins in a good light?

Sin describes intentional actions, as well as thoughts and words.

There is such a thing as *desensitizing* oneself or others to evil or to sin—by seeing or hearing it over and over again. If we allow certain media to do that, then we are at fault for the sin or evil that can, inevitably, start flowing out of our own minds, hearts, or even words or actions—because of what we've exposed ourselves to. We forfeit our own natural innocence by freely exposing it to sin. It is best to avoid media that promotes or diminishes one's natural repugnance for evil, sin, or sinful characters.

I need to recognize what situations or media represent *a near occasion of sin for me*. It is not a remote occasion but a “near” one, meaning once I'm there I almost can't help but to cross the line into thoughts, words, or actions that are sinful: offensive to others, God, or myself. I need to know myself: what are my own moral pitfalls or “vulnerabilities” (meaning places where I am “able-to-be-wounded,” spiritually)?

For instance:

-If listening to offensive language leads me to begin imitating what I hear and using that language myself, it is my own fault for exposing myself—presumably freely or unnecessarily.

-If you struggle in chastity or purity of heart in how you view others, and are aware that a movie uses fashion that is obviously provocative or sexualized, then it would be at best imprudent, at worst intentionally sinful, for you to continue to watch it. You know where that will lead your mind or your action.

That said, today there is content *wrongly* rated as “Adult” or “Mature” content—wrongly rated because, rather than inspire the watcher to be more mature or more humane, it frequently refers to inappropriate, unnecessary and explicitly violent or sexual content. It would more appropriately be rated “I” for Inappropriate. It should be avoided by any person due to gravely explicit nature of that content and the way it can inevitably threaten the innocence of that human heart and lead it to sin. Far from increasing “maturity” or “adulthood”, it tends to desensitize one’s humanity to the pain or suffering portrayed, and achieve the opposite end of a desensitized humanity.

See the articles at the end of this Q&A.

B. Answer: Is delving into and dwelling in the world of magic, fantasies and day-dreaming if I could live in that world a sin?

Cinema, TV, and other media tend to reference magic in ways that are innocent, but at times in other ways that are darker and verging on the demonic.

On the one hand, fantasy could be used to promote the gospel as C.S. Lewis did with *The Chronicles of Narnia* and J.R.R. Tolkien did with *The Lord of the Rings*.

But on the other hand, the Catechism of the Catholic Church # 2116 states: “All forms of divination are to be rejected: recourse to Satan or demons, conjuring up the dead or other practices falsely supposed to ‘unveil’ the future. Consulting horoscopes, astrology, palm reading, interpretation of omens and lots, the phenomena of clairvoyance, and recourse to mediums all conceal a desire for power over time, history, and, in the last analysis, other human beings, as well as a wish to conciliate hidden powers. They contradict the honor, respect, and loving fear that we owe to God alone.” Magic can fall under the category of divination.

C. Answer: Do I have to confess my past thoughts and behaviors that have influenced me because of my past poor choices in viewing media that is inappropriate?

Yes, it is best to confess past transgressions even though you did not know they were sinful at the time they occurred to make your priest and/or spiritual director aware of what types of sins you struggle with now and in the past so that he may give you the best spiritual counseling that you may need *to avoid the near occasion of sin* in the future.

Helpful references:

- From Catholic Sentinel: <https://catholicsentinel.org/Content/Social/Social/Article/Watching-that-movie-reading-that-book-Is-it-bad-for-your-salvation-/-2/-2/38317>
- This is not from a priest, but I think she offers some great reminders when viewing different content. <https://blessedisshe.net/blog/view-media-catholic-lens/>
- From Life Teen: <https://lifeteen.com/blog/discerning-media-watch-matters/>