

Hubble bubble, toil and trouble

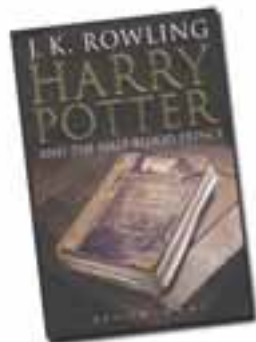
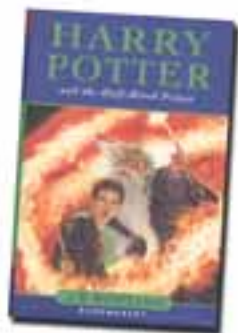
HP6

For many, Harry Potter books are like Christmas – you look forward to it for weeks and in a moment it's gone. But will the 11 million plus people who, by now, have read *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, the sixth and penultimate book in the series, have any lasting troubles?

This relates to the title, which I am sure most recognise as a quote from *Macbeth* – right? Wrong! It is a classic misquote of 'Double double, toil and trouble'. However, it does underline the need to check our facts.

For instance, there is no evidence that JK Rowling is a member of any coven and wants to subvert all our children into witchcraft. Such a claim is slanderous. It is also not true that most who read the Potter books are demonised. However, I would assert that to say there is no danger whatsoever with these books, is also a false statement.

Am I saying we should not read the books? That is for each family or school to decide. Some, like Holt Primary School, in Skellingthorpe, Lincolnshire,



abandoned plans for a Harry Potter Day to commemorate the latest book release because of parent pressure; others will not be so worried. However, whatever decision we arrive at, it is important we make it based on facts that are true.

Two sides

There are two sides to this issue, which leads us back to the 'double' in our title and certainly to the 'trouble'. This latest book has been hailed as a success by Chancellor Gordon Brown who is reported to have said: 'JK Rowling has done more for literacy around the world than any single human being.'

However, there are also some notable critics, such as Pope Benedict XVI, who expressed concerns in a letter to Roman Catholic sociologist Gabriele Kuby: 'It is good that you are throwing light on Harry Potter, because these are subtle seductions that work imperceptibly and, because of that, deeply, and erode Christianity in the soul before it can even grow properly.'

We can easily be drawn into the argument of who is right, but the answer is probably both, because they are arguing from different perspectives.

As far as success is concerned, the facts speak for themselves. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, dealing with Harry's sixth year at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, has broken the record for the number of pre-ordered books (a record held by the fifth book in the series: *Harry Potter and the*

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Order of the Phoenix). Around 2 million copies were sold in Britain on its first day of release. Initial reactions appear to show that most feel this is better than previous books. *The Telegraph online* comments: 'The consensus was that the latest offering from Rowling is a vast improvement on the two preceding books. The overall tone is darker and more mature: Harry Potter is now 16 and preparing for adulthood.'

The Pope, however, was not seeking to deal with success but a more important issue – the spiritual implications for the lives of avid fans. This is the aspect that all Christians should be concerned about.

The plot thickens

Harry is loaned an old text book by his new potions teacher. The dog-eared tome has been heavily-annotated with experimental magical incantations and handy hints for potion-making by a mysterious pupil known as 'The Half-Blood Prince'. However, this causes problems for Hermione and Harry, not only because he is now better than her at potions, but because his newfound success is entirely down to 'The Half-Blood Prince'. In short, Hermione resents the fact that Harry is cheating... and getting away with it.

The potion book also opens a door into a world of Dark Magic, enabling Harry to cast spells which are exotic, cruel and potentially lethal. Towards the end of the book the true identity of the Prince is revealed after he has killed ... (don't worry, I will not reveal that here!).

On a lighter note, many of the young teenagers in the book, including Ron, Harry, Hermione and Ron's sister Ginny, are involved in various love matches. In consequence there is plenty of snogging, jealousy and teenage angst.

At the beginning of the series (in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*) we read that Harry's parents were murdered by Voldemort as they attempted to protect Harry. But, when Voldemort turned the 'killer' curse on Harry, it rebounded, ripping Voldemort from his body – barely alive, he fled.

Now, in volume six, we learn that Harry ('the boy who lived') is now being feted as 'The Chosen One'

Harry Potter is now 16 and preparing for adulthood



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destined to destroy the evil wizard Lord Voldemort (He-Who-Shall-Not-Be-Named), whose background is also developed in some detail. Apparently, Voldemort committed multiple, pre-meditated, cold-blooded murders in a calculated bid to split his own soul into seven parts so he could place each within a 'Horcrux' in the hope of attaining immortality.

The plot of the final book has been set up for a classic showdown, as Harry attempts to find and destroy each Horcrux, thus triumphing over Voldemort once and for all – helped, of course, by his trusted companions: Ron and Hermione.

Witchcraft and evil

These books are so popular that it seems churlish to criticise them. However, just like the 'Smoking Kills' warning on the packet of cigarettes, we want to put up a sign that says, 'In some cases these books can be dangerous'. We should not bury our heads in the sand and ignore the possible dangers. A response to our criticism of this series is often, 'But they are only books – get a life!' It is quite possible that nine out of ten readers will not be affected, but if just one in ten is harmed does that make them okay?

In Harry Potter the battle is between two forms of the same evil

The stories are not true, but anyone longing for the reality of such power would certainly not investigate the source in their local church. If a Sunday school teacher encouraged their children to study witchcraft, I would hope they would soon be reprimanded. But isn't that what is happening? The Harry Potter books are all about witchcraft, pure and simple.

They also contain pagan philosophy and the story line often has a worldview opposite to the Bible. One example is the continual involvement of dead people in the world of the living. In *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, dead bodies ('Inferi') are given some form of animation and attack Harry.

Whereas these books are not meant to be a spiritual treatise, they do deal with spiritual areas such as the supernatural and death. It seems to me, therefore, that any Christian who holds the way these themes are handled to the light of Scripture, must become concerned. We surely cannot be comfortable with the portrayal of the supernatural only affecting us in this life, and that death is the end of everything. This is not a helpful picture for the reader.

Only one source of power

These books simply state that power is there but no source is ever really discussed. I wonder what conclusions readers might draw from this. In *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, Harry was told that there is no good and evil, only power. We are told that the wands of the 'good' wizard Harry and the 'bad' wizard Voldemort both come from the same source – one source of power that can be manipulated either for 'good' or for 'evil'.

This leads to the position at the end of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* where, as one reviewer put it, 'the book leaves us in the classic good versus evil battle'. That is not true. In Harry Potter the battle is between two forms of the same evil. This does not square up with evangelical biblical truth but is more akin to Eastern philosophy, prevalent in the occult.

I feel that two other 'small' issues need to be taken into consideration with *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* – violence and swearing. Whereas the violence may not be 'too bad' when compared with some adult books, we should not lose sight of the fact that this book was written for children. I very much doubt that as and when the film of the book is released it will receive a family viewing certificate. Added to this, we are told that Harry swears (p388, p429) and blasphemes (p425). In fact, we discover that Hogwarts' pupils are 'still allowed to swear loudly' in Herbology lessons if, for example, they are suddenly attacked by a magical plant (p205). Surely this is not something that Muggle schools would want their pupils to make a habit of... is it?!

Conclusions

Potter books are defended with the argument that if we do away with Harry, we would also have to lose Narnia, Middle Earth, Wonderland and Never Never Land. I do not agree. Peter Pan and Alice do not teach witchcraft. Books by CS Lewis and JRR Tolkien deal with good overcoming evil but, as we have seen, the Potter books do not. In conclusion, I would like to make three points:

- We need to weigh all the evidence carefully and decide what is right for me, my family and my school. As Christians, however, we ought to take into account the overall subject of the books. If we believe the Bible teaches that witchcraft is wrong then this should have a clear bearing on our decision to read – or to allow others to read – *Harry Potter*.
- It is important that we do not feed on a diet of totally 'occult input'. Let us not forget that Christians need good spiritual and moral input too. There may be some moral input from this series but little would clearly come through from

... don't let your people practice divination or look for omens or use spells or charms... The Lord your God hates people who do these disgusting things...

DEUTERONOMY 18:10-13 (GOOD NEWS BIBLE)

Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince. Jealousy, hatred and revenge appear to be the uppermost themes.

- Whatever our final reactions are, as Christians, and especially as Christians who interact with children, the one thing we cannot do is ignore it. Searching the internet you will find articles by Christians for and against Harry Potter. But you should not rely on what is said here (or in any other articles); you need to know what *you* think, and then be able to communicate your clear reasoning to anyone who asks. Please don't ignore these books. Instead, hold them up to the light of Scripture and 'toil' a little in your research and thinking, so that there is no 'trouble'.

■ Doug Harris

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