

## Dear Editor

I found Doug Harris' *Hubble bubble, toil and trouble* article about the sixth Harry Potter book in the last issue of this magazine (*ACT Now*, Autumn 2005) rather disappointing.

Much of Mr Harris' article could have been written about any of the six books, but when he specifically critiques *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* he is selective in his use of evidence. There is, of course, a well-rehearsed argument about all the books in terms of witchcraft and its dangers, and many Christians will have formed their opinions long ago. But not all Christians object to *Harry Potter*. Whilst some Christians warn of the dangers of trivialising the occult, others are pleased that the books deal with the real struggle between good and evil. Mr Harris denies the latter point, stating that 'the battle is between two forms of the same evil'.

Yet, in the *Harry Potter* universe, the evil Voldemort can be overcome, not by force but by love. This was an earlier theme (it was his mother's love which saved Harry when he was a baby), and it recurs explicitly in the sixth book: 'You have a power that Voldemort has never had,' says Dumbledore. 'I know,' says Harry, 'I can love.' Dumbledore goes on to say to Harry: '...given everything that has happened to you [your ability to love] is a great and remarkable thing.'

Love is then described as 'power the Dark Lord knows not.' In two critical pages (476–477), love is shown to be the only way to overcome evil. Back in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, the third book in the series, we learn that the ability to forgive is crucial. Yet Mr Harris mentions none of this.

Instead, he homes in on the only two examples of swearing in the book – even though no swear words actually appear in the text (on page 388 it



says: 'Swearing angrily, Harry spun round...' and on page 429 it says simply: 'Harry swore'), and one example of blaspheming (on page 425 Harry says: 'God, I've been stupid') – not good, certainly, but hardly the worst language children are ever likely to come across! Why focus on these three examples? Why not comment on how refreshing it is to find a work of children's fiction about teenagers that boasts over 600 pages of non-swearing, non-blaspheming text! If Mr Harris is *really* concerned about *really* offensive language in children's books, he would do well to rile against those authors worthy of such criticism – rather than attacking JK Rowling so unfairly.

If Christians have reservations about the *Harry Potter* books, what should they do? Is it better to fight a losing battle against young people reading them, or should we use the opportunity to talk with young people about any reservations we may have from a Christian point of view? Please, let's not be so negative. Instead, let us celebrate what is good about these books and approach the challenges they present much more positively.

Martin Cooper

notes in the post

## Dear Editor

I believe that ACT, ACT Scotland, ACTW and NIACT need to know whether they really are scratching where teachers itch. Our Christian teacher associations need to ask whether they are fulfilling the real and felt needs of Christians working in schools and colleges.

We also need to ask whether *ACT Now* carries the kind of articles that really help the hard-pressed Christian teacher. Does *ACT Now* encourage and inspire the headteacher, head of department or newly qualified teacher who is looking for new ideas, or is struggling with stress? *ACT Now* has certainly helped me over the years. But, has this magazine helped anyone else I wonder?

Likewise, earlier in my career, I benefited from weekend courses on leading assemblies and teaching RE held at ACT's residential conference centre, Stapleford House. I am eternally grateful for the professional Christian comment I received. I am sure that today there is as much need for this kind of ministry as there was when Stapleford House was at its zenith back in the early 1990s. Hence, I am delighted to hear that ACT has launched a brand new programme of local, Saturday events designed to bring this kind of input to a new generation of teachers.

David Edgington