

Editorial

The beginning of a new year is always an appropriate time to reevaluate objectives and the way to achieve them. It is therefore a time when change can be expected. However, not all changes are necessarily planned. This issue of the *Grace & Truth Magazine* is a little different from our usual format, but it does not mark a change of approach. We have not dropped the Book Reviews or Kid's Corner permanently, and there is no intention to have longer and fewer articles on a regular basis. The Christmas and Summer holiday season has played its part in disrupting normal routines, and this is one factor behind the differences in this issue.

A number of people have specifically asked me to provide an evaluation of the *Harry Potter* phenomenon. When I began reading the books, analysing the debates and reviewing the Christian critiques, I never expected to write a lengthy article. However, it soon became clear that the problems and possibilities associated with *Potter* are more varied and complex than appeared at first glance. The article only skims the surface of the issues of concern, but since few, if any, who read this magazine will be completely ignorant of who Harry Potter is, it is hoped that many will find it a helpful overview of the debate surrounding the books and films. Some readers will be faced with decisions about allowing Harry Potter across the threshold of their homes and into the hearts and minds of their children, others will want to enter into meaningful and constructive conversations with the youth in their churches or classrooms at school. Hopefully this article will provide a helpful introduction to the issues which have caused such a furore among Christians that national and international media have made them headline news.

It is interesting that a couple of the critiques of *Harry Potter* reviewed in this issue make reference to the book of Daniel and the example given by him of living in the world while not being corrupted by it. The article in the *Youth Supplement* takes up this same theme, though it was actually planned for inclusion in this issue long before the *Harry Potter* article was begun. At a time when many young people are entering a new phase in their lives, some even leaving home to study in other towns, the example of Daniel provides helpful guidance and demonstrates that it is possible to be surrounded by ungodliness and still maintain an upright walk before the Lord and the world.

John Quincy Adams' article brings to an end his lectures on Baptist distinctives. Some practices have changed slightly since he wrote his book, but in essence the issues highlighted by Adams are still the priorities of Reformed Baptists around the world.

May the Lord grant us the strength to live in obedience to His Word and be effective as salt and light in the world throughout 2002.

News

Wellington Reformed Baptist Fellowship

The second half of 2001 was an encouraging one for our little group. We have been having an excellent tape series on "What We Believe" by Stuart Olyott which summarises the 1689 Baptist Confession. We are currently up to looking at Christ as mediator. Another couple have started attending the studies, attracted by the doctrinal teaching of the Olyott series.

Grace Theological College lectures are teleconferenced from Auckland on Wednesday nights. Andrew Young has been doing a valuable series on "Preaching and Teaching".

Chris continues to be involved in the Wellington Christian Apologetics Society, including maintaining the website (<http://www.christian-apologetics.org>). He has also become involved in a small NZ group called Truthwatch (<http://www.truthwatch.info>) which is concerned to promote local church reformation and a return to the centrality of the Word

Our first mini-conference featuring Erroll Hulse on "Past & Present" on Thursday 1st November consisted of two sessions: 'Learning from Baptist History' and 'How to be Biblical and Contemporary' (the latter with an emphasis on worship). About 25 people were present

Our first morning mini-service was held amongst ourselves with a message on the Great Commission on Sunday 7 October. The second took advantage of John Leever's (of Marchwiell Reformed Baptist Church, Timaru) being available for Sunday 16 December. He preached on 'Providence' to 10 adults & 6 children.

The start of 2002 has seen us relocate the studies to Sunday afternoons in an attempt to make it easier for people to come along. Already we have been blessed with an extra person regularly coming as a result of

stumbling across the NZ Reformed Baptist Churches website.

Prayer Points:

- Wisdom in promoting the group
- That God would bless our outreach to others
- That God would enable us to rely on Him in all things

Source: Wellington Reformed Baptist Fellowship Newsletter No. 5 - December 2001

Tamaki Reformed Baptist Fellowship, Auckland

Until now the Fellowship has been holding Sunday morning services every two weeks, with 12-14 (from 6 families) regularly attending. On Sunday 27 January weekly services began in response to requests from those in regular attendance. Sunday evening Bible Studies continue to attract up to 14 people, including unbelievers.

The Retirement Home outreach has been an encouragement with 30-45 old people present each month, while the monthly Youth Tea and Bible Study attracts between 12 and 16 youngsters. Recently they have looked at the ways in which we Christians can witness to others, partly, but not exclusively, looking at reaching Muslims.

Just before Christmas 2000 copies of a special Christmas tract were prepared and distributed in the neighbourhood where the fellowship meets. Many people read the tract on the spot when they received it, and an elderly lady phoned who was lonely and wanted to talk about Christ. Personal invitations were extended for people to attend a Christmas service and a special neighbourhood Bible study the Sunday night before Christmas. Three Christian visitors were at the

Sunday morning service and four unconverted neighbourhood contacts came for the evening Bible study. Please pray that people will be drawn to Christ and that the Fellowship will continue to have visitors who will be receptive to the gospel.

A couple of the younger members have worked hard to get a website up and running. This can be viewed at <http://www.tamakirb.org>.

Source: TRBF Newsletter - January 2002

Grace Baptist Mission in Peru

The latest news from Grace Baptist Mission indicates that there has been an improvement in the situation in Peru. Geoff Gobbet, the president of GBM, spent some time with the missionary team in Peru in early December and feedback from the missionaries has been very positive.

There has been further encouragement in the work. The missionaries have been involved in building 28 houses in the aftermath of the earthquake, and this has brought more opportunities for evangelism. Trevor Charlton reports: "People are not only grateful and therefore willing to listen, but also because of the earthquake people have been

unsettled and realise that there's more to life than just houses and security, and therefore have been willing to listen in a more open way than if we had just spoken to them directly... We're building a little meeting place [in the village] and hope to make that a base for evangelism."

Source: GBM Hot News cassette, January 2002

Update on the Burnhams

Some of our readers may have seen a recent news item on TV One News in which Martin and Gracia Burnham were mentioned. This was in connection with the deployment of US troops to the Philippines to help the government there in the fight against the Abu Sayyaf Group who hold the Burnhams captive. There has been no further news regarding the Burnhams, and New Tribes Mission is concerned that they may get caught up in the fighting as Philippine troops clash with Abu Sayyaf fighters. Apparently the American troops are there in training and support roles and should not be involved in active combat.

*Source: New Tribes Mission web site
<http://www.ntm.org>*

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Harry Potter: friend or foe?

DAFYDD HUGHES

With the recent release of the movie, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, interest has been rekindled in what has become known as Pottermania. Not that the fictional teenage hero has ever been far from public view since all the hype surrounding the publication, in July 2000, of the fourth book in a projected series of seven. *Potter* books and associated paraphernalia (toys, dolls, lollies, computer games, note-books, etc., and now the first movie) have been on constant display in shops around the country, as well as the subject of a steady stream of reviews and advertising. Yet alongside all the favourable publicity in the general media, there have been significant attacks on *Potter* from various Christian groups and individuals. Indeed, in certain circles there seems to be something of a crusade against the *Potter* phenomenon.

It is regrettable that some Christians who perceive *Harry Potter* as a threat have not been careful to research the facts in their zeal to quash his popularity and influence. For example, an e-mail has been circulating with many quotations regarding the anti-Christian content of the *Harry Potter* books. The e-mail claimed that in an interview with the *Times* newspaper, J. K. Rowling, the author of the *Potter* books, had herself stated, "These books guide children to an understanding that the weak, idiotic Son Of God is a living hoax..."¹ Months after I first received the e-mail, *Challenge Weekly* acknowledged that it was a hoax which originated on "a satirical website called The Onion, well-known for its funny, inventive satire, as well as its vulgar and blasphemous stories."² Careless quoting of unverified statements to support a Christian crusade against *Harry Potter* has done the church a disservice. Some Christians have been circulating this erroneous message with a speed and fervency matched only by the apathy many Christians have when it comes to sharing the true message of the Gospel. If we want the world to pay even the slightest attention to what we have to say, then we cannot afford to quote such sources. We need to present the facts, and not be so ready to repeat statements that happen to support our position even though we do not know their origin or the validity of their claims.

This is a call for honest evaluation and reasonable response. Christian parents, educators and church workers should all be concerned for the spiritual safety of those in their care or influence. It is clear, therefore, that when a phenomenon like *Harry Potter* appears on the scene, two extremes must be avoided: first, the knee-jerk reaction, typical in some Christian circles, of immediately outlawing any non-Christian

material with a hint of magic without first evaluating its contents; and second, the apathetic response so common among other Christians who can't be bothered to weigh evidence and make decisions which might require some effort of thought and application.

Jay Adam's book, *A Call to Discernment*, focuses on the need for spiritual discernment among Christians. Though his emphasis is upon discerning between truth and error within the church, his comments also highlight the need for discernment in the way we receive and respond to things from outside the church. In his conclusion he writes, "Your children and mine will be affected by what you, and others like you, do. Will you become part of the solution rather than remain a part of the problem? Will you do all you can to become more discerning and to encourage your Christian friends and your family to do the same?"³

Christians need to approach the *Harry Potter* phenomenon with discernment. They need to be willing to examine the facts and decide upon the best response. They also need to realise and accept that Christians in different circumstances will not necessarily respond in the same way. For example, parents with children attending a state school may well take a very different approach to *Harry Potter* from parents who home-educate their children. Parents with good discernment will evaluate the dangers and formulate a response which will best help their children to deal well with the particular circumstances they face.

Lengthy though it is, this article is not intended as an exhaustive answer to the many questions raised by the *Harry Potter* phenomenon. Rather, I hope to stimulate thought, raise issues for investigation, and provide information on resources that might be helpful to those who are concerned by Pottermania.

Synopsis of the *Harry Potter* books

Virtually everyone in the western world will have heard of Harry Potter. According to the publisher, by the end of October 2001 more than 129 million copies of the books bearing his name had sold world wide.⁴ But before this popularity, several publishers had turned down the opportunity to print *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*.⁵ (No doubt they are kicking themselves as they hear the continuing crash of cash registers and think about the profits that could have been theirs!) Even adventurous Bloomsbury Publishing must have thought they were taking a risk when, in 1996, they agreed to publish the book: the first print run in June 1997 numbered just 500 copies.⁶ But it turned out to be a risk reaping huge financial rewards for both the publisher and the author.⁷

Joanne Kathleen Rowling is a single mother living in Edinburgh with her eight year old daughter, Jessica. She conceived the *Harry Potter* stories in 1990 and, over the next five years, developed the idea for a series of seven books, each covering a year of Harry's life as a student at the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, where, between the ages of eleven and seventeen, he would train to be a wizard.⁸

Four books have been published to date,⁹ while the fifth, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*,¹⁰ is being prepared for publication about the middle of 2002.¹¹ The film version of the first book was released, to loud acclaim, in November 2001, and production has begun on the second movie.¹²

The key area of controversy regarding these books is the place given to magic. Indeed, magic is not incidental to the plot, it is central to it. Hardly a page of the 1427 pages published so far fails to mention magic either directly or indirectly. These books are all about magic - harmless magic (one would hesitate to call any of it 'good', though much of it is creative and amusing) and decidedly evil magic, and everything between the two.

Yet, to be fair to Rowling, we must not jump to the conclusion that she is seeking to seduce people to Satan, as has been claimed.¹³ She herself told *Reader's Digest* journalist, Tim Bouquet, "I don't believe in it [magic] in the way that I describe in my books."¹⁴ Furthermore, reading Rowling's comments in various interviews, the objective person must conclude that, whatever the results of her writings may be, she never intended that people should take the magic seriously, or experiment with the occult after reading her books. CNN records Rowling's response to the concern that her books promote witchcraft: "I absolutely did not start writing these books to encourage a child into witchcraft," she says with an uncomfortable chuckle. "I'm laughing slightly because to me, the idea is absurd.... It is a fantasy world and they understand that completely."¹⁵ Not all agree.

Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone

(Bloomsbury Publishing, 1997; paperback 223 pages, ISBN 0-7475-3274-5)

The first book in the series introduces us to an eleven year old Harry Potter, the central character in the stories, who lives with the revolting Dursley family: his uncle and aunt, and their son, Dudley. Harry is their unwanted ward, being the son of Mrs Dursley's sister who died along with Harry's father when he was just a year old. Harry's parents were murdered by Lord Voldemort, an evil supremacy-seeking wizard who lost much of his power in his attack on the Potters, specifically in his attempt to kill Harry. Since that day Harry has sported a lightning-shaped scar on his forehead, while Voldemort,

all but dead and virtually deserted by his followers, has been trying to make a comeback.

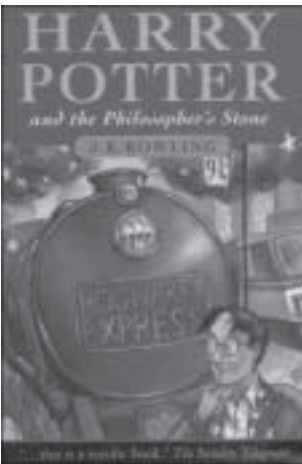
For as long as he can remember, Harry has been told his parents died in a car crash in which he also received his scar. The Dursley's, you see, are Muggles - they have no magical abilities and will not acknowledge that Mrs Dursley's own sister had these powers. Ignorant of his true heritage, Harry receives the surprising news that he has been accepted as a student at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, located somewhere in the north of Britain. To get there Harry must board the Hogwarts Express which leaves from platform 9¾ at King's Cross station, having first bought his wand, textbooks and school uniform from Diagon Alley - a magical shopping mall somewhere in London.

All this is new to Harry. In fact, having been so isolated from the magical world during his ten years with the Dursleys, his fellow students at Hogwarts know more about his fame as the only survivor of Voldemort's vicious attacks than he does. Viewed as a hero, he feels his ignorance more keenly. But he is helped by his newfound friends Ron Weasley and Hermione (pronounced 'Her-my-oh-nee'¹⁶) Granger who are fellow students at Hogwarts, and Hagrid, the half-giant who works as school groundsman.

The reader discovers, along with Harry, the amusing magic of this parallel world, such as the strange multi-flavoured sweets, magical moving portraits, fascinating and fearsome creatures, and, of course, the amazing game of Quidditch - a kind of basketball played on broomsticks - at which Harry excels (and what kid wouldn't want to be able to play it?). But not all is fun and games, and throughout much of the year (and the book), between lessons on potions and other magical arts, Harry and his

cohorts are immersed in solving the mystery of the Philosopher's Stone and the three-headed beast that guards it. In fact, Harry isn't the only one pursuing this prize; Lord Voldemort is also after it, since it produces the Elixir of Life - the key to immortality. Yet Voldemort hasn't counted on Harry's courage and his friends' help. There can be only one winner - but both will be back in the next book!

The film version follows the book closely. In a documentary on the making of the movie, director Chris Columbus said, "Doing this film was all about the integrity of the project. I was really interested in being as faithful [to the book] as possible, because I felt that you're dealing with a... well, it's difficult to use the word 'classic' when you're dealing with a contemporary



novel, but nevertheless I consider it a classic, so I didn't want to come in and change it."¹⁷ However, one viewer of the movie noted that some characters "have been cut down dramatically... [and] they've added slightly more bad language...."¹⁸ The latter point will have been observed by anyone who knows the books and has seen the advertising previews for the film.

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets

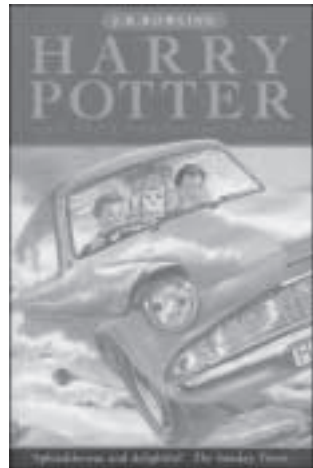
(Bloomsbury Publishing, 1998; paperback 251 pages, ISBN 0-7475-3848-4)

A year spent at Hogwarts has given Harry a whole new perspective on life. Previously he had known only the animosity (at worst) and indifference (at best) of his adoptive family, the Dursleys, living their boring suburban Muggle lives. Now he has experienced the excitement of the magical world, the loyalty of true friends and the exhilaration of defeating dangerous enemies, life at home with the Dursleys over the summer holidays has been anything but pleasant for Harry, as we discover in the opening chapter of this second instalment of the *Potter* saga. Indeed, imprisoned in his bedroom on his twelfth birthday and cut off from his friends, Harry feels his life couldn't get much worse. But rescue comes in the form of a flying car, illegally driven by one of Ron Weasley's brothers.

The intervening time before school recommences is spent in the Weasley home. This being the first occasion Harry has stayed with a wizarding family, the experience is a novel one for him. But the things he sees here are nothing compared to what he'll encounter during his second year at the School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

Strange events are unfolding at Hogwarts; strange, that is, even for this other-worldly place. A sinister and invisible enemy is prowling the corridors, petrifying staff, students, and even the resident cats and ghosts. It has something to do with the legendary 'Chamber of Secrets' and Slytherin, one of the four founders of the School who gave his name to the school house which is home to many of the nastier students. There is also a connection with the twice-defeated but ever persistent Lord Voldemort.

Harry is something of an 'accidental hero': he doesn't ace all his tests and he's no whiz with a wand; the one thing he is a natural at is flying his broomstick.



And when he discovers he has a skill normally associated with the Dark Arts his concern is evident: it is the legacy, apparently, of his first encounter with Voldemort in which he received his distinctive scar. Harry is no super-hero, and his success depends as much on the skill and cooperation of his friends as it does on his own courage and determination.

Hermione and Ron join Harry in his quest to unravel the mystery surrounding the Chamber of Secrets and the Heir of Slytherin, who seems to be turning the school upside-down. And again Harry confronts a manifestation of his arch-enemy, Voldemort, and survives to tell the tale and earn yet more fame to his name.

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban

(Bloomsbury Publishing, 1999; paperback 317 pages, ISBN 0-7475-4629-0)

Azkaban is the maximum security prison of the magical world, located somewhere "in the north of the North Sea."¹⁹ It is guarded, not by fences and electronic surveillance, but by the constant presence of the Dementors - mysterious beings whose very presence drains all happiness from the soul, driving most people mad. Escape from this woeful place is deemed to be impossible, yet a rumour is spreading that someone *has* managed to dodge the Dementors in a bid for freedom.

Meanwhile, Harry has been spending another wretched summer with the Dursleys, where a visiting relative has not made things any easier. The Ministry of Magic does not allow under-age wizards to perform spells outside school, and under threat of expulsion Harry has so far managed to curb his anger at his ill-treatment at home. But things reach a climax with Aunt Marge's visit, and, hardly realising what he's done, Harry causes magical mayhem in the Dursley home. He doesn't hang around to see the outcome, but grabs his wizard paraphernalia, flees the house and catches a ride on the flying Knight Bus in his own bid for freedom.

It appears that the escaped prisoner of Azkaban is headed for Hogwarts. Furthermore, it turns out he was a follower of Voldemort and played a key role in the death of Harry's parents. The conclusion is quickly reached that Harry must be his target. The teenage wizard-in-training finds himself the victim of his own fame, with restrictions preventing him from



participating in eagerly anticipated weekend visits to Hogsmeade - the local village and the only entirely wizarding community in Britain.

But Harry's problems are not confined to the threat from the prisoner. In its wisdom and against the wishes of Professor Dumbledore, the likable headmaster of Hogwarts, the Ministry of Magic has sent Dementors to stand sentry at the school gates and to patrol the perimeter of the grounds. Yet these dubious protectors have an awful effect on Harry, weakening him and causing him to faint. In fact, they come close to bringing about his untimely death during a Quidditch match as their unauthorised presence causes Harry to fall from his broomstick in mid flight. The result of this scare is the acquisition of a skill which will enable Harry to resist the Dementors' weakening influence, and ultimately to save the life of a friend.

While lessons in Potions, Spells, Transfiguration, History of Magic and Defence Against the Dark Arts continue, Harry has added Care of Magical Creatures and Divination as his third year choices. Alongside these, Harry has regular Quidditch practice, takes extra lessons to defend himself against the Dementors, and, helped by Ron's brothers and his invisibility cloak (the only thing he owns which once belonged to his father) makes secret excursions to Hogsmeade, where he joins his friends on their weekend outings.

But the climax of the story is Harry's encounter with the prisoner of Azkaban, the discovery of the true identity of Ron's pet rat, and a terrifying final confrontation with the Dementors. But the real enemy - Voldemort's informer and the traitor of Harry's parents - evades capture. Once again, Harry survives but his success is incomplete.

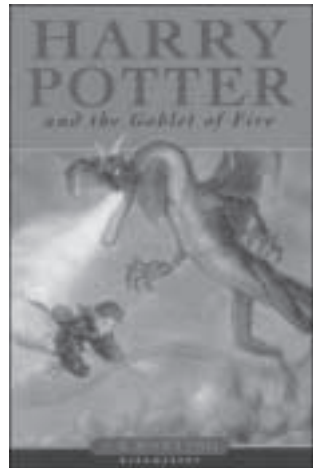
Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire

(Bloomsbury Publishing, 2000; paperback 636 pages, ISBN 0-7475-5099-9)

This is a real tome. At over 600 pages it is the largest book many children will have read; and many *have* read it, enchanted by Harry's exploits and the creative and captivating plot.

Voldemort is on the move. Joined by the ally who had escaped capture by Harry and his friends in the previous book, this evil wizard is making plans for a comeback.

Meanwhile, Harry, who has been home with the Dursleys once again, escapes the monotony of their



Muggle existence to join the Weasleys and Hermione at the Quidditch World Cup Final. A foreboding of dangerous times ahead overwhelms the occasion when the 'Dark Mark' - Lord Voldemort's sign and the call-to-arms for his followers - is seen in the night sky following the match. And as we might expect, Harry and his friends are caught up in the drama from the start.

There will be no Quidditch practice for Harry this year; indeed, there will be no Quidditch at all. But there is something grander to occupy the talk of the school. Hogwarts is to be host to the Triwizard Tournament; an event where a champion from each of three schools competes against the others for the honour of the school and for personal prize-money. Three tasks are set during the year and points awarded for each. The three champions are chosen by the 'Goblet of Fire' from the volunteers of each school who have placed their names in it. This year, however, to the surprise of all, four champions are chosen to compete. Despite not meeting the age-limit, Harry's name has been chosen by the Goblet; and having been chosen, he *must* compete.

For Harry to have been chosen, someone must have entered his name in the Goblet as a competitor for a fourth school. And it becomes clear that whoever has done it means to do him harm. Yet despite ignorance, lack of skill and misplaced pride, Harry succeeds not only in completing the first two tasks, but in finishing tied for first place and a favourite to win the Triwizard Cup.

The third task involves a race through a maze, avoiding dangerous creatures and enchanted traps. At heart, Harry is a generous boy, and twice he stops to help a fellow competitor who faces danger. And it is the repayment of this generosity which brings Harry face to face once again with Voldemort. For the Triwizard Cup has been turned into a Portkey (an object which acts as a magical point of transfer to another place) to the very presence of the Dark Lord.



Rupert Grint, Daniel Radcliffe and Emma Watson who play Ron, Harry and Hermione in the movie *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*.

© 2001 Warner Bros.

At last Voldemort has things going his way, and he uses Harry as the means for strengthening his own life and taking his most significant step towards supremacy in thirteen years. After using Harry to achieve his purposes, Voldemort intends to dispose of him. But an unforeseen twist in the laws of magic provides Harry with the opportunity for escape, and he flees leaving a stunned band of Voldemort's followers in puzzled disarray.

This book closes on a more sombre note than the previous three. We're more than half-way through the seven part saga, but now Voldemort is more powerful than ever and the future looks bleak for Harry Potter. But, "as Hagrid had said, what would come, would come ... and he would have to face it when it did."²⁰

Food for thought

People praise the *Potter* books for reigniting a fast fading interest in reading among children, many of whom have migrated instead to the computer game and TV screen. Others have called on school boards to ban the books from their libraries and classrooms as an evil influence on the young and impressionable.²¹

It is an inescapable fact that the *Harry Potter* books are hugely popular. Why is this so? Careful advertising must surely have had a part to play,²² but can that be the whole story? After all, it's one thing to get someone to buy a book, it's quite another for them to read it beyond the first chapter or two (especially if it has thirty-seven chapters and 636 pages). The answer must have something to do with what's written between the covers.

Rowling acknowledges that "magic has a universal appeal" as she muses on the reasons her books have been so successful in different languages and cultures.²³ In the same article, a deputy head of a primary school puts *Potter's* popularity down to "potions, intrigue, magic and 'what happens next'",²⁴ and the author goes on to explain that Rowling's books "are driven with all the suspense and twists of detective novels."²⁵

Magic is certainly acknowledged as an important element in the popularity of these stories. But is it the magic of the occult or is it the magic of fantasy? Some argue the former while others insist on the latter.²⁶ Rowling herself says, "Most of the magic is made up. Occasionally I will use something that people used to believe was true - for example, the 'Hand of Glory' which Draco gets from Borgin and Burkes in *Chamber of Secrets*."²⁷ With regard to the spells, she says, "The spells are made up. I have met people who assure me, very seriously, that they are trying to do them, and I can assure them, just as seriously, that they don't work."²⁸ Nevertheless, Rowling has done her research, and there are many parallels with what has been believed historically. The

following transcript from a radio interview with Diane Rehm will help to explain Rowling's perspective:

DR: "Is there a certain amount of very sophisticated mythology that you're trying to work in here?"

JKR: "There is, um... I'm not *trying* to work it in, but, if you're writing a book that, I mean... I do do a certain amount of research and folklore is quite important in the books, so where I'm mentioning a creature or a spell that people used to believe genuinely worked (of course it didn't, but that's, you know, it's still a very picturesque and a very comical world in some ways), then I will find out *exactly* what the words were and I will find out *exactly* what the characteristics of that creature or ghost were supposed to be. Umm... but I hope that that appears seamlessly. Children often, *often* ask me how much of the magic is 'real' in the books in the sense that, did *anyone* ever believe in this? I would say - a rough proportion - about a third of the stuff that crops up is stuff that people genuinely used to believe in Britain, two thirds of it though is my invention."

...

DR: "Do you feel yourself drawn in any way to witchcraft?"

JKR: "Not in the slightest... not in the slightest. Children ask me, of course, 'do you believe in magic?' And I have always said 'No I don't.' I believe in different kinds of magic. There's a kind of magic that happens when you pick up a wonderful book, and it lives with you for the rest of your life. That is *my* kind of magic. Umm... there is magic in friendship, and in beauty, and... metaphorical magic, yes. But in the sense that, do I believe that if you draw a funny squiggly shape on the ground and dance around in it something's...? *not* at all, I find the idea frankly comical."²⁹

The magic in the *Potter* books is presented as fantasy and not intended to draw children into the world of the occult. But intentional or otherwise, these books *may* lead some children to delve further into the world of magic, and perhaps even to explore the occult. Perhaps this would be less likely if there were no other influences. However, coupled with all the material on the paranormal that is available today, the possibility must be acknowledged. *Harry Potter* doesn't stand in isolation, but sits on the shelf in the same shops that sell *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and similar material. The British monthly newspaper, *Evangelical Times*, reported that many teenagers were trying to join witches' covens or pursue occult interests, inspired by a range of these materials.³⁰ In a culture swamped by so many influences, no single product can be blamed for an increasing interest in the supernatural, but neither can it be denied that each may contribute to a fascination and experimentation with the occult.

Perhaps part of the attraction of these books for some, and part of the problem for

others, is that though Rowling describes two parallel worlds - the magical and the Muggle - there is so much overlap and intermingling of the two that they can easily become confused. Unlike C. S. Lewis' *Narnia Chronicles*, with which Rowling's books have been favourably compared by some,³¹ Harry doesn't step from one distinct world into another, he occupies both at the same time. Yes, there are 'gateways' from the Muggle London street to the magical Diagon Alley, and from Muggle King's Cross Station onto the magical Platform 9¾, but Harry can perform magic at the Dursley's home as well as in the Hogwarts' classroom (it's illegal, but he can and does do it). Frequently, the Ministry of Magic has to use memory modification spells on Muggles so that they don't remember anything unusual happening after wizards have used magic in their presence. Furthermore, the Muggle world is presented as excessively boring and stupid while the magical is full of excitement.

These books are fiction; they are fantasy. But the Christian must not ignore the fact that the Bible presents magic as real. From the magicians of Egypt who were able to transform their rods into snakes, change water to blood, and bring hoards of frogs upon the land,³² to Simon the Sorcerer who astonished the people with his magical arts³³ and the slave girl in Philippi with her powers of divination,³⁴ all are presented as real people with genuine skills, but none are followers of God: they serve another master. Any encouragement to practise real magic is contrary to Scripture, which condemns it as an abomination to God³⁵ and declares that those who practise it are destined for hell.³⁶ But does the same hold true for the magic of fantasy? Does the condemnation of real magic equate to a prohibition of fictional magic? Certainly there are dangers to be considered: where a proper distinction can be made between fantasy and reality then perhaps magic could be permissible, but where a story makes the practise of magic in the real world a desirable pursuit then even as fiction it has crossed the line of acceptability. Depending on the reader, the *Harry Potter* books could fit either scenario.

A further area of concern is the graphic detail of the descriptions of some of the grosser situations or scenes



of violence, together with the darker elements of evil and enmity, particularly as they are personified in Lord Voldemort. Many readers may find these disturbing - which they are designed to be - and some will conclude that the books are therefore inappropriate. Having said that, even the Bible has some rather graphic scenes of violence and gore.

Many readers believe the books are getting 'darker'. When asked whether this is because Harry is getting older, Rowling stated, "It's really because Voldemort is getting more powerful, but yes, also because Harry is fourteen now. At fourteen, you really do start realising that the world is not a safe and protected place - or not always."³⁷ This being the case, are the books really okay for children of primary school age? When asked, Rowling responded, "I personally feel the books are suitable for people aged 8 years and over. Though my daughter, who is seven, has read them all and not been very frightened - but maybe she's tough, like her mother!"³⁸ As with so much relating to these books, the circumstances and personalities of the children who read them will greatly affect their response.

There is another consideration which the Christian must not ignore when trying to assess the reasons for the popularity of these books and their suitability for their children: it is the way they deal with sinful attitudes and behaviour. Those who believe in the doctrine of Total Depravity realise that human nature is at enmity against God, and that its natural disposition is away from God and His standards. At best, mankind ignores the true God, at worst, he is antagonistic towards Him. Things that promote a right view of God are rarely, if ever, popular with the world. The question therefore arises, Do the *Harry Potter* books simply ignore God, or is something more sinister afoot in these stories? (The question does not imply that 'ignoring God' is itself a minor offence.)

The books certainly ignore God. There is no evidence of a supreme being of any kind in these pages. Yes, there is the battle between good and evil, but neither quality is personified in a supernatural being or even described as a Force (as in *Star Wars* - which presents its own dilemmas for Christians), rather they are presented as relative values manifest in the choices made by people. So, for example, Voldemort is an evil wizard who practises the Dark Arts, while Harry is good and, along with the other students at Hogwarts, learns various defences against these Dark Arts. Good and evil are therefore described as actions performed or as choices made, but there is no supremely good God to serve or worship, nor a sovereign being that superintends the universe.

Do the books teach antagonism towards God? To the extent that they present the world as a place where our own choices intermingling with the choices of others are the sole determinants of our successes or failures quite apart from Providence, then it could

be argued that they do. But that is a rather tenuous argument, and there isn't a more direct assault on the concept of God.

Part of the popularity of these books stems from an engaging, other-worldly storyline coupled with fallible characters to whom we can relate: they share our fears and foibles, but they also ultimately come through in some of the areas we value, particularly friendship and loyalty. The magic aside, these stories describe human nature as it is: no-one is perfect, lies are told and mistakes are made, friendships are sometimes strained, 'good' people die, rule-breaking may go unpunished, and teachers are not always consistent in their treatment of students, 'good' usually overcomes evil (not on every occasion, but the story thus far leads us to believe that ultimately 'good' will triumph over evil), self-sacrifice is often appreciated and courage is applauded. There is also the reality of interdependence here. Even the hero, Harry, needs his friends and teachers if he is to succeed, even to survive. He is no Superman who does everything by himself. Nor is magic presented as the solution to every problem. Courage, unity and love are just as potent, if not more so.

It is questionable, however, whether we should really speak of 'good' and 'evil' in relation to these books. Even the so-called 'good' characters fall far short of biblical morality, and proper consequences often do not follow bad behaviour. The books reflect the behaviour of people as it is in our world, rather than presenting behaviour as it *should* be or the appropriate consequences when it isn't. Christian parents would not want their children to emulate Harry, Ron or even Hermione (though she tends to have the clearest idea of right and wrong out of the three). Too often their attitudes and behaviour are at variance with biblical values and morals, and they present particularly bad role-models for honesty and obedience. Even the adults in these stories are more true-to-life than true-to-the-Word, but that is to be expected from a non-Christian author.

Having said all that, the realness or humanness of the characters does at least present opportunities for discussing the moral battles we face in life, and how we *ought* to act in similar situations. And it is worth bearing in mind that the Scriptures themselves present us with examples of the complexities of the moral choices we are required to make from time to time.³⁹

An evaluation of some Christian critiques

It must be emphasized that this article only skims the surface of the issues being debated. My purpose has not been to analyse every area of concern and provide a clear-cut conclusion on what all Christians should believe and do. Rather, I hope to

demonstrate that there is room for differing responses, and to encouraged parents, educators and Christian workers to use discernment in their assessment of the appropriateness of *Potter* for the children within their influence. (It should go without saying that educators, youth workers, pastors, etc., ought to be careful not to usurp the authority of parents on this controversial subject.)

Here is a brief look at four books⁴⁰ and one internet article which may prove helpful to those who wish to delve further into the debate, and make better-informed choices about the *Harry Potter* books and films.

A Closer Look at Harry Potter by John Houghton

(Kingsway Publications, 2001; paperback 92 pages, ISBN 0-85476-941-2)

This little book is by the author of *The Osuain Tales*, a series of five children's novels written in the style of C. S. Lewis' *Narnia Chronicles*. After a brief introduction to the *Harry Potter* books, Houghton deals with the importance of the imagination and the place of fictional literature in the lives of children. He spends two chapters outlining the various forms of mythical narrative and the place of witches and magic in such writings. A further chapter highlights the postmodern world-view which underlies the *Harry Potter* story.

While Houghton recognises questionable elements in the *Potter* books, he warns against a knee-jerk reaction. His book doesn't advocate an out-right ban; rather, it stresses the importance of discernment, and the final chapter provides suggestions on issues that parents could discuss with their children as they read Rowling's books.



Being short and to the point, this book will be particularly helpful to the parent who hasn't the time to read the longer critiques, but who nevertheless wants to understand some of the basic issues at stake. Be aware, however, that its brevity inevitably means that themes are not explored in depth, and some problem are not touched on at all. Furthermore, Houghton writes from a Charismatic perspective, and some of his comments on the Holy Spirit would not be consistent with a reformed understanding of the Spirit's work. Nevertheless, this should not detract from the usefulness of the book as a whole.

What's a Christian to do with Harry Potter? by Connie Neal

(WaterBrook Press, 2001; paperback 210 pages, ISBN 1-57856-471-9)

Reading this book, it is obvious that careful research has been undertaken in gathering and analysing material from a broad range of people and perspectives.

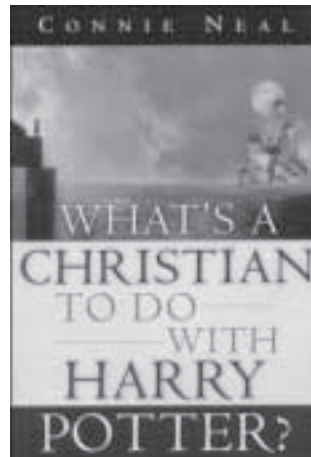
After introducing the *Potter* phenomenon, Connie Neal demonstrates, by means of quotations, the divergence of views among Christians, and suggests that peace can replace quarrelling even among people who hold opposing views on the legitimacy (or otherwise) of *Harry Potter*.

A brief chapter introducing the key characters and terms used in the books is followed by an extremely helpful chapter on the literary classification of the novels, exploring areas of mythology, legend, folklore, fables and fairy tales. How readers' prior assumptions significantly affect their understanding and interpretation of certain elements in the books is also helpfully explained. A further chapter explores themes in the story which appeal to children and meet various needs they commonly feel, explaining, in part, why the books have become so popular.

The fifth chapter asks the question, 'What would Jesus do with Harry Potter?' There is no simplistic answer provided here. Rather, the author argues that these books fall into the category of disputable matters over which Christians may legitimately disagree. She proceeds to apply the principles of Romans 14-15 and 1 Corinthians 8-10 to the *Potter* phenomenon, and shows that for some, reading *Harry Potter* would be a sin, while others have freedom to read them without incurring any guilt.

Another chapter highlights errors Christians need to avoid in their debates and discussions about the *Potter* books, including believing falsehood and building on it, talking like the devil, giving in to sinful nature, judging one another, and accepting and using foolish and stupid arguments. All of these have been evident in articles and e-mails dealing with the *Potter* phenomenon.

Chapter seven addresses the issue of 'Protecting Kids from Real-World Occult'. Earlier in the book, Connie Neal makes a distinction between fictional magic (found in *Harry Potter*, the *Narnia Chronicles*, the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy and many other books) and real-world magic. In this chapter she gives crucial warnings and explanations concerning real occult practices and the correct biblical response. In the following chapter she goes on to show how the story of



Daniel and his three friends in the Old Testament, and the book of Ephesians in the New, provide helpful teaching and illustrations to Christian children on living in this world without imbibing its teaching.

The final three chapters give examples of the way the *Potter* books may be used in teaching Children biblical values and principles, or as a tool for evangelism. Here Neal is at her weakest as she manifests her Arminian theological position, and she also fails to appreciate the extent to which Rowling's values are at variance with the Word. But she does make some good points, and the discerning reader will find useful suggestions.

The author writes on the basis that "Harry Potter is here and he's not going away" (the title of the introduction), and her purpose is to examine how to make the best use of his continued presence. Neal has a tendency to over-simplify or gloss the books' significant problem areas. Nevertheless, she does recognise that these books need to be handled with care, and suggests, by her own family's example, that Christian parents should read them with their children so that issues can be discussed as they arise, rather than allowing children to read the books alone. All in all, this is a useful analysis of the *Potter* books and the debate surrounding them.

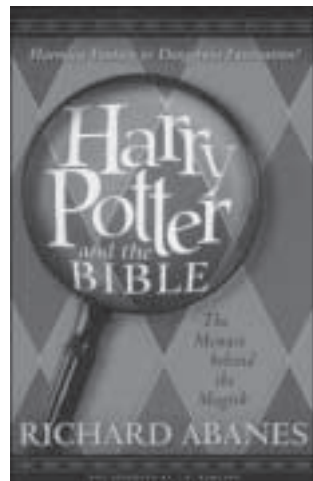
Harry Potter and the Bible by Richard Abanes

(Horizon Books, 2001; paperback 275 pages, ISBN 0-88965-201-5)

This book takes a markedly different approach to the *Harry Potter* phenomenon from the previous two reviewed here. The others attempt to demonstrate how the *Harry Potter* books can be turned to good use in the Christian home, while acknowledging that they contain questionable and potentially dangerous elements. This book seems intent on proving that *Potter* is a virtually untameable menace...

The book is split into two parts. The first part examines the *Potter* books by way of four pairs of chapters: one pair for each *Potter* book published so far. The first chapter in each pair provides an overview of the story in the relevant book, while the second chapter critiques that story in three main areas: its occult content, its presentation of morals (what Abanes calls Potterethics), and its suitability for children aged six and over.

The author's overviews of the *Potter* books are



generally accurate, though he does have a tendency to emphasize the negative and ignore any positive elements, and on at least one occasion misrepresents what Rowling says, reading a metaphor literally and by doing so giving a reasonable phrase an uncouth meaning.

Richard Abanes critiques these books with the perspective of one who has researched and written extensively on the occult. As such, he sees far more occult-related content in the *Potter* books than most other readers. He demonstrates that the same folklore and ancient magical beliefs which Rowling has researched and incorporated into some of her fictional magic is used by occultists as the historical basis for their modern-day witchcraft. However, he stretches his arguments too far at times, seeming to see purely occult connections where other explanations are equally if not more plausible.

The author's analysis of Potterethics is particularly perceptive and helpful. He draws attention to many areas in which the *Potter* books present morality as subjective or relative. Even the 'good' characters frequently lie, steal and disobey with impunity, manifesting little or no sense of shame or remorse. His case would have been strengthened had he acknowledged that there *are* some occasions when the disobedience parallels the more complex moral situations described in the Bible.

While Richard Abanes makes good points in his analysis of the books' suitability for young children, he has not been entirely fair to Rowling in choosing age six as the basis for his comments. He has done so on the grounds that Rowling said you can't stop six-year-olds from reading them. But, as noted earlier in this article, she personally believes her books are suitable for children aged eight and over. Nevertheless, the two year age difference doesn't entirely negate the usefulness of Abanes' comments.

The second part of the book contains chapters which examine the occult in greater detail, explore the biblical data on magic, and reveal the changes in American society's increasing acceptance of and interest in the paranormal and 'spirituality' over recent years. In these chapters Abanes provides lots of information and helpful comments on the state of paganism today.

A further chapter contrasts *Harry Potter* with the *Narnia Chronicles* and the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. But here the author again demonstrates a certain bias against *Potter*. His evaluations of Lewis and Tolkien are somewhat simplistic, ignoring elements within their works which do not support his case. He also refers to Tolkien's devout Christian faith and commends the books on the basis that this is reflected in them, but according to one reviewer, Tolkien was a staunch Roman Catholic and, at least to some people, aspects of this unbiblical corruption of Christianity are evident in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy.⁴¹ This itself is a subject of debate outside the scope of this article, but it illustrates the inconsistency and bias evident in Abanes' work.

The final two chapters present brief rebuttals to arguments in favour of *Potter*, and an analysis of disturbing *Harry Potter* study aids being used in some public schools in the States. After 270 pages of predominantly negative comments, the final five pages offer disappointingly brief and rather weak guidance to parents of children attending schools where *Potter* is embraced.

There is a great deal of useful information and some perceptive comments in this book. It has two great weaknesses however. First, no clear distinction is made between occult practices evident in *Harry Potter* and those which are practised in the real world. Abanes moves swiftly and silently from one to the other and the reader is left uncertain as to the true extent occult references in the *Potter* books. It would have been far better if the author had made a distinction, clearly describing references to the occult woven into the fantasy of the books, and then distinctly explaining the potentially dangerous beliefs and practices an inquisitive child would discover if he investigated those references in the real world.

The second problem is that the author fails to apply his own advice in the final chapter concerning factual integrity, accurate criticism and non-misrepresentation. On a number of occasions he fails to accurately convey the true sense of Rowling's

comments. One example is a reference to Rowling's belief in magic, where he quotes her saying, "I don't believe in it myself, [but] we shouldn't be too arrogant. Some stuff we believe today will be considered rubbish in years to come, and things we think of as rubbish now will be considered true." This abbreviated quotation gives the impression that Rowling is uncertain about magic, and



Hermione casts a spell while Harry and Ron look on.
© 2001 Warner Bros.

Abanes uses it to support his suggestion that she does believe in certain types of occult magic, even if she doesn't believe in the 'wand waving sort'. The full quotation gives a very different impression.⁴²

Unfortunately, Abanes' misrepresentation of Rowling and the *Harry Potter* books begs the question whether there are inaccuracies in other areas of his writing. Nevertheless, two lessons are worth noting. First, that if children investigate some of the *Potter* magic they could discover historical references which may lead them to further explore a vast occult world condemned by the Bible. And second, that Rowling presents a moral maze potentially more dangerous than the magic itself.

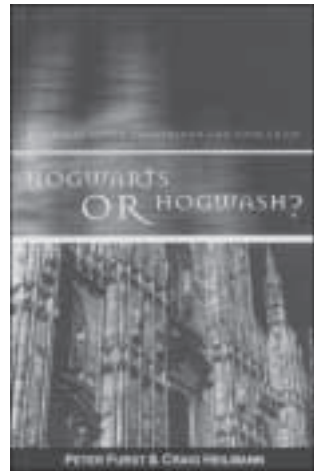
Hogwarts or Hogwash? by Peter Furst and Craig Heilmann

(Lime Grove House Publishing, 2001; paperback 152 pages, ISBN 1-87679-854-8)

Craig Heilmann is the director of Focus on the Family in New Zealand, and along with his friend, Peter Furst, an Australian TV reporter, he has written this the most recently published critique of the *Harry Potter* books. The authors have a different emphasis from those of the previous three books reviewed here, which all tend to focus on the controversy over the magic in *Potter*. Furst and Heilmann suggest that the critical problem is not the books' possible promotion of the occult but the underlying unbiblical worldview.

The book is split into three sections. The first of these sets out to demonstrate the real danger of *Harry Potter*: the difference between Rowling's worldview as presented in her books and that set forth in the Scriptures. It does so by asking four questions and exploring the answers provided by the *Potter* stories in contrast with the text of the Bible: who are we and where do we come from? what is wrong? what is the solution? and, where are we going? It becomes clear that Rowling's fictional world is very different from ours, and presents genuine dangers of eternal significance for children, who are in the process of developing a worldview. Furst and Heilmann provide a helpful analysis of the big picture, but it is unfortunate that they have failed to adequately explore the moral muddle in *Potter*, though, to be fair, they do raise it as an issue in the final chapter of the third section.

In the second section of the book, the authors look at how we should deal with the dangers in *Harry Potter*. The first chapter looks at whether Christians should isolate themselves from non-Christian texts such as this, or familiarise themselves with their contents for the purpose of making a connection with the world. Having established that there should be freedom of choice in this area, the second chapter focusses on the example of Daniel and his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, to demonstrate what it means to be in the world but not of it, while a third chapter describes the biblical basis for using non-Christian texts in communicating biblical truth. In the fourth chapter the authors reiterate that they believe the unbiblical worldview is the main problem with *Potter*, but recognising that many Christians see its magic as a major issue they address it here. They make a clear distinction between *Potter* magic and occult



magic, while recognising the problem it presents: "The greatest danger is that in the fantasy world of the series, magic is dislocated from supernatural and occult power. However, in reality there is no such dislocation."

In the third and final section Furst and Heilmann reassert that they are not seeking to promote the *Potter* books, but to turn them to profit. Two chapters provide helpful and biblically faithful examples of the way the books can be used to provide analogies of Christian truths (sacrificial love, grace, betrayal, mercy, and salvation) and raise issues on which a Christian perspective can be shared (Christian living, right and wrong, death, suffering and friendship).

Considering its length, this book does a good job of addressing the fundamental dangers of the *Potter* books and provides a biblical and balanced perspective, with helpful advice for those wishing to use them for profit.

Houghton, Neal, and Furst and Heilmann all acknowledge that *Harry Potter* is here, accept the fact, and aim to provide guidance to Christians on how best to use him since he's not going to disappear any time soon. On the other hand, Abanes sets out to demonstrate why *Harry Potter* shouldn't be here at all, and though providing lots of warnings of danger he gives little positive direction on how to make the best of a bad situation. Each of the books has its strengths and weaknesses, however, and two or more are need to appreciate the full extent of the problems and possibilities *Potter* presents.

What Shall We Do With Harry? by Lindy Beam

(<http://www.family.org/pplace/pi/harrypotter/A0018569.cfm>⁴³)

Don't want to buy a book about *Potter*? Prefer to sit at the computer and surf the net? Of course, there's an awful lot on the internet about the *Potter* phenomenon - both positive and negative, balanced and extreme, factual and fake. This internet article at the Focus on the Family web site is worth perusing.

Lindy Beam, a Youth Culture Analyst, has written this helpful overview of the books, very briefly pointing out most of the problems highlighted by the published critiques reviewed here. She begins with a short explanation of the two sides of the debate: those who accept *Harry Potter* with open arms, and those who loudly decry the books. She accepts that both have valid arguments, but presents them with a challenge to consider how best to use the books for good.

A further four sections (separate linked pages on the web site) each give the gist of

the plot of a *Potter* book and highlight relevant issues in the debate: magic and spiritual elements, violent content, hatred and anger, morality and ethics and worldly values, family and relationship issues, among others. The article doesn't explore these issues in any depth, but it may prove a useful introduction to things readers should be aware of, setting them on their guard and helping them to think critically.

Conclusion

It should be obvious from what has been written here, that the question of what to do with the *Potter* books (and related films) is not clear cut. They certainly have many questionable elements. They could be abused and used, along with other material, as an introduction to the occult, and they might teach children that God is absent or irrelevant and morality is relative. But they could also be turned to more productive ends, and form the basis for culturally relevant and spiritually profitable discussions.

As intimated in the opening section of this article, families in different circumstances could take very different approaches to these books. Those whose children are home-educated may well decide not to touch the books, recognising that much better reading material is available which avoids the significant spiritual and moral as well as magical dangers associated with *Potter*. On the other hand, for children attending state schools where *Harry Potter* is the topic of playground conversation, and may even form part of the classroom curriculum,⁴⁴ their parents may decide it is best to read and discuss the books at home, and help their children to grow in wisdom and discernment regarding their contents. For some, attempting to ignore the *Harry Potter* phenomenon could lead to more harm than good for their children; for others, introducing *Harry Potter* would serve no positive purpose that could not be met in other, safer ways.

Remember that, as yet, the story is not over, and neither should the evaluation be. As each book has been published, more of Harry's history has been revealed, and more information has been given on the motives, circumstances and plans of the key characters. Taken as a whole, the story may yet repair some of the weaknesses and avert some of the dangers highlighted by critics, or it may raise still further areas of concern and reinforce questionable ideas. For this reason, parents, educators and Christian leaders may want to hold off from making a final decision regarding these books until the seven-part saga ends and a full evaluation can be made.

Personally, at this stage I neither commend nor condemn the *Harry Potter* books. What is right for one family or individual may not be right for another. However, if you *do* read these books, read them with care and discernment - and that goes for anything else you read, including this magazine!

Notes:

1. 'Harry Potter Books Spark Rise in Satanism Among Children', a satirical essay in *the Onion*, (http://www.theonion.com/onion3625/harry_potter.html - URL valid on 18/10/01).
2. 'Christians fall for e-mail hoax' in *Challenge Weekly*, Vol.59 Iss.26 (July 10, 2001), p.6.
3. Jay E Adams, *A Call to Discernment*, (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 1987), p.133.
4. 'Introduction' on Bloomsbury Publishing's Harry Potter web site, <http://www.bloomsburymagazine.com/harrypotter/muggles/whassup/intro.asp?pageNo=2> (URL valid on 10/1/02).
5. 'FAQ' page on Bloomsbury's web site, (<http://www.bloomsburymagazine.com/harrypotter/muggles/faq/faq.asp?pageNo=7> - URL valid on 10/1/02).
6. This figure compares with first print runs of 10,000 copies each for *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* and *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, and a staggering 1 million copies for the first printing of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, (see 'FAQ' page on Bloomsbury's web site, <http://www.bloomsburymagazine.com/harrypotter/muggles/faq/faq.asp> - URL valid on 10/1/02).
7. According to the BBC, J.K. Rowling is one of the highest earning women in the United Kingdom (see 'Harry Potter première date set', 7 September 2002, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/entertainment/film/newsid_1530000/1530689.stm - URL valid on 10/1/02).
8. 'An Interview with J.K. Rowling', undated, (<http://www.scholastic.com/harrypotter/author/interview.htm> - URL valid on 9/1/02).
9. The title of the first book (and hence the movie) was changed to *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* for the American market. The editor "felt that the British title gave a misleading idea of the subject matter." *Sorcerer's Stone* was Rowling's idea. See 'An Interview with J.K. Rowling' at <http://www.scholastic.com/harrypotter/author/interview.htm> (URL valid on 9/1/02).
10. "Transcript of J.K. Rowling's live interview for Comic Relief", March 12, 2001, (<http://www.scholastic.com/harrypotter/author/transcript3.htm> - URL valid on 9/1/02).
11. See the publisher's notice: <http://www.bloomsburymagazine.com/harrypotter/muggles/faq/faq.asp?pageNo=15> (URL valid on 10/1/02).
12. Simon Elder, 'Harry Potter 'picture book' perfect', undated, (http://entertainment.nzoom.com/entertainment_detail/0,1846,68870-129-132,00.html - URL valid on 18/1/02).
13. As recently as December 2001, a church in New Mexico had a public burning of *Harry Potter* books. The pastor said they were "a masterpiece of satanic deception." (See <http://www.cnn.com/2002/SHOWBIZ/books/01/01/potter.bookburning.ap/index.html> - URL valid on 10/1/02).
14. Tim Bouquet, 'J.K. Rowling: The Wizard Behind Harry Potter', undated, (<http://www.readersdigest.co.uk/magazine/Rowling.htm> - URL valid on 9/1/02).
15. 'Success of Harry Potter bowls author over', October 21, 1999, (<http://www.cnn.com/books/news/9910/21/rowling.intvu/index.html> - URL valid on 10/1/02).
16. J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2000), p.364.
17. *Hogwarts and All: A Glimpse into the World of Harry Potter*, a documentary which screened in New Zealand on TV2 on 23 December 2001.
18. Rebecca Allen in a personal e-mail on 1 January 2002.
19. 'Transcript of J.K. Rowling's live interview on Scholastic.com', February 3, 2000, (<http://www.scholastic.com/harrypotter/author/transcript1.htm> - URL valid on 9/1/02).
20. J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, p.636.
21. 'Banning Harry Potter', 15 October 1999, (<http://publishing.about.com/library/weekly/aa101599.htm> - URL valid on 10/1/02).
22. Tim Bouquet, 'J.K. Rowling: The Wizard Behind Harry Potter 2', (<http://www.readersdigest.co.uk/magazine/Rowling2.htm> - URL valid on 9/1/02).
23. Tim Bouquet, 'J.K. Rowling: The Wizard Behind Harry Potter', (<http://www.readersdigest.co.uk/magazine/Rowling.htm> - URL valid on 9/1/02).
24. Tim Bouquet, 'J.K. Rowling: The Wizard Behind Harry Potter 3', (<http://www.readersdigest.co.uk/magazine/Rowling3.htm> - URL valid on 9/1/02).
25. *ibid.*
26. 'Banning Harry Potter', 15 October 1999, (<http://publishing.about.com/library/weekly/aa101599.htm> - URL valid on 10/1/02).

27. 'Transcript of J.K. Rowling's live interview on Scholastic.com', October 16, 2000, (<http://www.scholastic.com/harrypotter/author/transcript2.htm> - URL valid on 9/1/02). According to the book, the 'Hand of Glory' was a withered hand resting on a cushion, "Insert a candle and it gives light only to the holder!", pp.43-44.
28. *ibid.*
29. *The Diane Rehm Show*, October 20, 1999, (http://www.wamu.org/dr/shows/drarc_997018.html - URL valid on 20/1/02).
30. 'Teenage Witches' in *Evangelical Times*, September 2000, Vol. XXXIV, No.09, p.2.
31. 'Success of Harry Potter bowls author over', October 21, 1999, (<http://www.cnn.com/books/news/9910/21/rowling.intvu/index.html> - URL valid on 10/1/02).
32. Exodus 7:11-13, 22; 8:7.
33. Acts 8:9-11.
34. Acts 16:16.
35. Deuteronomy 18:9-14.
36. Revelation 21:8; 22:15.
37. 'Transcript of J.K. Rowling's live interview on Scholastic.com', October 16, 2000, (<http://www.scholastic.com/harrypotter/author/transcript2.htm> - URL valid on 9/1/02).
38. *ibid.*
39. e.g. Rahab's lie to save the spies (Joshua 2), and David's lie and eating of the holy bread to which Jesus makes reference (Mark 2:23-28; cf. 1 Samuel 21:1-6).
40. A fifth book came to my attention just as this article was being finalised for publication: Francis Bridger, *A Charmed Life: The Spirituality of Potterworld*, (Darton, Longman & Todd, 2001: paperback 156 pages, ISBN 0-232-52433-5). It would appear that the book, written by the Principal of Trinity College in Bristol, takes a positive approach to *Potter*. A favourable review of the book appears in the British monthly newspaper, *Evangelicals Now*, February 2002, p.23 (the review should become available online at <http://www.e-n.org.uk>).
41. Paul Charman, 'The Lord of the Rings as a Catholic Tract' in *Challenge Weekly*, Vol.59 Iss.49 (December 18, 2001), p.5.
42. Richard Abanes quotes Rowling on page 170 of his book. The full quotation comes from a question and answer session following a reading at a school in the USA, in answer to the question, "Did you do any research on wizard customs?" The following is an exact transcript of Rowling's response:
- "Um... I did. Before I even started writing the books I knew quite a lot about folklore and magic. I don't really know why I knew anything about it, because I don't believe in it, I just find it a really colourful and quite a funny world. And it is, it is very funny what people used to believe worked. Alchemy, for example, I'm sure you know, people genuinely believed for a very long time that you could make this stone, it would turn things into gold, it would make the Elixir of Life and mean you could never die - they really believed that. But that doesn't make them stupid. Because very definitely there's stuff that we believe at the moment - all of us - me and you and everyone; there's bound to be something we believe at the moment, we accept as fact and is absolute rubbish, and in a hundred years time they'll be laughing their heads off at us... [kids laugh]. You know, we shouldn't get too arrogant. And then the Alchemists gave us loads of science, they found out a load of scientific stuff that we now know to be true. Umm... so, you know, that was an offshoot of trying to find this stuff that doesn't exist. [Pause, then jokingly] The laughs on me if it turns out that Alchemy is true [kids laughing] in a hundred years time, that would be funny...."
- "So yeh, I did. But when I started writing the books I started researching it a bit more. In the books you have a mixture of things that people used to believe in. Like on the cover of um... a lot of... quite a few people have said... asked me how I made up a Hippogriff. Well I didn't make up a Hippogriff. People used to... in Europe, we believed there were Hippogriffs - maybe we're just stupider than you, I don't know! - but um... but a lot... but then things like the Dementors in book three I invented, you know. So it's about, I'd say about a third of it is... is based in historical accounts, and two thirds of it I've just invented."
- (<http://www.montclairkimberley.org/jkrowling/qa.html> - URL valid on 21/1/02).
43. The URL for this undated internet article was valid on 22/1/02. The comments in this review are based on a printout made on 18/10/01 when the article was at a different URL on the same Focus on the Family web site.
44. Tim Bouquet, 'J.K. Rowling: The Wizard Behind Harry Potter 3', (<http://www.readersdigest.co.uk/magazine/Rowling3.htm> - URL valid on 9/1/02)

The Restoration of the Order of the Primitive Churches

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS

“Then they that gladly received his word, were baptized...
And the Lord added to the church, daily, such as should be saved.”
(Acts 2:41, 47)

All professed Christians, who admit that the Scriptures contain a model for church organization, strenuously maintain that the denomination with which they are connected, is formed after the Scriptural pattern. This is true alike of Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Methodists, and all others. But it is abundantly evident, that while these denominations are so very dissimilar, they cannot all resemble one Scriptural model. It is further evident, that some who make pretensions to be “THE CHURCH,” are not satisfied to rest their claim to that title, simply on a comparison of their organization with the new Testament pattern of a Gospel church, but very gladly seek to bring in evidence from other quarters, by which they hope to support their cause. The Fathers, Tradition, Expediency, are all pressed into their service, to supply the lack of evidence afforded in Scripture; or, as is sometimes the case, to nullify and render powerless its direct testimony against them. All this I say, is done by those who profess to find, in the New Testament alone, a warrant for their ecclesiastical systems and organizations. They do not seem to perceive, that the very course which they adopt to support their claims, affords most conclusive evidence that they are false and vain.

But while some appeal to Tradition, and others to expediency, it is the glory of the Baptists that they act on the principle of the sufficiency of the Bible in testing this, as well as all other questions relating to religion. Though Jewish antiquity, and the Fathers, yield as much or more support to their distinctive features, as to those who are most clamorous in demanding submission to them, still they prefer to appeal to “the law and to the testimony.” I announce, as the Sixth Feature of the reform at which Baptists aim,

The Restoration of the Order of the Primitive Churches.

It is certain that primitive church order has been generally abandoned, from the fact that so many different organizations exist, each claiming to be the gospel church. Now,

it is evident that not more than one of these dissimilar organizations can be constructed after the Scripture model. All that is necessary in testing their claims is, to compare them with the New Testament description of a gospel church. And any body of Christians that is unwilling to be brought to this test must of course give up this claim. Let us inquire,

I. What was the strict Order of the Primitive Churches? We can only obtain satisfactory information on this point from the Word of God. The text [at the head of this article] and its connection present to us the circumstances under which the first gospel church was formed. From this it will be perceived, that first, the gospel was preached, then repentance and baptism were urged upon the hearers; “then they that gladly received the Word were baptized; and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And the Lord added daily to the church such as should be saved.”

1. *The Primitive Churches were composed only of professed believers.* Those who “gladly received the word.” In all the epistles to the churches it will be seen that the members composing them are addressed as “believers,” “saints,” “chosen ones,” “partakers of like precious faith” with the apostles; and even where their sins are spoken of, they are alluded to as “brethren,” who had departed from the faith. Dr. Dwight says, “There is but one character given in the New Testament to those who were church members, and that is the character of Christians. There is no mixture of any other character.”

2. *The Primitive churches were composed only of baptized believers.* By *baptized*, I mean *immersed* believers. “They that gladly received his word were *immersed*.” This is the translation – in the common version we have only a transfer. Let me, on this point, give you a few authorities for this translation, as there are some who deny its correctness – none, however, of any eminence as scholars. The learned Bossuet says: “Baptism was performed by plunging. In fine, we read not in Scripture that baptism was otherwise administered; and we are able to make it appear, that for thirteen hundred years baptism was thus administered throughout the whole church, as far as possible.” Dr. Doddridge says: “‘Buried with him by baptism.’ It seems the part of candour to confess that here is an allusion to the manner of baptizing by immersion, which was the primitive mode.” John Wesley says: “‘Buried with him,’ alluding to the ancient manner of baptizing by immersion.” Whitby, author of a Commentary on the New Testament and more than forty other learned works, says: “It being so expressly declared here, that we are buried with Christ in baptism, by being buried under water, and the argument to oblige us to a conformity to his death, by dying to sin, being taken from hence; and this immersion being observed by all Christians for thirteen centuries, and the change

of it into sprinkling without any allowance from the Author of this institution, being that which the Romanist still urges to justify his refusal of the cup to the laity; it were to be wished that this custom might be again of general use." Dr. Chalmers says: "The original meaning of the word baptism is immersion; and we doubt not that the general style of administration in the apostles' days was by an actual submerging of the whole body under water." Archbishop Tillotson says: "Anciently those who were baptized were immersed and buried in water, to represent their death to sin; and then did rise up out of the water to signify their entrance upon a new life."

I might go on and fill a volume with similar quotations, from every scholar of any note who has ever written upon the subject. In addition to this, every lexicon of note gives it a meaning, which signifies either an immersion into an element, or a complete overwhelming with it.

It is evident, also, from the narration of circumstances connected with baptism in the New Testament, that immersion was the primitive mode. Christ, when he was baptized, came up out of the water. When Philip baptized the eunuch, he went down into the water with him, in order to do it. The apostle Paul, in alluding to baptism, twice calls it a burial, and once a burial and resurrection. All who became members of the primitive churches were admitted by immersion; and as none were admitted but believers, none but believers were immersed.

3. *In the Primitive Churches none were admitted to the Lord's table but those who were immersed.* Though they were, at the time of their conversion, members of the Jewish nation, or, as a Paedobaptist would say, of the Jewish church, and had been circumcised in their infancy, still they must be immersed before becoming members, or enjoying the privileges of a Christian church. Yea, even though they had been proselytes to the Jewish religion, and were circumcised after they arrived at maturity, they must still be immersed, when they professed faith in Christ, before they could sit down at the Lord's table. It is admitted by all, to have been the practice of the primitive churches, to receive none but the baptized to the Lord's table.

4. *The primitive churches were independent in their government.* All the members were on an equality in each church, and each church was on the same equality with every other church. There were no bishops, in the sense in which that term is used by Roman Catholics, Episcopalians, and Methodists. There were no church sessions, presbyteries, assemblies, synods, or conferences. Advisory councils, having no power to legislate, were sometimes called to give counsel in difficult matters. But individual churches possessed supreme authority to administer discipline, and transact their own business. The church was the highest court of appeal.

II. Paedobaptists have universally departed from the strict Order of the Primitive Churches. The first Paedobaptist church was the Church of Rome. I presume I need not stop here to show that the Romish church does not conform to the Scripture model. All Protestants will affirm that she does not; and any one who will read the Bible will be convinced of it. Let me remind them, however, that in nothing is her dissimilarity to gospel churches more palpably manifest than in her infant baptism; and in this thing all Paedobaptists are treading in her path, while not one of them is conformed to the New Testament pattern. For,

1. *They are not composed of the same materials.* They number among their members others than professed believers. Every Paedobaptist church holds that the children of believers, when they are baptized, are members of the church, and form a part of it. I substantiated this assertion by numerous quotations from printed documents, in my lecture on the "Spirituality of Christ's Kingdom."¹ I need not, therefore, repeat them here. But I remark, in addition to this, that conversion is not necessarily a qualification for membership in most Paedobaptist churches.

With Episcopalians, admission to full church privileges is granted to those who have been confirmed. The requirements for this service are thus stated in their Book of Common Prayer: "The Church hath thought good to order, that none shall be confirmed but such as can say the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments, and can also answer to such other questions as in the Short Catechism are contained." The conditions of admission being thus made, irrespective of personal character, it cannot be expected that the Episcopal church will bear a comparison with that of primitive times. Indeed, it will be perceived that all that is needed is a *good memory*, in order to be confirmed as a member of that church.

The Presbyterians acknowledge in their standard, that "the visible church consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children." They further say, "Children born within the pale of the visible church, and dedicated to God in baptism, are under the inspection and government of the church, and are to be taught to read and repeat the Catechism, the Apostles' Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. They are to be taught to pray, to abhor sin, to fear God, and to obey the Lord Jesus Christ. And when they come to years of discretion, if they be free from scandal, appear sober and steady, and to have sufficient knowledge to discern the Lord's body, they ought to be informed it is their duty and privilege to come to the Lord's supper."² Now, in all this there is nothing said about regeneration, repentance, or faith. The late Dr. Chalmers, a distinguished Presbyterian minister, maintained that it was "wrong to say that *none but the pious* should be admitted to partake of the sacraments," while, for the decent regulation of the church, "it is well that the visibly

profane or profligate are kept away." As to the duty of a minister to the "great majority of our species," who are "neither of the profligate or the pious," his business is, "not to exclude them, but to warn them." A church formed on such principles as these certainly cannot claim to be identical with the primitive churches.

In the Methodist body, it is held that a religious society is "a company of men, having the form and seeking the power of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in the Lord, that they may help each other to work out their salvation." "There is one condition previously required of those who desire admission into these societies – a desire to flee the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins." It is well known that persons who give no evidence of conversion are often allowed, and even urged, to become "class members;" and these "seekers," as they are termed, are admitted to the Lord's table. It is not necessary according to the Discipline, that a man should give evidence of conversion. It is certainly not impossible for unconverted men to fulfil a term of probation. And thus, in almost every Paedobaptist church it may be seen, that conversion is not absolutely insisted on as a condition of membership on the part of adult applicants.

But what shall we say of their *infant membership*? We frequently hear of the "children of the covenant," and the "children of the church," from Paedobaptist pulpits, but do we hear any thing of this kind in the New Testament? Do we find unconverted men addressed as members of the church in primitive times, or young persons urged to fulfil baptismal vows, made for them by their parents, when they were unconscious infants? No, no! We see parents urged to bring their children up in "the nurture and admonition of the Lord," but we nowhere find this duty enforced by any allusion to vows made at the dedication of their children in baptism.

Again, those who united with the primitive churches came into them voluntarily. It was not necessary to look about, and see who were "free from scandal," and tell them that it was "their duty and privilege to come to the Lord's table;" but, constrained by the love of Jesus Christ, they voluntarily sought to profess his sacred name. "Here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptized?" "If thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest."

2. *Paedobaptists do not receive their members by the same initiatory rite that the primitive churches did.* The primitive churches received their members by immersion. This was the act by which they publicly "put on Christ" before the world. A great many Paedobaptist authors acknowledge that the primitive saints were immersed, and that immersion is the proper signification of the terms which are used to designate the ordinance. In addition to those already quoted, I remark that Calvin says: "Here we perceive how baptism was administered among the ancients; for they immersed the

whole body in water." Bishop Taylor says: "The custom of the ancient churches was not sprinkling, but immersion." Now, we know that Paedobaptist churches receive the majority of their members, not by immersion, but by sprinkling. Some may be immersed, but it is only after every argument to dissuade them from it has failed. The practice of these churches is sprinkling, the exceptions are immersion. In the primitive churches there was "one Lord, one faith, one baptism;" and that was immersion. Here, then, is a striking dissimilarity between all Paedobaptist churches and the primitive churches. The latter were composed of immersed believers. The former are composed of a mixed multitude of believers and unbelievers, sprinkled, poured, and immersed. The language addressed to the primitive churches cannot be addressed to them. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Have infants put on Christ? "Therefore we are *buried* with him by baptism into death." Can any Paedobaptist minister address his church thus? "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through faith of the operation of God." Can this language be appropriately addressed to a Paedobaptist church? No; so far from it, many Paedobaptists do not like to read it in their Bibles. But still further; a Paedobaptist preacher cannot stand up, in a Paedobaptist community, and address unconverted men as the primitive disciples did: "Repent, and be baptized, every one of you." They have been baptized, as they call it, already. From all this it is evident that Paedobaptist churches are very dissimilar to the churches in the times of the apostles, and to the teachings of the New Testament.

3. There is a wide dissimilarity between Paedobaptist churches and the primitive churches, *in reference to the Lord's Supper*. In the primitive churches, all who were baptized, and members of the church, were admitted to the Lord's table. None, who were considered proper subjects of baptism, and who had received that rite, were excluded from the communion. But Paedobaptists contend that infants are proper subjects, and that sprinkling is the proper mode. Every infant who is sprinkled, then, is properly baptized, and is a member in the visible church and ought, according to their own reasoning, to be admitted to the Lord's table. Paedobaptists are most inveterate close communionists. They are very eloquent against the bigotry and closeness of the Baptists, for not admitting members of Paedobaptist churches to the Lord's table; but surely they should not expect us to receive persons whom we consider unbaptized, when they will not receive their own baptized members. All whom we consider baptized, and who are members of our churches, we receive; so did the primitive churches. But Paedobaptists have large numbers, whom they consider baptized members of their churches, whom they do not admit to the Lord's table. This is a kind of "close communion" that we have never practised.

4. *There is a dissimilarity in the government of Paedobaptist churches and the primitive churches.* One was independent; the other is arbitrary, despotic, and tyrannical. I exhibited this fully in my lecture on the "Equality of Christ's Disciples,"³ and therefore need not repeat the arguments here.

III. Baptists aim to Restore the Order of the Primitive Churches. They make no appeal to tradition, the Fathers, or expediency. They simply ask, "What do the Scriptures teach?" They follow the New Testament model of a church, and invite all to test them by it. It is not strange, therefore, that they confidently appeal to God's Word for proof of the correctness of all they do. They take it all from the Bible, and therefore they know it can all be found there. Take any Scripture account of the course pursued by the apostles, or of the practice of gospel churches, and you will find the counterpart in a Baptist church.

Like the primitive churches, they are composed of immersed believers. Show us an instance of the baptism of an infant in the primitive churches, and we will then baptize infants. But until then, we will oppose infant sprinkling as an innovation of man, having no divine authority, and therefore sinful, when performed in the name of Jehovah.

Like the primitive churches, Baptists admit none to the Lord's table but those who are immersed on profession of their faith. Show us an instance of a gospel church doing otherwise, and we will conform to the model.

Like the primitive churches, Baptists are independent in their government. Show us a pope, or bishop, or conference, or synod, or presbytery, or council, authorized to govern the church; we will submit to just such authority as you can show us in the Bible.

Our position in these matters is illustrated by a narrative contained in a tract, published by the American Tract Society, entitled "Mick Healy, the Bible Reader." Mick had been a strict Roman Catholic for fifty years. One day he accidentally found a Bible, and commenced reading it. The more he read, the more he neglected the Romish service. The priest at length heard of it, and visited Mick, and sought to get the Bible from him. Failing in this, he began to expostulate with him. He told him he must not read it any more; and reminding him that he had not been to confession for a long time, he told him he must come and confess, for it was his duty. Mick held out the Bible to the priest, and said, "Will your riverince please to show it to me in the Book." Now this is just what we say to all the arguments of Paedobaptists. They tell us that all Christian parents should have their infant children sprinkled. We say, "Will you please to show it to us in the Book." They tell us that sprinkling will do as well as to go "down into the water," and be "buried in baptism," and "come up out of the water." We say, "Will you please to show it to us in the Book."

After some time, Mick united with a Protestant church, and regularly attended the

Sunday-school. The children used frequently to gather round him, and put questions to him, to hear his answers: "Well, Mick, why don't you now pray to the Virgin Mary?" "Because it is not in the Book." "Why don't you now confess your sins to Peter and Paul, Mick?" "Because it is not in the Book." "Why do you believe the Bible to be sufficient to make you wise unto salvation, without tradition?" "Oh, sure, it is all in the Book." "Must every thing in religion be proved by the Bible, Mick?" "Yes; whatever is not so, is only moonshine." Now our Paedobaptist friends ask us why we do not sprinkle infants; we reply, "It is not in the Book." They wish to know why we "go down into the water," and immerse those who believe, and "come up out of the water." We reply, with Mick, "Oh, sure, it is all in the Book." They ask us why we do not admit to the Lord's table with us those who are unbaptized. We reply, "It is not in the Book; and whatever is not in the Book is only moonshine." We aim to be Bible Christians, and to make our churches Bible churches. In upholding Baptist sentiments, we simply aim to perpetuate primitive Christianity.

We resemble the primitive Christians in another respect – we are "every where spoken against." This we expect, so long as men follow Tradition rather than the Word of God, and are influenced by the teachings of men, rather than by the example of Christ; but, when the Bible, – and especially the Bible faithfully translated, – is made the standard, then we shall triumph. We make no arrogant assumptions; we utter no idle boast; but we simply use the language of humble confidence and firm faith.

The progress of the Baptist denomination can be arrested only by taking the Bible away from the people; for, while they possess that, in spite of priests and princes, scaffolds and faggots, tortures and death, some will be found, as in all ages some have been found, who will contend for primitive simplicity, primitive purity, primitive order. On the other hand, Paedobaptism can only succeed by withholding the Bible from the people, or veiling the command to be immersed in an unknown tongue, or calling human tradition to support it, and enlisting carnal weapons to defend it.

Oh, how much better to come out on Gospel ground, take the Bible and follow Christ, and enjoy the sweet and abiding confidence that you have done what is right!

This article is taken from John Quincy Adams' book, Baptists, the only thorough religious reformers, published in 1876. C. H. Spurgeon used this as a textbook in his Pastor's College, regarding it as the best Manual of Baptist principles he had met.

Notes:

1. See Issue 3 of this magazine.
2. *Directory for Worship*, chap.9, sec.1.
3. See Issue 5 of this magazine.

Journeys through fiction to truth

CHRIS GOOD

Dr Richard Belcher, a senior Reformed Baptist in the USA, with years of pastoral and seminary experience, as well as an extensive teaching ministry, has written an excellent series of fictional theological novels. These novels are aimed to introduce people to theological reading who are not used to it. In this he succeeds admirably.

The series focuses around the main character, Ira Pointer, from his early days as a seminary student in the early 1970's and his first call to the pastorate, through to the latest book where he is now on the staff of a major theological seminary. It follows the many issues Ira encounters and on which he seeks to find a Biblical perspective.

The series is characterised by Ira's determination to be faithful to Scripture, no matter what the cost. The novel format enables the author to clearly illustrate the practical and pastoral implications of the doctrinal issues in a way often missed in more theologically abstract books. Short, pithy chapters make for easy reading, and the plots are generally good, lively and supportive of the theological aim, though at times the story becomes subservient to the theological goals.

The books have a welcome 'Baptist' flavour, and although based on the US church scene, they are still relevant in many respects to the NZ situation.

Below is a survey of the titles to date:

1. *A Journey in Grace*

In a call to his first pastorate, Ira is asked "Young man, are you a Calvinist?", which begins a search to discover Scripture's position on the matter. In doing so he inadvertently becomes the centre of considerable hostility!

2. *A Journey in Purity*

Now in his second pastorate, Ira is faced with the problem of taming the 'giant beast' of 800 odd inactive members as they are stirred against the faithful few when an issue of church discipline arises. Overall, this is the best written installment in the series so far, with the tense plot and the theological pursuit seamlessly woven together. The author obviously writes from personal observation and concern.

3. *A Journey in Authority*

Arising from issues raised in the previous volume, Ira begins an exploration into the rule of the church: whether this should be exercised through the elders, or directly by the congregation. The dangers of the extremes of both approaches are quickly realised.

4. *A Journey in the Spirit*

An encounter with a maverick charismatic who now pastors one of Ira's former churches leads to an exploration into the Holy Spirit's person and work, especially for today. In the meantime chaos, confusion and division abound all around!

5. *A Journey in Inspiration*

Ira returns to Seminary for further training only to find himself forced to defend the reliability of the Scriptures, and even his own life!

6. *A Journey in Providence*

A close friend's tragic and mysterious loss of a son leads to an action-packed adventure, as well as a heart wrenching study of living with God's providence as revealed in the book of Job.

7. *A Journey in Eschatology*

Ira is invited to write a book on eschatology and so undertakes a survey of the major eschatological views - and searches for his birth parents in the process. The conclusion that Christians are unwise to divide over eschatological schemes alone is a good caution. This is the least satisfying of the series so far. Part of this is due to the fact that the 'follow Scripture at any cost' ethos and testing is missing as he doesn't take a stance on any eschatological view but merely surveys them. Also the plot is not really integrated with the theological pursuit - this volume reads almost like two books in parallel: a fictional plot and a theological survey.

8. *A Journey in Salvation*

Ira's encounter with a fallen pastor leads to a study on the nature of salvation - good news indeed, for even the greatest of sinners.

The author promises that the Journey is set to continue!

This series is highly recommended. It is ideal for our teenagers as it shows why we believe what we do, and illustrates how to study scripture and apply it to the attitudes and problems of life that even Christians must face. It is also ideal for Christians unfamiliar or hostile to the theological issues covered, and who normally wouldn't look at a 'heavy theology' book. As a series it is rather expensive to purchase as a set. Hence good for a church library - or it could be bought and read volume by volume. The books may be ordered through Grace & Truth Publications (see page 3 for contact details).

Further information can be found on the internet at: <http://www.richbarrypress.com/books.htm>

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The articles in this magazine reflect the body of biblical doctrine summarised in the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. Contributors are allowed reasonable freedom in the exposition of those truths; the editors do not necessarily endorse every view expressed.

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Subscriptions:

Grace & Truth Magazine (ISSN 1175-3749) is published bi-monthly: six issues per year. Subscriptions should be sent to the address above. Cheques should be in NZ dollars drawn on a New Zealand bank and payable to *Grace & Truth Publications*. Payment may also be made by VISA or Mastercard. The annual subscription rate is:

NZ\$30.00 including postage within NZ

NZ\$40.00 including airmail postage to Australia

NZ\$50.00 including airmail postage to the rest of the world

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Cover Picture

Daniel Radcliffe plays the part of Harry Potter in
Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone.

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