

Potter and Christ: Who Is Who?

Devki Gandhi^a, Steffi Mac^b

^aStudent, Department of English, St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Ahmedabad, Gujarat, 380009, India

^bLecturer, Department of English, St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Ahmedabad, Gujarat, 380009, India

Abstract

The Holy Bible and the Harry Potter series both explore the grounding concepts of faith and belief. The Potter series echoes the concepts of the Bible through various incarnations in the form of characters. This research paper stands as an indication of the affinity between both these revolutionary texts, and the impact it has generated on the masses. The Potter series has several characters that resemble the ones in the Bible, and this research paper aims at tracing the blueprint of both the texts. At the core of both these texts lie characters which crop up through centuries and at various places in the history of humankind. This paper highlights these characters and the correlation between them, showcasing the nature and universality of human emotions and personalities.

KEYWORDS: The Bible, Harry Potter series, religion, Christianity, characters, symbols.

Introduction:

What started as a nebulous idea on a train journey from Manchester to London developed into a seven-book series, now famously known as the Harry Potter series. J.K. Rowling penned the books from 1997 to 2007, and they instantly became a huge success. The Harry Potter series, comprising of seven installments, talks of a wizard named Harry Potter and his fight against evil. Voldemort, the antagonist of the series became one of the most infamous villains in the field of literature. Apart from discussing the themes of bravery, friendship, loyalty, and courage, the novels carry bold strokes of Christian beliefs and traditions, imbibing countless religious allusions. The Bible has a prominent effect on the novels, which is intriguing because the series generally falls under the classification of fantasy. One of the most striking features of the novels is the ability to display each character as being important in shaping the plot. The novels are replete with religion insights, attracting both the young and the old.

Delving deep into the religion of Christianity, the Potter series takes their inspiration from the Bible. Thought to be written originally in the sixth century BC, the Bible is classified by the centuries it covers. The Old Testament covers the birth of Jesus and the formation of Israel, while the New Testament focuses on the life of Jesus. The crux of the Bible remains simple: not of preaching, but of reflecting the dilemmas ordinary people face in life, possibly because divinity, at its core, does not differ from the ordinary. Humanity is the binding force of all; divine and human. Parallels can be drawn between the Potter series and the Bible, because, at its core, even the Harry

Potter series deals with the same message. The novels may talk about a world away from reality, but the struggles the characters face are ordinary.

The characters in the Potter series collectively remind one of the characters in the Bible. They display a similar struggle for survival and portray common emotions and human nature. The characters from both these texts share an affinity and a close study reveals an astounding amount of common ground, which adds to the series. The Potter series hence becomes a clear reflection of the Bible, but more so, adds depth to a pre-existing arena of personalities and actions, and showcases how similar emotions and figures are reflected in various backgrounds.

It is because of this reason that it is of paramount importance to trace the similarities of both the texts; for people should become aware that a text written centuries before the present time is relevant even today. The Bible forms the backbone of countless other novels, but in this particular series, it gains its status because of the peculiarity of its presence. The Harry Potter series is an amalgamation of various allusions to the Bible, combining sin and redemption. The binaries of evil and good are discussed in the series, and they assume significant roles in the view of the greater picture. The main novels selected for this research are Harry Potter and The Chamber of Secrets, Harry Potter and The Order of Phoenix, and Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows. Each of these novels proves to be a kaleidoscopic study of the religious elements in the series.

By dissecting the strokes of religion, this research sets out to achieve a united, and not a fragmented, synthesis of the topic. This will aid in contributing to the field of research, and ultimately, literature, by achieving a deeper understanding of a text that is influencing generations. This will also prove insightful to readers who limit the scope of the series as a mere fantasy work: it is so much more than that. The researcher's aim is precisely that: to garner the understanding of a topic that is extremely common in life, yet one which plays a crucial role in life.

Religion in Harry Potter:

Khaled Hosseini has stated, "Writing fiction is the act of weaving a series of lies to arrive at a greater truth,"¹ and rightly so as is clearly reflected in the Potter series. On a first glance, the series may seem to be confabulating about wizards and witches and their struggles, but a deeper study acknowledges the presence of Christian symbols and characters. It can be said that the series reveals a greater truth, one which is attainable. The truth is omnipresent, one needs to possess a certain disposition to avail it. The Harry Potter series is an intricate work, with carefully carved details about allusions to Christianity. J.K.Rowling has said in an interview covered by The Telegraph, "To me, the religious parallels have always been obvious, but I never wanted to talk too openly about it because I thought it might show people who just wanted the story where we were going" (Jonathan Petre, The Telegraph). This is significant because it validates how these symbols have been omnipresent from the novels' conception and are transparent to the readers. It is also quite shocking how some part of the population exploits the Harry Potter series to broadcast the Christian message. Author Richard Abanes explores in his book, Harry Potter and the Bible: The Menace Behind the Magick, how the Potter series deals with "occultism" (Abanes 11) and opens with the following quote: Any time the dark side of the

supernatural world is presented as harmless or¹⁻ This is a quote by Hoseeini, not mentioned in any of his texts.

even imaginary, there is the danger that children will become curious and find too late that witchcraft is neither harmless nor imaginary (Abanes 1, Lindy Beam Focus on the Family). Published in 2000, the book dissects the first four parts of the Potter series and categorizes them as something evil. A list of banned books (2000-2009) published online by the Ala Office for Intellectual Freedom is topped by the Harry Potter series.

The rudimentary plot of the series, that of Voldemort's unsuccessful pursuits to kill Harry Potter strangely echo King Herod's futile attempts to kill Jesus Christ. The parallels between the Bible and the basic plot can be traced back to the Bible, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him (Matthew 2:13), when Joseph is warned about King Herod's deadly intentions. This is validated through, Then Herod. . . slew all the children that were in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:16), when Herod slays all the children of Bethlehem. King Herod becomes analogous to Voldemort in the series, whose actions of killing Harry are akin to that of Herod's. Another manifestation of this is highlighted when King Herod conspires against John the Baptist, and gets him murdered. And Herod said, John have I beheaded: but who is this, of whom I hear such things? And he desired to see him (Luke 9:9). Something similar to this transpires when Voldemort plans to kill Dumbledore and apparently succeeds. King Herod's personality is quite identical to that of Voldemort's, both of whom eliminate threats. Albus Dumbledore ensures Harry Potter's safety by shielding him from the wrath of Voldemort, just as an angel ensures Christ's safety in the Bible. It can hence be evidently said that the elementary beginning of the series is inspired from the Bible.

The Genesis of the Bible discourses the origin story of human beings on earth, and it becomes worthy of attention in this discussion when Satan assumes the role of a serpent and tempts Eve to commit a sin. It is written in the Bible, Genesis 3:4 and 3:5 which propagates how the serpent convinced Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil (Genesis 3:4-5). This is of paramount importance because the Potter series talks about snakes within the same boundaries. The cogitating notion about the series lies in its treatment of evil and sin. Actions and objects associated with Voldemort repeatedly denote the underlying theme of evil. It is from the Bible that this idea stems, of snakes being evil. The Bible discusses the implications of the fall of Adam and Eve, and their punishment to lead a life on earth, and people often fuse the ideas of sinning with snakes. Voldemort is often described as "snake-like" and how years of sinning has reduced his humanly features to resemble that of a snake: slits for nostrils and dauntingly red eyes. This description is the most prominent in Harry Potter and The Deathly Hallows, when Voldemort is at the pinnacle of his evil manoeuvres. Advancing with this analogy, it is interesting to note how in The Chamber of Secrets, Ginny Weasley is lured by Tom Riddle. This can garner Riddle as Satan while Ginny comes off as Eve-like. Interestingly, Harry can be established as Adam who was inadvertently lured by Satan, after Eve. Ginny is first lured by Tom Riddle, and then Harry falls victim to it, which further deepens this dimension. The parallels between Satan and Tom Riddle spring up throughout the series, and

Voldemort retains his evilness. Lucifer's fall is discoursed in the Old Testament chapters Ezekiel:28 and Isaiah:14, where it is elucidated how it was pride that corrupted Lucifer and catalysed his transformation to the fallen angel, and ultimately Satan. Not unlike Lucifer, Voldemort is controlled by his excessive pride, and his ultimate conception that he is the most powerful wizard of all times. At the very core, it is Voldemort's pride that brings about his demise. By characterizing Voldemort having Lucifer-like qualities(pride), Rowling achieved a very important point: that evil showcases itself repeatedly through the course of humanity, and that through determination and perseverance, goodness can overpower the malevolent forces.

Remarkably, Rowling chose a snake as a fit companion for Voldemort. The snake, Nagini is employed to accomplish the evil deeds set forth by Voldemort. Voldemort controls Nagini, and uses her to kill characters, and it can be safely said that in exercising control over Nagini, Voldemort exercises control over evil. This is similarly resonated in The Chamber of Secrets when a figment of Tom Riddle commands the Basilisk and directs its actions. From the very conception of the series, Tom Riddle and later, Voldemort has a demonic air around him, and the fact that he is endowed with the ability to talk to snakes, known by its formal name Parseltongue, only adds to this supposition. Harry is also gifted with this ability, which adds to him being analogous to Christ, for the sole reason that even Christ converses with the Devil. Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered. And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season (Luke 4:2 and 4:13).

Another of the most interesting comparisons can be drawn between Peter Pettigrew being tempted by Voldemort and then being punished by God. Peter Pettigrew resembles Judas in the fact that he betrays his friends, as Judas betrayed Jesus Christ. The Bible addresses Judas' betrayal saying, And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, one of you shall betray me (Matthew 26:21), and it can be balanced to form the hypothesis that Peter has Judas-like qualities. He is punished for his betrayal to James and Lily Potter when he dies by his own magical hand.

Another character with remarkable depth is Albus Dumbledore, one of the leading characters in the Potter series who dies in The Half-Blood Prince. Dumbledore can be equated to John the Baptist on the grounds that he commences Harry's work in defeating Voldemort and forges the path ahead. John the Baptist is first introduced in the Bible verses Matthew 16:10 and Matthew 16:13, and then in Luke 1:76 and Luke 1:79 where it is declared how John the Baptist will help the Lord "prepare his ways" and "to give light to them that sit in the darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." This becomes symbolic for the precise reason that Dumbledore actually leaves a Deluminator, an object that saves light, to Ronald Weasley which ultimately guides Ron and sheds light on the path that he has to choose. Elphias Doge, a character from the Harry Potter Universe says in The Deathly Hallows, Albus Dumbledore was never proud or vain; he could find something to value in anyone, however apparently insignificant or wretched, and. . . he died as he lived: working always for the greater good and, to his last hour, as willing to stretch out a hand to a small boy with dragon pox as he was on the day that I met him (Rowling 24), which engagingly echoes the features of John the Baptist.

Dumbledore resembles John the Baptist in the sense that he not only marks the path and leaves a trail that Harry has to follow to defeat evil, but also in the sense that he

illuminates the wrongdoings present in the society and persistently continues to wipe the dissimilarities and weaknesses of the society. Dumbledore also warns the wizard society of Voldemort's return and guides their feet into the way of peace (Luke 1:79) where he chooses to fight for goodness. It is said, He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light (John 1:8), showcasing how in the Bible, John the Baptist is characterized as a figure who will witness and guide Jesus, which resonates with Dumbledore's actions. Dumbledore forms to be Harry's guardian in his journey of defeating evil. Dumbledore says, in the Deathly Hallows, "Do not pity the dead, Harry. Pity the living, and, above all, those who live without love, (Rowling 578)" which is analogous to the Bible discoursing how love is important in life, And walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (Ephesians 5:2). Harry's narrative in The Deathly Hallows which says, Dumbledore would have believed him, he knew it. Dumbledore would have known how and why Harry's wand had acted independently, because Dumbledore always had the answer. . . (Rowling 74) reaffirms the claim that Dumbledore resembled John the Baptist. Moreover, John the Baptist baptized Christ and Christ was then able to see things, as cited in the Bible, Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me? Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness. Then John consented. As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well please (Matthew 3:13-17), which holds water in the Potter series because it is only after Harry's interactions with Dumbledore that he is endowed with the knowledge to survive and fight. Albus Dumbledore mirrors John the Baptist's words when he says, Harry is the best hope we have. Trust him (Rowling 65). The Bible conveys, For this is he that was spoken of by prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his path straight (Matthew 3:3). This resemblance validates how Dumbledore is akin to John the Baptist, both of whom lived their lives to prepare the way for their saviours, and facilitate their purpose. Strikingly, John the Baptist and Dumbledore enlighten Christ and Harry, respectively, and it is through these two figures that Christ and Harry are enriched with their key to survival, and their aim in life. Dumbledore strengthens Harry's chances of survival, and endows him with the wisdom of defeating Voldemort. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: (Matthew 3:16). Although the methods practiced by John the Baptist and Dumbledore may have been different, their aim remains common.

Severus Snape forms to be one of the most immersed characters in the series, for he plays the part of an undercover character, apparently supporting Voldemort, but internally aligning with Dumbledore and his cause of defeating Voldemort. Snape's eyes are described to be dark, and when he dies, The green eyes found the black, but after a second something in the depths of the dark pair seemed to vanish, leaving them fixed, blank, and empty (Rowling 528). This is echoed in the Bible, which says, The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! (Matthew 6:22-23) The connotations of both the texts are quite disparate, but the crux is the same. This verse from the Bible can be applied to Snape's character, because his eyes

reflect his love for Lily Potter, which add depth to his character. Precisely for this cause does Snape devote himself to fighting Voldemort. Snape's last portraiture is symbolic because his eyes, metaphorically, lose the depth that Lily's love offered him. Lily's love highlights his redemption arc, and her death works as an impetus for his transformation. Compellingly, in the Bible, and subsequently in Christianity, the colour black manifests sorrow and mourning, and is worn at funerals. In the Bible, it signified a period when no revelation came from God. The Potter series encapsulates the message and theology of Christianity. Severus Snape is furnished in a black cloak throughout the series, and this can epitomize Lily's loss in his life, and his sorrow. He is, till the end, mourning Lily's death. Parenthetically, the only other wizard who dresses up in black throughout the whole series is Voldemort. While one is waging war against evil, the other is the embodiment of evil. Snape also emerges as the professor of Defence Against the Dark Arts in the sixth part, which can literally mean building a defence against the "dark arts" of their world, ultimately leading to Voldemort. He defends people from the allies of darkness, which is highlighted with his futile attempts to save George Weasley from losing an ear. But the spell, intended for the Death Eater's wand hand, missed and hit George instead – (Rowling 552)."

One of the most consequential Christian symbols is of Harry Potter being associated with Jesus Christ. The most obvious connection finds root in the fact that both Harry and Christ resurrect, as cited in *The Deathly Hallows* and the Bible. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you (Matthew 28:6-7), and, And when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive (Luke 24:23). Harry Potter reawakens after being killed by Voldemort. Interestingly, both Harry's and Christ's birth are prophesied. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost (Matthew 1:20). Russell W. Dalton, in his text *Faith Journey Through Fantasy Lands: A Christian Dialogue with Harry Potter, Star Wars, & The Lord of the Rings*, discourses the Christian analogies displayed in the above texts. To say that characters such as E.T., McMurphy, or Harry Potter can serve as Christ figures is certainly not to say that we are putting them on a par with Jesus or that they should be objects of worship. It is merely to say that these characters share some aspects of Christ and offer us the opportunity to reflect on the Christ story from fresh perspectives (Dalton 140). Harry Potter and Christ are identical to the core as they both die for the redemption and restoration of their fellow beings. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). Harry says, You won't be killing anyone else tonight. You won't be able to kill any of them, ever again. Don't you get it? I was ready to die to stop hurting these people – I meant to, and that's what did it. I've done what my mother did. They're protected from you. Haven't you noticed how none of the spells you put on them are binding? (Rowling 591). It is Christ's and ostensibly Harry's love and sacrifice that protects the people around them; to save others becomes their purpose, and in this they are united.

Interestingly, these leaders have symbolic physical scars on their bodies; Harry portrayed by his lightning bolt shaped scar and Jesus endowed with scars on His palms and hands. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put

my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe (John 20:25). These scars are epitomes of the torture and loss these figures have suffered: Jesus Christ being crucified, and Harry losing his parents and surviving in the outcome. It is these scars that define their lives, and exemplify their purpose in life. They ultimately have to fight evil, and save others. Strikingly, both Harry and Christ were humiliated before being killed. And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head. And after that they had mocked him, the head. And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him (Matthew 27:28-31). In *The Deathly Hallows*, Harry says, Harry had been expecting it: knew his body would not be allowed to remain unsullied upon the Forest floor, it must be subjected to humiliation to prove Voldemort's victory (Rowling 582). Theologian Rev. Dr. Stephen Holmes argues how Harry Potter and the Potter series as a whole have a "Biblical inspiration" (Auslan Cramb, *The Telegraph*), and converses about the resurrection of Harry. What happens gives the strong impression that Harry dies, discovers an afterlife in a place called King's Cross – a striking reference from a Christian perspective – and comes back to life. The effect of his death has been to render impotent the power of evil. That is a Christian narrative which is almost impossible not to recognise (Auslan Cramb, *The Telegraph*).

The Potter series is a reservoir of Christian symbols and this symbolism is the most evident in the last part of the series. With several references to Harry being considered as a "saviour" of the wizard world, and ultimately of the whole of humanity, his actions resonate those of Christ who was often hailed as a saviour and a guide of humanity. They wanted him there with them, their leader and symbol, their saviour and their guide, and that he had not slept, that he craved the company of only a few of them, seemed to occur to no one (Rowling, *The Deathly Hallows* 596); which resonates with For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:11). Derek Murphy, in his book, *Jesus Potter Harry Christ* considers similarities between both these personalities. Credible criteria for potential Christ figures includes: comes from an extraordinary origin, possesses a "secret identity" and dual nature, displays a distinctive appearance, exhibits extraordinary powers, generates awe and wonder, gathers and leads disciples, saves others, suffers a sacrificial death, descends into "hell", and rises from the dead. Harry Potter certainly meets most, if not all, of these factors (Murphy 50). If the researcher examines Murphy's model of areas of resemblance, it becomes transparent that Harry Potter experiences each criteria and comes out triumphant, not unlike Christ. Harry illustrates extraordinary powers, with his ability to converse with snakes, and his reliance on his instincts and reflex thoughts. Additionally, he leads the DA (Dumbledore's Army) during his fifth year in school, and teaches spells to counter the Dark Arts. He sacrifices himself to save others, and literally rises from the dead. The Bible also sheds light on the presence of a group of people who opposed Jesus Christ, and collaborated against him, which is akin to the events in Harry's life. Harry Potter was characterized as a negative persona who was fabricating statements about Voldemort's return. But first must he suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation (Luke 17:25).

It also becomes paramount that these parallels are traced because it is these characteristics that determine the plot of the Potter series. Because of a Biblically-inspired story, the Potter series follows a path that is clearly demarcated by evil and good; the lines often blurred in some scenes. From the use of mythic motifs, Rowling expresses fundamental truths about what it is to be human and how to live in the world good and bad. Therefore, her mythical story line not only entertains the audience but also teaches children and adolescents about the values and important truths that they must encounter on the path to intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and moral maturity (B. Vasantha Kumar 200).

Another affinity of Harry to Christ comes from the fact that Harry warns Ron and Hermione of the dangers in the path they have chosen, and implies that they will have to leave their worldly possessions behind, akin to Christ choosing his disciples and asking them to leave the worldly trappings behind. And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God (Luke 9:61-61). Harry is also designated as The Chosen One which is akin to how Christ was the chosen figure to save humanity from its sins. Jesus is graced with healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people (Matthew 4:23). Harry Potter, quite analogous to this, symbolically cures people of the disease of “Voldemort” and saves them from sickness and death.

The characters in the Potter series are an amalgamation of kaleidoscopic personalities and ideologies, which provides a strong foundation for their actions and beliefs. The personalities of the Bible reverberate through the centuries and find their likeness in the Potter series. In endeavouring in this vast area of knowledge, this research paper attempts to discern the world beyond.

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