

The Lutheran WITNESS

FEBRUARY 2002

VOL. 121 NO. 2




Good Fantasy
Bad Fantasy

Also:
New Blood for Our Church
Advice on Church Weddings



The Lutheran WITNESS

A MAGAZINE FOR THE LAYPEOPLE OF THE LUTHERAN CHURCH — MISSOURI SYNOD

FEBRUARY 2002

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Letters

Muslims and Jesus



There is no question that Muslims need Jesus Christ, as we all do, but looking at this contentious issue with rose-colored glasses does not change the fact that we remain in a religious war.

*Jack Pierce
Charleston, Ill.*

I ENJOYED READING "LOVE THY (Muslim) Neighbor" by Dr. Roland E. Miller (Dec. '01) and fully embrace his call for us to reach out to Muslims in the love and truth of Christ.

Although his depiction of the Muslim next door fits my experience in living with Muslims, it doesn't do justice to the root causes of Islam terrorism and the behavior of many Islamic countries. Among them:

- More than 100 verses in the Qur'an advocate use of violence to spread Islam.
- Of the 30 active conflicts in the world today, no fewer than 28 concern Muslim governments or communities.
- Islam is not clear about the means for going to paradise, with one exception—by sacrificing one's life in *jihad*.

Still, none of these negates the call by Dr. Miller and our Lord to reach out to Muslims in the love and truth of Christ.

*Dr. Mark Peterson
Little Rock, Ark.*

THANK YOU FOR YOUR EXCELLENT ARTICLES by Dr. Roland Miller and by Rev. Randy Duncan ("Muslims Need Jesus," Dec. '02). They have helped me to revise my attitude toward Muslims.

*Donald A. Rosenberg
Wausau, Wis.*

ISLAM IS ON THE RISE AND IS ACTIVELY persecuting Christians in many parts of the world (for example, in Egypt, Nigeria, Sudan, Timor and the Philippines). It was already 50 years

ago that Morris Watkins, missionary to Nigeria and founder of Lutheran Bible Translators, alerted me to the fact that even then, Muslims in northern Nigeria were openly presenting a threat to the Christians in the south.

Islam denies the Trinity, rejects Christ as the Son of God and Savior of the world, and considers the Bible *a* book from God but not *the* book from God.

What do we do? We take the approach as in *The Lutheran Witness* articles. Any sort of persecution and bad mouthing of Islam will accomplish nothing. Christ used his Word, love and forgiveness. Muslims must be understood, loved and accepted as people who also were redeemed by the grace of God.

At the same time, we must be fully aware that Islam is a threat to Christianity. It opposes any teaching that Christ is fully God and the Redeemer from sin for all people.

All this may sound contradictory and hard to follow, but it is the essence of Christ's words: "Love your enemies." Now, let us intensify our own commitment to Jesus Christ and convey that to others in humiliation and love.

*Rev. Paul H. Koschmann
Jacksonville, Ill.*

IT IS A SPIRITUAL RELIEF TO HAVE ARTICLES on Muslims that are not condemnatory but constructive. The LCMS can rack one up on these two!

*Dr. Francis E. Jeffery
Lakewood, Wash.*

Yankee Stadium

I WAS SADDENED AND DISTURBED TO read of the criticisms directed at Atlantic District President David Benke for his participation in "A Prayer for America" at Yankee Stadium following the attack on the World Trade Center ("National News," Dec. '01).

The days following Sept. 11 were filled with horror, anger and sorrow. We residents of New York City, as well as the rest of the nation, needed ministry. We needed to hear those prayers offered outside the walls of our local churches that God is in control. We needed to hear those prayers offered in the name of Jesus. We didn't need to be isolated from other Christians; we needed to be united with them in fixing our eyes upon Jesus. Pastor Benke understood this. President Kieschnick understood this. My prayer is that those offering criticisms of these men will understand this.

*Joan M. Piccinini
Flushing, N.Y.*

THE GREATEST AND MOST EFFECTIVE weapon of Satan has never been atheism, satanism or violence. These are so blatantly evil and empty that they pose no real temptation for most people. No, the greatest weapon of Satan is false religion that offers just enough "religion" to make a person feel comfortable and safe without providing real salvation. And the closer that religion is to Christianity without providing the message of salvation through Christ, the more dangerous it is—all the more so when such religion is represented in situations that are outwardly good and loving.

No matter how lovingly or attractively they package their message, the majority of religious leaders who participated in "A Prayer for America" are emissaries of Satan and proclaim teachings that lead to eternal damnation. 1 Corinthians 8 and 10 are quite clear: we cannot be participants with demons. At

Letters

Yankee Stadium, the LCMS participated in a service at which the precious name of Jesus was proclaimed on equal footing with the demonic gods of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. If we truly love people, can we be so callous about their eternal life as to continue to participate in situations where a deadly message is heralded?

*Rev. Matthew Andersen
Ottumwa, Iowa*

ON SEPT. 11, OUR SON WAS WITHIN A couple of blocks of "Ground Zero." After being horrified by watching a number of people fall or jump to their deaths, he decided to walk away from the area before the first tower fell—for which we are very thankful.

The devastation and intense pain still associated with lower Manhattan months later were just overwhelming to us when we visited our son for Thanksgiving. It is incredible that anyone could second-guess the pastoral decision made by Dr. Benke and Dr. Kieschnick in such awful circumstances. I can't imagine that anyone passing judgment has ever been to Ground Zero. A word of Christ was needed and a word of Christ was proclaimed.

Thank you, Dr. Benke, for your courage and faith, and thank you, Dr. Kieschnick, for your support of him in that decision.

*Beverly Gunderman
Alan D. Gunderman
Topeka, Kan.*

I AM IN THE LAST YEARS OF LIFE. OVER THE years, I have noted that the pastors who seemed to reach the most souls for Christ were the ones that went the "extra mile" with the Gospel.

I pray that the members of the Missouri Synod will pray daily that we will soon become a group of which the outsider can say, "See how they love each other"—and then want to know from where we receive this love!

*Lois E. Frantz
Alpena, Mich.*

Saint or Santa?

THANK YOU FOR THE EXCELLENT POINTS in your response to the question about the "celebration" of Santa Claus ("Q&A," Dec. '01).

Christmas and Easter seem to be the two holidays that we as Christians celebrate with the greatest joy. Then along come two fairy-tale characters that nudge Christ into the background. Adults teach children to believe in the Easter Bunny and Santa Claus. How sad for our children!

As an LCMS elementary-school teacher for 32 years, I vowed to teach the truth for the sake of the little child's faith. I saw to it that Christ was always the focus in these celebrations with my students. What joy we had in the Savior's birth and resurrection! I treated Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny as what they are—cute fairy tales.

*Irene Gehring
Seattle, Wash.*

READING "Q&A" HAD ME LAUGHING TO the point that my belly shook like a bowl full of jelly!

It's interesting, given how often diversity and multiculturalism are touted from on high within the LCMS, that poor old St. Nick is still so maligned. Do we not adore the rich culture and diversity also of Scandinavia, Germany and other European nations that bring us so much of our Santa Claus legend? How about simply telling the Christian history of St. Nicholas instead of the fundamentalist (un-Lutheran) reaction? I thought for sure that I was going to read by the end of the article that "Santa" is really "Satan" if you rearrange the letters.

God help us if Santa is our greatest foe at Christmas time.

*Rev. Grant T. Bode
Lester Prairie, Minn.*

GOOD FANTASY/BAD FANTASY

The tremendous popularity of Harry Potter and of "The Lord of The Rings" is raising questions about the world of fantasy.

by Gene Edward Veith

The Harry Potter books may be the biggest success story in children's literature. The series by J.K. Rowling, a British woman who started writing them as a divorced single mother on welfare, has dominated the best seller lists for more than three years. At one point, Harry Potter books ranked 1, 2 and 3, the first time one author had ever taken the top three spots. And the first movie based on the books is a mega-hit.

Amazingly, most of these book buyers are children. Many of them, reportedly, are enjoying a book for the first time in their lives. Parents and teachers are saying that the Harry Potter series is turning on young people to the pleasures of reading.

Surely, this is good news.

Small leap to the occult?

Yet, something about the Harry Potter series makes Christian parents squirm: the novels are about a school for witches.

Harry is a nerdy, miserable preadolescent raised by stepparents who despise him. Then he goes off to Hogwarts Academy, a magical boarding school, where he learns to cast spells, becomes a star athlete in a broom-riding game, and enjoys fabulous adventures.

In a time when *real* witchcraft is in vogue—with Wicca chapters being recognized on university campuses as another legitimate campus ministry—these entertaining novels make witchcraft sound appealing. True, these broom-riding witches and wizards are a "good" version of fairytale characters, not the neopagan worshipers of Wicca.

Nevertheless, Christian parents still

worry that it could be a small leap from fascination with Harry Potter to overt involvement with the occult.

Harry Potter is only one example of how today's young people are awash in fantasy. Video games often portray archaic realms of swords and sorcery. TV brings "Xena: Warrior Princess," "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" and "Sabrina, the Teenage Witch."

In fact, fantasy has always been a staple of children's entertainment, including the most wholesome. Fairy tales have witches, but are currently under attack by feminists and others for conveying values that are "too traditional." Some of the best Christian writers, from John Bunyan to C.S. Lewis, have used and defended the genre of fantasy. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* have helped thousands of children and their parents under-

stand the Gospel.

The problem is not with fantasy, which is simply an exercise of the imagination. But works of fantasy can shape the imagination of its audience in either harmful or helpful ways. The challenge is to discern the difference between good fantasy and bad fantasy, recognizing not only its content but also its effects on the reader.

Fantasy and reality

The answer is not simply to dismiss fantasy altogether in favor of works that are “realistic.” One can argue that the current wave of realistic children’s books are more negative in their effects than the Harry Potter fantasies. Books such as *Heather Has Two Mommies* and *Daddy’s Roommate* are “realistic” attempts to legitimize homosexuality to 4- to 8-year-olds. Popular titles written for teenagers include sympathetic treatments of drug abuse, running away from home, suicide and premarital sex of every description. Today’s “realistic” world is one of bad parents, moral rebellion and adolescent self-pity. “Realism” in children’s books is often a pretext for politically correct indoctrination, anti-family diatribes and angst-ridden problem narratives.

A realism that confines itself to descriptions of only those things that can be seen in ordinary life excludes that which remains unseen but gives ordinary life its meaning, namely, truths of morality, faith and transcendent ideals. The challenge for a Christian writer or artist is how to get at these invisible truths. It is possible to show their effects in a realistic way or to go inside the heart of the characters to show their inner struggles. But another way to write about these invisible truths is to explore them symbolically—through fantasy. By definition, fantasy is wholly imaginary. It is not reality,

but it can provide a way to think about reality.

One of the first explicitly Christian discussions of literature was *The Apology for Poetry* written in the 16th century by the statesman, soldier, man of letters and devout Protestant, Sir Philip Sidney.

Works of fiction, Sidney wrote, are “profitable inventions.” They are profitable precisely because they can deal with ideals—“what should be”—and they are especially effective in teaching morality. A good story, Sidney wrote, both teaches and delights.

The Christian psychologist William Kirk Kilpatrick has shown how stories shape children’s moral education. Children are taught the attractiveness of virtue and the repulsiveness of evil not so much by abstract precepts—and certainly not by schools’ “values clarification exercises”—but by rooting for virtuous heroes and being inspired by a good story to emulate their behavior.

Logically, it seems that the reverse would also be true. If stories can make virtue attractive to some, they can also make vice attractive to others. Like all powerful tools, literature can have a good use or a bad use. If your purpose is to teach a child not to lie, nothing beats “The Boy Who Cried Wolf.” Other Aesop’s fables, for all of their talking animals, convey true notions of hard work (“The Ant and the Grasshopper”) and persistence (“The Tortoise and the Hare”).

Many Christian writers from Dante to J.R.R. Tolkien (author of *The Lord of the Rings*) have, in fact, favored “profitable inventions” over realistic tales. One reason may have something to do with one of the Ten Commandments. The prohibition against making “graven images” specifically forbids the making of “likenesses”:

Harry Potter mania is in full swing with the release of the Warner Brothers movie. Young Harry Potter fans are not so much fantasizing about witches as they are fantasizing about being popular and attending a school that is exciting. The challenge for Christian parents is to discern the difference between good fantasy and bad fantasy.





Frodo (Elijah Wood) takes in the beauty of Rivendell (left), and Gandalf (Ian McKellen) guides the Fellowship of the Ring through the perilous caverns of Moria (below). These scenes from "The Lord of the Rings" show the power of fantasy to convey ideas that are beyond our every-day existence.

"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth" (Ex. 24:4).

The commandment is actually aimed at idolatry—"bowing down" to these likenesses as practiced by the pagan nature religions. But the Jews took the prohibition of likenesses to heart. The pottery and coins of early Israel are decorated with nonrepresentational designs—intricate intersecting lines and geometric shapes; they are likenesses of nothing in heaven or on earth or in the water.

One can argue that the early Christians invented fantasy—or invented fiction—by what they did to pagan Greek and Roman mythology. They taught that the myths were not true, but they retained them in their educational curriculum as pure fantasies. For Christians to believe that Icarus actually flew so high on wax wings that they were melted by the chariot of the sun god would be idolatry. However, once it is clear that there is no sun god and that this story never really happened, it can be appreciated as an illustration of what can become of human pride.

Children who understand the difference between the story and the actual world are inoculated against most of the bad effects of fantasy. It's when the child takes the fantasy world as the real world—that is, when it ceases to be clear fantasy—that problems can arise.

Good and bad escape

Another Christian defender of fantasy, J.R.R. Tolkien—whose *Lord of the Rings* is now a hit movie competing with Harry Potter—was one of the greatest fantasy writers of them all.

One charge against fantasy is that it is mere "escapism." Tolkien pointed out that it is not always morally irresponsible to try to escape. "Why should a man

be scorned," he wrote, "if, finding himself in prison, he tries to get out and go home? Or if, when he cannot do so, he thinks and talks about topics other than jailers and prison walls?"

Tolkien was emphasizing the sense in which today's materialistic world-view—which admits no God, no immortality, no moral truths, no transcendent ideals—is, in fact, a narrow, stifling prison house.

In an intellectual and cultural climate that recognizes nothing beyond what can be seen, touched and measured, it may take a fantasy—such as *Lord of the Rings*—to awaken people's imaginations to longing, beauty, moral heroism and transcendent ideals. Working on their imagination might waken a sense in them that there is something more to life than a narrow material universe of buzzing atoms.

C.S. Lewis, the great Christian apologist whom Tolkien was instrumental in bringing to Christ, wrote fantasies such as *The Chronicles of Narnia*. One of the Chronicles, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, features a boy named Eustace Scrubb, a product of permissive, liberal parents and the modern educational system. Being brought up a thorough-going materialist, he liked only books that were realistic. "He liked books if they were books of information and had pictures of grain elevators."

When Eustace finds himself in Narnia, with its talking animals and noble ideals, he is utterly lost. Rude,

(Continued on Page 10)



THE CASE OF HARRY POTTER

So what are Christians to think about the Harry Potter sensation? First of all, there is good reason why so many children are enamored with these books and the movie. This is a clear symptom of imagination-deprivation. It is also a powerful indictment of our educational system.

To use J.R.R. Tolkien's metaphor, children's imaginations are imprisoned, and they are right to want an escape. Their schools often lock them into a politically correct curriculum, earnestly trying to instruct them about "real" and depressing social problems. Their textbooks are materialistic: science texts asserting the closed naturalistic system of evolution, history texts attacking American ideals, and reading texts spinning out "problem" stories and moral dilemmas.

No wonder children hate to read.

The key to the popularity of the Harry Potter books is not that they are fantasies—there have been many of those that are not nearly so popular—but that they are stories *about school*. Children read about Hogwarts Academy with a sense of recognition. Here are the cliques, the pressures and, above all, the struggles for popularity with which they are all too familiar. But here the school is at least *interesting*. Instead of just making them sit around in groups sharing their feelings, this school teaches them wonderful things: how to become invisible, how to change things with a magic wand and how to fly.

Children can identify with Harry Potter, who at first is trapped in the "Muggle" world, the drab ordinary material realm of those who cannot see the supernatural. He is alienated in his school and feels despised even in his stepfamily. It turns out he is really a wizard all along, and at Hogwarts this nerdy kid with glasses even becomes popular! Young Harry Potter fans are not so much fantasizing about witches as they are fantasizing about being popular and successful.

The Christian case against Harry Potter is that he is in a school for witches. For Christians, the main concern is the danger of occultism. If witches were merely fantasy creations, they would be harmless. *But witchcraft is real*. Demonism and pagan rituals are not fantasies; they are real.

Defenders of Harry Potter can point out that the Hogwarts witches have nothing to do with the Wiccan or black magic kinds of witches. They are not evil at all, nor do they preach any kind of New Age nature religion. These witches are out of the family fables, with brooms and spells, except that they are good.

Still, at the time when witchcraft is becoming a major presence in our youth culture with books about how to be a witch targeted at teenagers, Christians are right to disapprove. In fairy tales, witches are typically "wicked," reinforcing the clear lines between evil and good, that is, the forces of darkness and the forces of light. Anything that blurs those lines is cause for concern.

Harry Potter, however, does not erase the lines completely. There is an overtly evil power in Voldemort, a true wicked witch with whom Harry and his schoolmates are in conflict throughout the series.

Some see disrespect for parents in Harry's bad relationship with his Muggle stepparents, who make him sleep in a closet. But, in fact, Harry's real parents were killed (by Voldemort), and his love and admiration for them is a major part of his character.

So, yes, Harry Potter falls short. If the book spoke only of wizards—a profession found only in fantasy books—rather than the clear-and-present danger of witchcraft, most of the

problems would evaporate. Christian parents are right to steer their children away from the series. But, if the Potter bug has already bitten their children, they should handle the situation with care.

Parents need to make clear that Christians are not Muggles. In other words, Christianity is not a narrow, materialistic, boring worldview such as the one satirized in the Potter novels. It is Christianity that recognizes unseen truths of goodness and beauty and that believes in a genuine battle between the forces of darkness and the forces of light.

— G.E.V.



Daniel Radcliffe stars as the boy wizard in Warner Bros. Pictures' fantasy adventure film "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone."

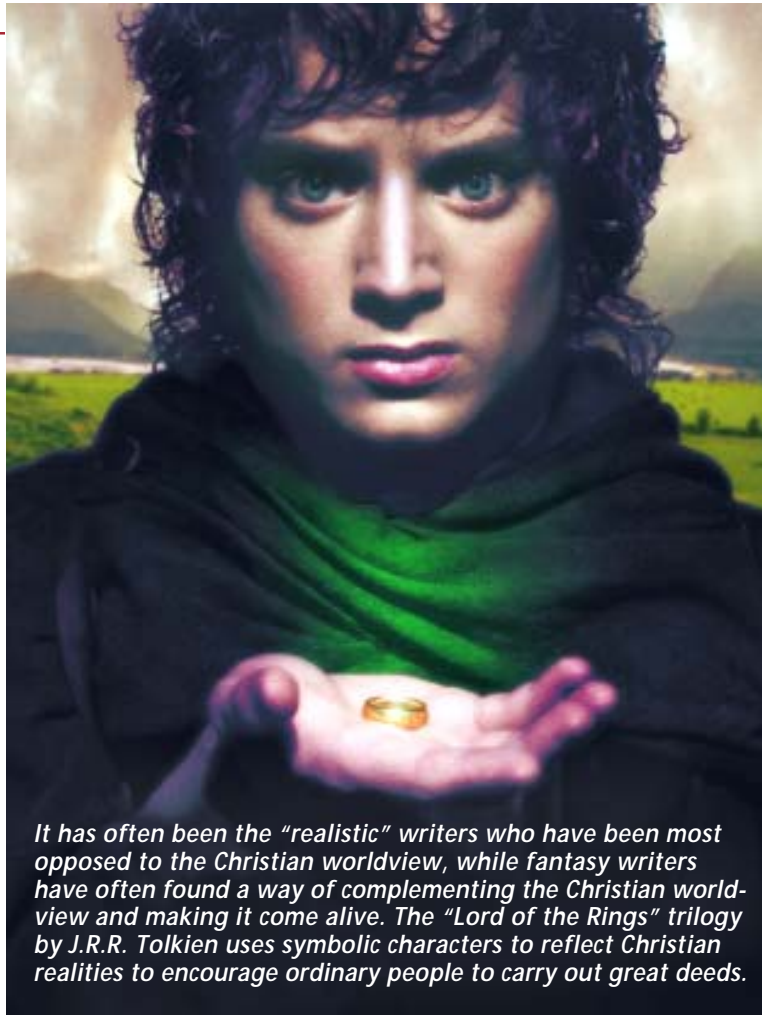
obnoxious and self-centered, Eustace cannot function in a moral world. Then he confronts a dragon. Since “Eustace had read none of the right books,” he does not even know what it is.

“Most of us know what we should expect to find in a dragon’s lair,” writes Lewis, “but ... Eustace had read only the wrong books. They had a lot to say about exports and imports and governments and grains, but they were weak on dragons.” Partly due to this ignorance

and to the twisted quality of his own moral nature, Eustace eventually turns into a dragon himself.

Finally, the mighty lion, King Aslan, destroys Eustace’s evil nature, and Eustace is reborn, a repentant sinner, redeemed and changed by Lewis’ symbol for Christ. Eustace needed to “escape” from his materialistic self-centered worldliness into the larger, freer, more spacious world—not just of Narnia but of spiritual reality, which, though it cannot be fully seen, can be evoked, experienced and symbolized.

Lewis’ point is that reading “the right books” can equip a child to recognize the dragons that lurk outside and within. *The Chronicles of Narnia* are some of those “right books” that can shape a child’s spiritual awareness far better than realis-



It has often been the “realistic” writers who have been most opposed to the Christian worldview, while fantasy writers have often found a way of complementing the Christian worldview and making it come alive. The “Lord of the Rings” trilogy by J.R.R. Tolkien uses symbolic characters to reflect Christian realities to encourage ordinary people to carry out great deeds.

tic books about grain elevators.

The child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim reports how he has found fairy tales useful in treating children scarred by trauma and abuse. The “scary parts” of fairy tales, he maintains, anticipate children’s actual fears (as in Hansel and Gretel’s parents being unable to provide for them—children do worry about things like that). They then show how, despite trials (getting lost in the woods) and temptations (don’t eat the candy house), through courage and virtuous action, they can “live happily ever after.”

While much contemporary children’s literature tries to project a “safe” domestic world and insists that fairy tales should have their scary parts and harsh punishments sanitized out of them, Bettelheim takes a different view:

“Adults often think that the cruel punishment of an evil person in fairy tales upsets and scares children unnecessarily. Quite the opposite is true. Such retribution reassures the child that the punishment fits the crime. ... If not, the child thinks that nobody is serious about protecting him. But the more severely those bad ones are dealt with, the more secure the child feels.”

The world of the fairy tale is a realm of rigorous moral order. When used rightly, fantasies can help instill that moral order into a child’s personality.

Tips for Christian parents

Since fantasies can stimulate the imagination in a constructive way, it must also be possible for other fantasies to stimulate the

imagination in a destructive way. One tale might convey the attractiveness of moral heroism; another might be an occasion to wallow in evil thoughts.

It is not enough just to look at what the story is about. Some parents object to Lewis’ *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* just because it has a witch in it. Nevermind that the book presents the witch as a repellent villain, indeed as a symbol of the devil and his temptations. Never mind that the book is a powerful allegory of the Gospel. The mere presence of the witch is assumed to make the book and its readers partake in the occult. One might just as well say that a tract against witchcraft is occult since it mentions the word.

Nor is the answer for Christian

parents to simply to throw out all stories that contain violence. There can be no plot without some kind of problem, some obstacle to overcome, some conflict, whether external (good guys vs. bad guys) or internal (the character having to make a decision between two options). This is manifested in fights with monsters, in battles and in chivalrous contests. These can all be characterized as “violence.” Yet without conflict, we have accounts of only grain elevators.

Imaginative wrestling with conflicts is exactly how stories teach morality and build character.

Fantasies, along with all literature, must be evaluated according to their *meaning* and their *effect*. What does the violence *mean*? Does it dramatize the conflict between good and evil, or does it glorify the strong terrorizing the weak?

What is the *effect* of the violence on the reader? Does it make the reader less likely to hurt people in real life? Or, does it stir up perverse pleasures of cruelty and sadism?

The point of view—that is, the view of the story’s character with whom the reader is made to identify—is a useful point of analysis. Traditional stories nearly always present the point of view of the “good guy.” Contemporary stories, on the other hand, often place the reader with the point of view of a character who is evil.

This is especially true of today’s video games that present the action through the eyes of a character within the story who happens to be a killer who strides through a virtual landscape, raising a gun, aiming it at cowering victims, blowing them away.

Defenders argue that the number of players who actually act out their games in real life is minuscule. Christians, however, know that it is not just actions but the thoughts and imaginations of the heart that are morally corrupting. Jesus Himself emphasized that God judges mur-



Harry Potter learns "witchcraft" skills with his classmates at the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry in the movie "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone."

derous thoughts as well as murderous actions, and adultery committed “in the heart” violates God’s commandment, even if it is never acted upon.

Another difference between traditional fantasies and some that are popular today is that the former have clear demarcations between good and evil. Today, the boundary between good and evil is often blurred or erased.

If fantasy can be used to teach moral truths, it can also desensitize the moral imagination. Just as a tale of chivalry can inspire ideals of courage and honor, sagas of raping and pillaging, with no moral center, can deaden the heart. Someone may be fascinated with such things in fantasy literature and then go on to practice them in real life.

Know the truth

The problem is crossing away from fantasy (what the reader knows to be imaginary) into the actual world (what the reader believes to be real). Being able to tell the difference between fantasy and reality is an essential survival skill. In fact, it is a definition of sanity.

The account of how

God became man in Jesus Christ, defeating Satan and atoning for our sinfulness by dying on the cross and rising again, is the most wonderful, mind-blowing story of all—having the profound advantage of being *true*. The Bible asserts it, history confirms it and the Holy Spirit brings us to believe it. Those who think in Biblical terms have a far bigger, more stimulating worldview than any of their materialistic and occult followers.

The best way to inoculate children from being confused by Harry Potter or seduced by fantasies that are far worse, in addition to giving them a solid grounding in the Word of God, is to expose them to good literature, including good fantasy. To use C.S. Lewis’ terms, a child who knows about dragons and witches from “the right books” will know to stay away from them and will know that he or she doesn’t want to become one.



Dr. Gene Edward Veith is professor of English at Concordia University-Wisconsin, Mequon, and the author of nine books, including Reading Between the Lines: A Christian Guide to Literature.

Study discovers young churches grow rapidly

A study of more than 400 LCMS congregations that were started in the 1990s as a result of Lutheran Brotherhood (LB) grants finds that newly planted churches grow faster than older churches.

The study was conducted by the Center for U.S. Missions, Irvine, Calif., at LB's request. LCMS World Mission funded the study.

Survey data came from 434 of the 446 Synod ministries started with the grant money, which totaled more than \$5 million.

The findings conclude that during the 1990s, baptized membership in the churches responding to the survey went from 11,884 members to 41,482, and average weekly worship attendance grew from 8,927 to 27,375.

Lutherans give \$20M for relief

Lutherans nationwide so far have designated \$20.8 million to help those affected by the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Members of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod have given more than \$3.6 million for the response through LCMS World Relief; the Evangelical

Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has received \$6.5 million for the effort; and Aid Association for Lutherans (AAL) and Lutheran Brotherhood (LB) have taken in \$8.7 million for the disaster.

AAL and LB, which merged Jan. 1, also donated \$1 million each in matching funds.

About \$5 million from those sources, including some private donations, have been funnelled so far to Lutheran Disaster Response of New York (LDRNY), according to LDRNY Coordinator John Scibilia.

Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR) is a joint

ministry of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. It is being coordinated in New York by the LCMS Atlantic District and the ELCA Metropolitan New York Synod.

LDRNY was established to help meet the needs of those affected by the Sept. 11 attacks. That response, which is being carried out under the theme "Comfort and Renew," includes counseling, training for trauma response, respite care for pastors and church workers, and tuition assistance and other care for children affected by the attacks.

Roegner lays out long-term goals for mission work

Although Rev. Robert Roegner began just last month as executive director of the Synod's Board for Mission Services, he is already thinking about long-term goals and priorities for the church's mission work.

"How are we going to reach people in the world today," especially in light of "Sept. 11 and all the things going on in the world?" he asked.

LCMS World Mission supports Gospel outreach in more than 70 countries.

"It's hard to know what God is going to do in the world," Roegner said. But, he says he is convinced of the "critical need" in the world to "proclaim the

Word and distribute the sacraments."

To meet that need, he said, the Synod must be involved in church planting, leadership training

and "mission partnerships"—working with others to proclaim the Gospel worldwide.

Roegner said he believes he has an ability

to build relationships that could result in an increase in the number of mission partnerships the Synod has with independent mission agencies and other Lutheran church bodies.

He said that such partnerships would include "anyone who wants to be involved in the proclamation of the Gospel," such as mission organizations, seminaries, universities, congregations and individuals affiliated with the Synod and its partner churches.

Roegner is a former LCMS missionary to Liberia who also previously served on the Synod's mission staff.



Rev. Robert Roegner, center, executive director of LCMS World Mission, talks about work in North America with staff members, from left, Dr. Robert Scudieri, director for North America, and Dr. Robert Gonzalez, facilitator for new Hispanic missions.

Kieschnick visits European partner-church leaders

A meeting in Germany of the International Lutheran Council (ILC) executive committee gave LCMS President Gerald Kieschnick an opportunity last month to meet individually with the heads and other officials of the Synod's eight partner churches in their respective countries.

Kieschnick was elected in August to the ILC executive committee, which met Jan. 15 and 16 at the seminary of the Synod's partner church in Germany, the Inde-

pendent Evangelical Lutheran Church. Kieschnick and Dr. Samuel H. Nafzger spent a total of 16 days on the relationship-building trip.

The ILC is a worldwide association of confessional Lutheran churches. Nafzger, executive director of the Synod's Commission on Theology and Church Relations, also is executive secretary of the ILC.

"President Kieschnick has not been to these churches, and I strongly

encouraged him to do this," Nafzger said just before leaving for Europe. "I think it's going to do wonders, just in terms of relationships. I would like to see him visit all our partner churches around the world."

Church relations for the Synod is primarily the responsibility of the Synod president.

The Synod's European partner churches are in Germany, France and Belgium, England, Russia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland and Denmark. Nafzger

said plans also were to meet with the heads of two churches with which the Synod is not in fellowship — the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia and Other States and a new Lutheran church in Belarus.

Confessional Lutherans worldwide "are facing some of the same theological issues," Nafzger said. "We have to be in closer contact and establish and nurture relationships."

AAL, LB merge

Aid Association for Lutherans and Lutheran Brotherhood officially merged Jan. 1 into a new financial-services organization temporarily known as "Aid Association for Lutherans/Lutheran Brotherhood" (AAL/LB).

Barbara Stemson, a spokesperson for AAL/LB, said that ballots for renaming the organization will be sent to its members this month, with announcement of a new name expected this summer.

She said that other decisions anticipated this year involve field operations and branches for the new organization.

Noland accepts call to CHI

Dr. Martin R. Noland, pastor of Christ Lutheran church, Oak Park, Ill., has accepted a call to be the director of Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, the Synod's Department of Archives and History.

He succeeds Rev. Daniel Preus, who was elected first vice president of the Synod last year.

A 1983 graduate of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Noland earned an S.T.M. from Fort Wayne in 1986, and a Ph.D. in 1996 from Union Theological Seminary, New York City.



Noland

Lutherans help volcano victims

U.S. Lutherans have committed \$25,000 for relief work in Congo and Rwanda through Lutheran World Relief, Baltimore.

The aid comes after the eruption of Mount Nyiragongo in the Democratic Republic of Congo on Jan. 17. It destroyed almost half of the nearby city of Goma, sending many thousands of people across the border into Rwanda.

LCMS World Relief provided an initial grant of \$10,000 to LWR, which works on behalf of the Missouri Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

LWR is providing aid through Action by Churches Together (ACT) International, an inter-church emergency alliance.

Through ACT, Lutherans are providing food, water, bedding and other necessities to people affected by the eruption.

Contributions to assist refugees in the Congo and Rwanda—earmarked "Congo Volcano"—may be sent to LCMS World Relief, P.O. Box 66861, St. Louis, MO 63166-9810. Or, call the credit-card gift line at (888) 930-4438.

WHY IS JESUS SO IMPORTANT?

This month's "Searching Scripture" is from Part 2 of a five-part Bible study titled "The Way of Life: A Beginning." Part 1, "Who Is Jesus?" appeared in last month's issue. The entire study is now available online at www.lcms.org/theway/index.htm.

—Ed.

by Jerry M. Kosberg

The amazing truth about Jesus is that He is both human and divine, both true man and true God. Christians have never really understood the depth of this mystery. In faith, we affirm that Jesus of Nazareth brought the love and life of God to everyone. In this brief study, we will begin to examine what the Bible says about what Jesus did, and why He is so important!

1. Read the following verses. In your own words, write what each says about why Jesus came into the world.

Luke 19:1–10 _____

1 Tim. 1:15 _____

2 Cor. 5:19 _____

John 10:10 _____

2. Read John 3:16–17. In these verses, what is Jesus called?

What is the goal of God the Father in sending Jesus into the world?

What is God's feeling about the world?

3. Jesus knew why He had come into the world. Three times He predicted what would happen. Read the following verses:

Matt. 16:21 _____

Matt. 17:22–23 _____

Matt. 20:17–19 _____

What did Jesus say would happen? _____

4. In John 10:11–18, what does Jesus call Himself? _____

5. In John 15:13, what does Jesus prove for us by laying down His life? _____

6. According to 2 Cor. 8:9, why does Jesus do this? _____

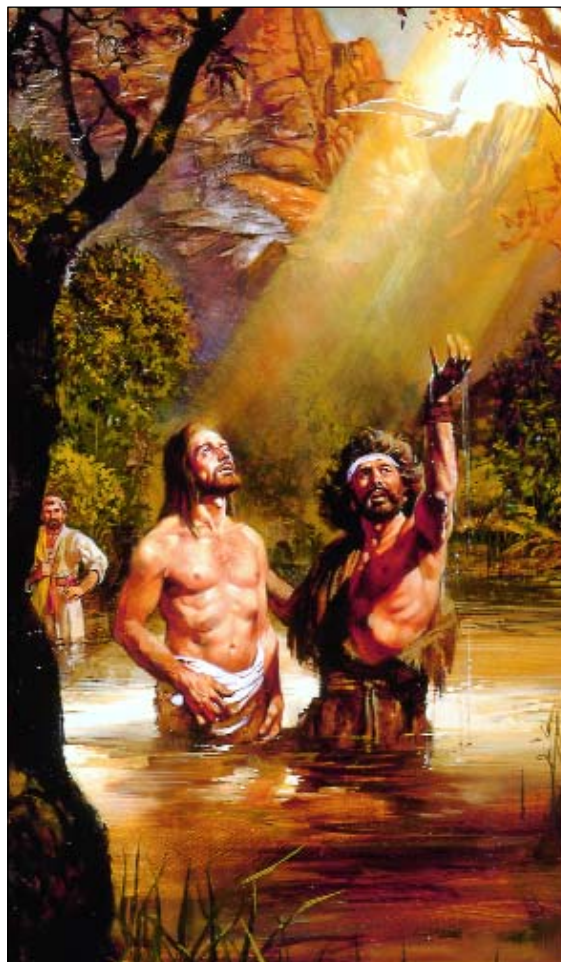
What does "rich" mean in this verse? _____

7. Read John 19:30. What did Jesus cry before He died? _____

What was "finished?" _____

8. When Jesus died on that cross, He was sacrificing His life to save ours. That was His purpose in coming into the world. We will study more about that later. For now, we need to focus on Jesus dying for us because we needed His love and His life to be given to us. Read the following verses. What does each say to you about Jesus?

Rom. 5:8 _____



1 Tim. 1:15 _____

9. Read Matt. 28:1–10. What is the message of the angels? _____

Why is this important? _____

10. Read John 14:1–6. Why is Jesus so important? _____



Rev. Jerry M. Kosberg is mission and ministry facilitator for the Pacific Southwest District.

WHAT ABOUT HELL?

Last July, the question (titled “Your Self in Heaven”) was whether one will have a personality and body in heaven. Could you answer the same question, but for hell? H.M., California

Much of what was said last July about heaven—which addressed not only body and personality in heaven, but also whether we will like everyone else if there are different personalities there—also would apply to existence in hell.

All those who are raised from the dead will have a body, a basic truth confessed in the Christian creeds. This differentiates Christianity from other religions. The words in the Apostles’ Creed, “I believe in the resurrection of the body”; the Nicene Creed, “I look for the resurrection of the dead”; and the Athanasian Creed, “... at whose coming men will rise again with their bodies,” clearly state this truth.

This is a reflection of Jesus’ words in John 5:29: “Do not be amazed at this, for the time is coming when all who are in the graves will hear his [the Son of Man’s] voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live,

and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.”

Consequently, it is obvious that Scripture teaches that those who are condemned also will have the body they possessed while living on earth, the body created by God.

Just as there are many unanswered questions regarding those who are raised to eternal life, so there are unanswered questions about those condemned to eternal death. Scripture does make it clear, though, that their situation will be one that is terrible beyond description. It describes their condition as “weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Why? The parable of the rich man and Lazarus, found in Luke 16, provides a clue as to what that entails. Among other things, it entails hopelessness, because there is no escape from that situation—ever. Whereas those raised to eternal life are continually in the presence of God, with all the blessings that includes, for those

condemned, there is no possibility of ever being with God. There is only utter and complete hopelessness.

Eternal life is to be forever with God; eternal death is to be forever banned from His presence.

Scripture also implies that this hopelessness is accompanied by physical suffering. On the last day, those condemned are cast into “unquenchable fire.” It is interesting to note that the Biblical word “gehenna,” which is translated “hell,” relates to the valley in which garbage was dumped with a continuing smoldering fire.

Thank God that He has given us the hope that is ours as the Holy Spirit gives us faith in Jesus Christ, through whom we have life now and life forever.

Send your questions to “Q&A,” c/o *The Lutheran Witness*, 1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295. Please include your name and address. All questions will be considered, but none can be answered individually.

Shedding Some LIGHT

Thoroughly Modern Millie

The parents had been saying the Lord’s Prayer with their 4-year-old daughter, Millie, at bedtime. One evening, the girl wanted to say it on her own. Her parents listened with pride as she prayed each word correctly right up to “... And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us some e-mail. ...”

Anonymous.

While you’re down there ...

When life knocks you to your knees ... get back up.

When it knocks you to your knees again ... well, isn’t *that* a wonderful position from which to pray?

*George V. Kottwitz
Trinity Lutheran Church
Edwardsville, Ill.*



My apologies to anyone who got injured last week when we scheduled the bake sale and Weight Watchers for the same evening.

from the PRESIDENT

PROUD TO BE A LUTHERAN!

As a child, I learned to avoid using the term “proud,” being carefully and caringly instructed by parents and teachers of the dangers of the sin of pride. Indeed, humility is a blessed virtue. At times, I suppose, many of us are even proud to be humble!

Like many of you, I was born and raised in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. In my lifetime, I have seen the church at every level at both her best and at her worst.

Such is to be expected. For the Church, composed of all believers in Christ, is a creation of God Himself. But the church, individual gatherings of such believers in local congregations, is a human organization, consisting of sinful human beings.

Martin Luther said that humans who have come to faith in Christ are at the same time saints and sinners. As sinners, we struggle to do what is right, while being tempted by Satan to do what is wrong. As saints, we are forgiven by the blood of Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

Almost 155 years ago, the human organization we call the church organized itself into a larger group that we have come to know and to love as The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. The Synod has grown from 12 congregations at its inception to 6,200 individual congregations today.

Some of these congregations are very small in numbers. Others are quite large. Some are rural. Others are urban. Some are new. Others have greater chronological maturity. Some comprise mostly young people. Others have predominantly older members. Some are multi-cultural or mostly non-

Anglo. Most have few, if any, people of color.

As you might imagine, and perhaps may have experienced, the existence of such multi-level diversity makes it challenging for that which we have in common and that which unites us to remain uppermost in our hearts and minds as Christian people. Indeed, it is sometimes rather challenging for Christians to coexist in an environment of peace and harmony, whether at the level of individual congregation or national church body.

What makes peace and harmony elusive in the church is occasional disagreement concerning issues, beliefs and actions. That which unites us as a Synod is our common confession of faith.

To become a member of the Synod, a pastor, teacher or congregation must pledge adherence to the LCMS Constitution, including Article II, which states:

The Synod, and every member of the Synod, accepts without reservation:

1. The Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice;
2. All the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God. ...

This is a very important matter, for without our reliance upon Holy Scripture as *the only rule and norm of faith and of practice*, the disagreements among us would have no authoritative basis and would never be satisfactorily resolved.

But with our insistence upon the importance of clear passages of Scripture, we have a standard



against which to compare and from which to discern all matters of faith and of practice.

At times, people with equal commitment to Holy Scripture and to the Lutheran Confessions disagree on their respective interpretations of what the Bible does or does not say about a specific matter of faith or of practice. By God's grace, our Synod has survived more than a century and a half of such disagreement by consistently asking the question, *“What does the Bible say about this matter?”*

It is my hope and prayer that our study of Scripture, illumined by the Lutheran Confessions as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God, will continue to produce the peace and harmony that our church has experienced during much of its history, punctuated as it has been by periods of tension and turmoil.

For it is our insistence that matters of faith and of practice are determined among us only on the basis of Scripture that makes me proud to be a Lutheran!

Jerry Kieschnick

John 3:16–17

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Web page: www.lcms.org/president