

creation and deformed metaphors supposedly paralleling Scripture, help us see anew? Where is the antithesis in our discernment of good literature. God's grace is sufficient help for all our needs and will not be derived from fantasy literature.

May we as brothers and sisters in the church of Christ always maintain a spirit of love and concern for one another. Mr. VanDerSchaaf's comment describing those who do not agree with him as having "the intelligence and sensitivity of a potted fern," does not promote this spirit.

I hope and pray that all teachers, parents and supporters of Christian education will try the spirits concerning this matter of God in fantasy literature and may we all remember the words of the apostle Paul in Colossians 2:8, 9: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."

Bernie Kamps

REPLY TO ARTICLES OF RESPONSE CONCERNING FANTASY LITERATURE

Most of this reply is directed toward Mr. Kamps' letter, and that for two reasons. First, there is considerable overlap between the remarks of Mr. Kamps and Mrs. Dykstra, and secondly, Mr. Kamps has specifically requested a response.

At the heart of both replies is the conviction that the literature of Lewis and Tolkien is a blasphemous violation of the second commandment because such literature is itself, or is inducive to, image worship. That, I believe, is the point of the scripture passages, the sections from the confessions, and the quotations from the church fathers.

The scriptures, *etc.*, condemn the creating of images for the purpose of serving God through them; that is, they all condemn image worship. A sanctified reader or a covenant child under the direction of a believing parent or teacher will not, I believe, be tempted to or actually worship God through the mental image of a lion or hobbit, anymore than we are tempted to worship God or Christ through the lilies, pictured or real, that we find in our churches and on bulletin covers in this Easter season.

Is the very act of speaking of the Divine in images, of comparing Him to man, or to things in creation, or things created by man blasphemous? Mr. Kamps cites Isaiah 40:18 as evidence to the affirmative. Yet the context of that verse is one of comparison, a positive comparison to a caring shepherd (vss. 10, 11) and a negative comparison to an idol (vss. 19, 20). The point of the text is that any comparison will reveal the overwhelming supremacy of God, not that comparison is wrong. The shepherd, no matter how diligent and loving, remains a sinful, flesh and blood man, and the idol, despite man's efforts, will rot and fall. And God remains God: He is not lessened or blasphemed by the comparison. Christ Himself makes such a comparison for the edification of His people in the parable of the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8). The Lord did not think it blasphemous to compare His Father with an unbelieving magistrate.

Scripture's use of metaphor, simile, and anthropomorphisms limits neither God nor our understanding of Him to the image evoked. God is not a shepherd, Christ is not a lamb, a bridegroom, a lion — God is more than all images put together. And the sanctified reader knows this. The point is that God in scripture uses word-images to talk about Himself in order to give us a better, clearer understanding of Himself. We use these word-pictures in our prayers, we hear them in sermons, and as sanctified believers we can use and read and understand them for what they are in poetry and literature.

Both writers also object to my remarks that the literature is a retelling of scripture and that the retelling can induce one to study scripture. In connection with this, Mr. Kamps considers it flippant that I refer to the Bible as "The Greatest Story Ever Told," and Mrs. Dykstra reasons that I believe there to be a "dire lack in our regeneration."

First, to Mr. Kamps' remark, inasmuch as a "story," according to Webster's first and second definitions, is "a connected narration of past events, a history, an account of some incident, a report; statement," portions of scripture are "story."

In reply to Mrs. Dykstra, my point is not that our regeneration is lacking or that the Holy Spirit is weak. Rather, our flesh is weak, and our sanctification is not complete. The Spirit uses as means creation, events in creation, and man-made objects to enable us to see and understand better the truth revealed in God's word. These things do not reveal more truth than scripture. Rather, they affirm in my heart, through and only through the operation of the Spirit, the truths of scripture. For instance, when the believer reads the evening paper,

filled as it is with reports of wars, civil strife, and lawlessness, does not the Spirit move him to see these calamities as signs of the times? Only as it is given by the Spirit will the believer who studies history be able to see the Four Horsemen running. When the believer reads an inspirational poem or story, it is the Spirit that reaffirms the truth of the word as echoed in the literature within the believer's heart. When covenant parents hug their children before putting them to bed, it is the Spirit that makes them mindful that someday Christ will gather us all into His bosom. For the believer, all things, no matter how small or mundane, are worked by the Spirit to drive him to God's word. Note too that in all of the examples, the things themselves are not grace, nor is grace derived from these things in themselves. Only through the gracious operation of the Spirit do all things work together for our salvation.

A re-reading of my article will show clearly that I said Lewis' idea of how fantasy works is wrong. There is no natural light by which man can appropriate these stories. Apart from the Spirit, as it compels me from the story to scripture, these stories are powerless. Like anything in the natural or man-made creation — a sunset or a symphony, a robin's song or Handel's "Messiah," *Pilgrim's Progress* or *He Gathers His Lambs* — fantasy literature is powerless apart from the operation of the Spirit in the believer's heart, compelling him to think upon the truths of scripture. As I said in the article, the child of God does need all the help he can get. The "help" is not anything in or of creation, including fantasy literature; it is the gracious help of the Spirit working all things for the establishment of God's church.

Then, too, it becomes a moot point whether or not the Holy Spirit moved Lewis and Tolkien to write or to question the men's motive in writing. Certainly wicked Cyrus did not see himself as an instrument of God's purpose (Isaiah 45); the great wickedness committed by Joseph's brethren in selling him into Egypt was, scripture tells us, meant by God for the good of saving for Himself a people. Why did Handel write the "Messiah"? For God's sake? No, for money and personal fame. Does that fact and the fact that Handel was a Godless profligate diminish the power of the Spirit to edify me through listening to the "Messiah"? Not in the least.

I can see that I erred in using some of Lewis' and Tolkien's terms, i.e., that God is "in" fantasy literature and that He "leads" men to Himself by it. I should have made clearer the relationship between the operation of the Spirit in the heart of the believer and what I called in the article the "power of fantasy literature." God is not "in" fantasy

literature anymore than He is "in" a mountain or a chicken, and I apologize for any misunderstanding caused by my inexactness.

Also, in the second paragraph of his letter, Mr. Kamps confuses Lewis' viewpoint with mine. I agree that "Almighty God does not use myth to lead man to Himself. . ." and said as much in the article. I can see, however, that my statement "(High fantasy) can lead us to a greater love and appreciation for Him and His word" can easily be misunderstood. Even if we remember that we are dealing here only with the regenerated believer, and not all men, the original wording does not make plain enough the operation of the Spirit in this case.

Finally, Mr. Kamps is offended because I compared anyone who disagrees with me to a potted fern. I did not do that. That was a gut-reaction, a temptation, to which I said we could not succumb. Surely, those who disagree with the article are not potted ferns anymore than those who agree with it are papists. It is because, as Mr. Kamps says, that we "maintain a spirit of love and concern with one another" that the article was written at all.

Speaking personally and as a *Perspectives* editor, I would like to thank Mr. Kamps and Mrs. Dykstra for taking the time to express themselves in the pages of our magazine. The *Perspectives* is supposed to be an open forum for the views and ideas of parents and teachers alike, and we encourage all of our readers to share their ideas and opinions with us as we labor together toward the high calling of salvation in Christ Jesus.

Gary VanDer Schaaf

"... The Christian is not yet in heaven and can in no way establish the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ in this life. He can only point the way to the city which hath been eternally founded on the finished work of Christ. The builder of that eternal city is our faithful covenant-keeping God. The Christian writer looks forward in hope, as he writes his metaphors of praise, to the time when the perfect poem will be sung — THE SONG OF MOSES AND THE LAMB."

Literature Studies Guide, p. 50
Federation of Protestant Reformed Christian Schools.