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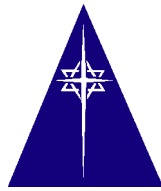
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CHURCH
WRITING
GROUP

Pen & SWORD

TO EQUIP AND ENCOURAGE THE LATENT WRITERS OF THE CHURCH

Goodness Can Attract

By Michelle French

Anyone growing up or having children in the United States over the past thirty years has heard of Fred Rogers. We can all remember the man from Mister Rogers' Neighborhood who walked into the room with a big smile, put on a sweater and tennis shoes, then asked, "Won't you be my neighbor?"

For one half-hour, Mister Rogers' "television neighbors" got to see how people make things, spend time in the Neighborhood of Make-Believe, and learn valuable lessons about life, from fear of the dark to being kind to others.

How could one television show and one man have such an impact on the children of a nation? So much so that in 2002 he was given the highest civilian honor of the United States, the Presidential Medal of Freedom?

Mister Rogers, an ordained Presbyterian minister, showed his audience they were loved. He showed them how to live with others. He did that in a phenomenal way: by making goodness attractive and desirable.

As Christian writers, our mission should be the same as that of Mister Rogers: to use our words to make good, true things look attractive. Unfortunately, most writers today do not praise something good; instead they criticize something bad. There is nothing wrong with condemning immoral things—in fact, the Bible commands us to speak out against the evils in our society. But how often do we praise the things that are good and right when writing for a secular press?

Matthew 5:16 says, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (English Stan-

dard Version) This verse does not say to tell everyone what sinful things they are doing; rather, it says we should show them "good works," and then they will glorify God. Can we demonstrate "good works" in our writing for God's glory?

This world is full of everyday folks who do much good: a teacher who has a smile for every student, even the unlovable ones; a janitor who is rarely thanked or even noticed for doing a good job; a group who volunteers to pick up litter in the park or along the highway. Normal, everyday people who do not appear to be anyone particularly special, yet they do many good things that should be praised.

Writing about these people highlights goodness and shows how anyone can make the world a better place simply by doing good things. Mister Rogers did exactly that: he emphasized how people make the world a better place by doing their best at whatever they do, from factory workers making shoes to mail carriers delivering mail.

Many in our world believe there is no such thing as right and wrong. It is up to Christians to show them what is truly good and right according to God. We can do that in our writing by praising the good things we see: a movie that emphasizes family values, a cashier at the grocery store who has a smile for every rushed customer, a person devoted to helping families adopt children, a politician or preacher who has stood against the tide of relativism to maintain traditional values.

That will make goodness attractive, just as Fred Rogers did through his television show. ➤

Michelle French has just graduated from twelve years of being home-schooled in Cincinnati, OH. She plans to attend Hillsdale College in Hillsdale, MI, where she will study History and Journalism. She has recently been published in *TJ: The in-depth Journal of Creation*, by Answers in Genesis.

The real issue in life is not how many blessings we have, but what we do with our blessings. Some people have many blessings and hoard them. Some have few and give everything away.

—Fred Rogers, in *The World According to Mister Rogers: Important Things to Remember* (2003)

These excerpts are recently published letters to the editor. We thank the Lord for the ministry of these authors. If you have been published recently, send us a copy of your letter or op-ed column. Include your name, address and phone number, the full name of the publication in which your article was published, and the date it was published.

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K Faith and Reasons

I appreciated [the] thoughtful and honest column, "Give Me a Reason to Believe." I suspect there are many who can identify with her spiritual questions and doubts. I hope she finds her answers. Spirituality is an important issue, even renowned publications like the Harvard Business Review and the MIT Sloan Management Review agree on that.

I found one of the comments particularly interesting: "From the time I was four years old I wouldn't take anything as truth until I fully understood it." I cannot say that, because there is so much in the world I don't understand: For instance, how electricity surges to an overhead light at the flick of a switch. (I don't stand in the dark until I figure it out.)

I also don't fully understand how a jet weighing hundreds of tons can escape the clutches of earth. (But I have flown many times, never doubting I would safely arrive at my destination.) I don't even fully understand why my wife loves me, but I gladly receive her love just the same.

The Bible offers an incongruous statement that sums up this dilemma: "Faith is the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1) As a follower of Jesus Christ, I cannot fully explain that passage, but I experienced its truth more times than I could ever count. At the same time, faith does not mean checking your brain at the door. In the Scriptures I have found more practical, relevant, everyday wisdom than anyone could ever use in a lifetime. That gives me a reason to believe!

Robert J. Tamasy
Chattanooga, Tennessee
The Pulse

K God has not retreated, we have

In a recent editorial, a reader's concern for widespread human suffering drives him to ask the question, "Does God Love You?" The poem he included by Thomas Hardy, "The Bed-ridden Peasant" reflects man's futile struggle against cosmic forces—a theme this English poet returned to

time and time again. Like Hardy, the reader believes that if there is a God, He's decided to take a "hands off approach" to His creation. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Charles Swindoll, chancellor of Dallas Theological Seminary, explains our skewed view of God in his book, Job: "We who were reared in the church learned from our earliest years that God is good, loving, merciful, compassionate, just, fair, holy, full of mercy, and grace. He sympathizes with our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15), knows what you need before you ask Him (Matthew 6:8) and satisfies your years with good things. (Psalms 103:5). Then we encounter the patriarch Job. We see God stepping back into the shadows, permitting Satan to afflict His godly servant, as He stays silent, keeps His distance, and refuses to answer when Job pleads for an explanation."

The Bible states: "Oh the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!" Will we accept good from the hand of God, but not evil? Satan is our greatest enemy, yet we put God on trial when disasters occur and question why He doesn't right all wrongs immediately.

As the reader struggles for some visible evidence of the living God, I point him to John 3:16. It answers the questions, "Does God love you?" with a resounding, Yes! I accepted the challenge [to seek God and find Him] over 40 years ago, and I discovered that God does love me...and you. He chose us and loved us, and then set us free that we might love Him in return. God has not retreated, we have.

Gail Black Kopf
Summersville, West Virginia
Nicholas Chronicle

K A rule to live by

What single commandment would change the world if everyone practiced it?

Broken relationships would be restored and cheating and defrauding would be nonexistent. There would

be no wars or need for jails and prisons. What is this "magic" 11 word commandment that, if observed by the world, would alter the universe?

Twelve-year-old Andrew knew this law when he found a large Brinks money bag in front of a store. It contained \$9,000. He turned the money in to the store, much to the surprise and relief of everyone involved. Andrew was asked where he learned such honesty. He answered, "From my parents. I've known them all my life."

What is the commandment so ignored by the world? "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Matthew 7:12).

Washington Mutual Bank put \$9,000 in a savings account for Andrew Gieseler's education. Who said, "honesty doesn't pay"?

Connie Snyder
Hammond, Indiana
The Times

K Schiavo case hints at real dangers

By the time this letter is published, Terri Schiavo may be dead. If so, we Americans have cheapened life. But as I write this, she still clings to life.

Last week, I met a young woman who was knowledgeable about the 6 million Jewish people killed in the Holocaust and passionate that such a tragedy should not be repeated. Thinking I had found a like-minded soul, I said, "The thinking behind pulling Terri Schiavo's feeding tube is just like that thinking behind the Holocaust, isn't it?"

But to my surprise, she said, "Oh, no. It's completely different. Terri Schiavo can't communicate."

"Does being able to communicate define personhood?" I asked. "So anyone who can't communicate deserves to die?"

Schiavo is just one person. But what is happening with her brings America one step closer to the Germany of 1935. Our courts seem to be saying that if we determine that a person—or many people—are living useless lives, we can snuff them out. Isn't

2005 AMY WRITING AWARD WINNERS

that the thinking behind the Holocaust?

God values life. God's commandments, Romans says, "are summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to its neighbor." America was founded on that principle and each person has an "unalienable right" to life. Terri Schiavo is a person. She shouldn't be killed.

Amy Givler, MD
Monroe, Louisiana
The News-Star

K Disagreement is not hate or an insult

This is a response to the letter about defense of marriage laws. People who support them are not hate mongers; they are concerned about preserving community values. Their support of such laws is not an insult to anyone but simply the expression of a different viewpoint.

We have freedom of speech, and both sides are entitled to have their say about what laws are passed or not passed. It's the way in the U.S.A.

People disagree on things all the time—with strangers, friends and even the people they love most. Disagreement is not an insult. Disagreement is not hate.

To those supporting traditional marriage, most of whom are among the 70 percent of the population who say they are Christians—please remind yourselves when you speak that you have commandments to obey, straight from the mouth of Jesus: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39). Notice it doesn't say "Love your neighbor if you like him, or if he agrees with you."

And then there's the one that makes it really clear that there are no exceptions: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you..." (Matthew, 5:44).

Don't let your words become ammunition against you and what you believe in.

Joanna Fuchs
Cocolalla, Idaho
Bonner County Daily Bee

"Born By Rape, Allowed To Live" by Nicole C. Brambila
(San Angelo Standard-Times; San Angelo, TX) \$10,000 First Prize

"The Conviction of Love" by Jon Marc Taylor
(The South Missourian News; Thayer, MO) \$5,000 Second Prize

"A Clear Vision: Tyler Eye Doctor Takes Next Step as Medical Missionary" by Patrick Butler
(Tyler Morning Telegraph; Tyler, TX) \$4,000 Third Prize

"God's Promise Eases Fear of Death, Dying" by Glen Moyer
(The Missoulian; Missoula, MT) \$3,000 Fourth Prize

"Our Foundation Rests on God" by Stephen Schwambach
(Evansville Courier & Press; Evansville, IN) \$2,000 Fifth Prize

\$1,000 Award of Outstanding Merit

"The Greatest Makeover Of All" by Michael Helms
(The Moultrie Observer; Moultrie, GA)

"Remembering D-Day and the Liberation of Corrie Ten Boom" by Kendall Wingrove
(The Meridian Weekly; Ovid, MI)

"Christmas Controversy: Religious And Cultural Tradition vs. Secularism" by Joseph Loconte
(The San Diego Union-Tribune; San Diego, CA)

"Christians Need To Get Involved" by J. Mark Fox
(Burlington Times-News; Burlington, NC)

"Ronald Reagan The Christian" by Tina Krause
(The Times; Munster, IN)

"'Passion' Leaves Viewers Speechless and Reflective" by David Sable
(Watauga Democrat; Boone, NC)

"Before Criticizing, Look Inside" by Luanne Austin
(Daily News Record; Harrisonburg, VA)

"Film Should Ignite Passions In All Of Us" by Rusty Wright
(The Sun; San Bernardino, CA)

"Do We Want Respect or Popularity?" by Jan Merop
(The News-Sun; Sebring, FL)

"Some Censored Facts on the Controversial Gay Marriage Debate From Local Pastor" by Roger Richards
(Adirondack Journal; Elizabethtown, NY)

lambs who are ROARING!

Roaring Lambs awards...

...go to the writers whose letters are excerpted on page two.

1st prize/\$200: *Robert J. Tamasy*
 2nd prize/\$100: *Gail Black Kopf*
 3rd prize/\$100: *Connie Snyder*
 4th prize/\$50: *Amy Givler*
 5th prize/\$50: *Joanna Fuchs*

We invite you to submit your published pieces for consideration.

Criteria for awards are:

- **Appears in secular publication**
- **Teaches obedience**
- **Includes scripture**
- **Written in a spirit of love**
- **Exhibits skillful writing**
- **Persuades effectively**
- **Addresses a current issue**

Be sure to include an actual clipping, your name, address and phone number, the full name of the publication in which the letter appeared and the date it was published. **Only one winning entry per author each 6 months.**

Writers' Conference

Jim Russell, president and founder of the Amy Foundation, will speak at the 29th annual Maranatha Christian Writers' Conference, August 29-Sept. 2, 2005.

Designed to equip writers for service, the rich curriculum will inspire and challenge both novice and seasoned writers. Lake Michigan provides a perfect setting for learning and growing your personal writing ministry or serving through your church.

For details on staff, special guests, and participating editors, call for a brochure at 231-798-2161 or visit VacationWithPurpose.org.

Shaunna Howat, *Pen & Sword* Co-editor, will speak at Canada's Annual Christian Leadership/Stewardship Conference, September 27-29 in the Toronto, Ontario, area. Read more about the conference at cccc.org.

Shaunna will also present two workshops at the Ohio Christian Writers' Conference in October. More information and a schedule can be found at christianwritersgroup.org/conference05/answer.php

THE AMY FOUNDATION

May/June 2005



Church Writing Group Newsletter

Pen & SWORD

TO EQUIP AND ENCOURAGE THE LATENT WRITERS OF THE CHURCH

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Crosswinds by Jim Russell

Let's work
hard at
producing
goodness
for Him

Jim Russell is the founder and president of the Amy Foundation and author of *Christian, Can You Hear Me?* In the **Crosswinds** column, he opens his heart to the members of the Church Writing Group family. Your questions and comments are welcome. This article was originally published in the July/August 1995 issue.

According to the yellow pages of the Lansing telephone directory, there are over 400 Christian churches in the immediate area. This means there are at least 400 pastors and many thousands of Christian lay people.

Frequently, several consecutive weeks will pass without a single discipling letter to the editor in our local newspaper. Also missing will be an op-ed piece with a biblical perspective, and there will be no guest editorials written from a biblical world view.

The problem does not exist in the editorial policies of the newspaper, which has a fair, open and reasonable position toward local participation in all of its departments. No, the problem exists in the lack of Christian understanding of biblical vision, mission, and strategy required to disciple our nation.

There is a quality of love that calls for realistic appraisal rather than de-

nial of truth. Some call it tough love. The mother spans a child for running recklessly into the street. Others are willing to engage in tough love by raising the issue of the need for increased effort to overcome the weakness of faith, courage, obedience, righteousness, biblical literacy, and discipling work ethic of the Christian community, not only in the Lansing area, but across the United States. I have always admired the directness of Peter, one of our Lord's most difficult disciples. While Peter sometimes learned the hard way, he learned his lessons very well. Hear the contemporary relevance in his words from 2 Peter 1:5-8: "Make every effort to add to your faith, goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to

brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Peter says, "make every effort." To me, that means work very hard at it. What is the end result of possessing these qualities in an increasing measure? We will become *effective* and *productive* in our *knowledge of Jesus Christ*.

It is difficult to imagine a more effective and productive effort than discipling thousands with biblical truth through an increasingly accessible local print media.

Surely a worthy goal for the Children of the Kingdom in Lansing, and in every community in the U.S., is a discipling letter to the editor *every day* of the year. The end result can be what every Christian should be praying for — the United States, a disciplined nation. WJR