



Zombies and Other Parable Characters

By Rev. Jonathan K. Morse, Ph.D. | Belcamp, Maryland | January 04, 2012

Youth ministers know they have to walk the walk and talk the talk. While the minister cannot become young again, it is important to remember what we were interested in at our students' age because the interests of youth do not change, only the expression of them. The interests of youth develop out of the problems of childhood.

Children have the desire to be on their own and to be adults. They cannot do so as quickly as they might like, so many find heroes to take them out of their realm. Sports heroes provide the impetus to spend time developing the skills so they can be the next hero on the mound or through the goal posts. The media provides other heroes who overpower evil adversaries. Superman, Batman, X-men and Harry Potter and others allow children and teens to escape reality. Youth want to soar and put their limitations behind them, so whether their parents and ministers approve, they will find and breathe in these escapist dreams.

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Stories from fairytales to the vampire tales have been used to attract the imagination, respond to a need in the reader/viewer and to provide a message. While the Bible and the Koran are the most published books, the most published English language books in literature are: Charles Dickens' *Tale of Two Cities*, J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None*, C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, and Antoine De Saint-Exupery's *The Petite Prince*. Five out of six of these are fantasy works. Fantasy is popular for adults and for youth, and it becomes a form of communication between generations.

All youth ministers by virtue of their ministry are familiar with our Lord's usage of parables. As teachers in ministry, they use stories to illustrate Christ's teachings. Jesus, as well as ministers take something from the real and sensible world to convey an ideal or spiritual meaning. There is the problem that the details may or may not be intended as literal or relevant to the story or teaching, and any parable can be over-analyzed. Jesus used the images that were relevant to His listeners. Young people today are not moved by agricultural images as were Jesus' listeners, but rather by contemporary media images. We cannot be afraid to walk into the youth's fantasy world as our Lord was not afraid to enter the world of His listeners. The poor farmer or shepherd probably dreamt of one day being able to sit at the table of a royal marriage. Today as people dream of winning the lottery (leaving the moral questions aside) or coming up with the next technological advancement, Jesus' people imagined finding the gem in the field or their masters giving them coins. This form of reaching people stays with them. How many times have youth been unable to describe why they feel about a certain subject. It is not that they are ignorant, but rather they were formed with certain viewpoints by their environment, including parents as they were developing. Mothers reading stories to them and fathers playing sports with them while sharing the stories of sports legends may have been forgotten, but the

teaching in those experiences remains with them. It is why the human race has been able to survive. We react quickly to situations without thinking. With the blink of an eye, we may have to avoid dangerous situations; if we spend too much time analyzing situations, we would not survive. So reactions are taught to us by how we see others react and what we have been taught.

It is possible to build on those stories and use them as the foundation for passing on the faith? What follows are popular images and how youth ministry can incorporate them theologically.

Imagery: Zombies are the living dead. They become zombies from an outside source. They cannot die naturally, but they can be killed.

Relevance: People, who chose sin, become subject to the penalty of sin, spiritual death. This choice to separate from the mercy of God causes exclusion from Christ's kingdom and the eternal death of hell. Our freewill allows us the power to make choices forever with no turning back. Constant choice of sin desensitizes a person until there is no goodness or holiness within; therefore, they are spiritually dead. They have no life within them. Outside they are still alive, but the evil or the dead core becomes apparent in their actions. People who are spiritually dead inside no longer care about others. They walk around like zombies neither caring nor aware of what is going on around them. They are already dead, but they can be killed. The person who has chosen to withdraw from the love of God and from the love of neighbor is still living in this world, but he or she will die as do all humans. They are spiritual zombies.

Caution: Denominations have different teachings concerning what happens to people who die without the grace of God. They are Eternal Torment (Hell), Eternal Death (Annihilationism--also used to mean Hell, as in life apart from God).

Imagery: Aliens are visitors from outer space. There are good aliens who come to help humans, such as the Transformers. There are evil aliens who come to destroy humans, such as the Skitters and Mechs of "Falling Skies."

Relevance: Angels and devils are other worldly creatures that come to earth either to help or lead us to sin. They can appear as the angels who visited Abraham ([Gen. 18](#)), or they can appear in their natural state (as in the visitation to Mary). Angels come from God to assist humans or give them messages from God (as the angel in Joseph's dream). Satan and his devils were originally with God, but they rebelled against God. Angels and devils have superhuman powers, but their nature also limits what they can do. Angels cannot lie or do evil. Devils can tell the truth, as well as lie. Angels and devils can fight a human and lose. (See [Genesis 32](#).)

Caution: Jesus is not an angel, so His defeat of Satan with the crucifixion cannot be compared.

Angels are not the state of humans in the afterlife. Angels are not glorified human beings. [Matthew 22:30](#) explains they do not marry or reproduce as do humans, and [Hebrews 12:22-23](#) says that when we get to the heavenly Jerusalem, we will be met by a "myriads of angels" and "the spirits of righteous men made perfect"—two separate groups.

Imagery: Vampires are the undead who are immortal and subsist on the essence of life found in blood. They create other vampires by biting them and draining them of life.

Relevance: There are people who are attracted by evil. They sell themselves for money, power or other things that mimic immortality. To attain and keep this in their lives, they have to steal life from others. They make their lives attractive but bring others to ruin as they have done to themselves. Sinners encourage others to be like them by making sin look attractive. Once the sinner falls for their traps, they are drained of their goodness and holiness.

Caution: If you were to say the name Edward to a teenage girl in your youth group, she most likely thinks of the 104-year-old eternal teenage vampire from best-selling author Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* Series. Mention the name Jacob, and the werewolf and best friend of *Twilight's* leading lady, Bella, comes to mind. Ask, "Are you on Team Edward or Team Jacob?" and you will see this phenomenon has become part of your youth's mindset. These bloody tales glamorize vampires to the point that many fans can think of nothing else. Since the beginning of the *Twilight* craze, more than 350 fan sites have shown up online. You do not want to feed into this hysteria.

Anne Rice, whose *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) and subsequent *Vampire Chronicles* believes the creatures continue to fascinate because we see something of ourselves in them. "The vampire is a monster who preys on his brothers and sisters, but loves them and needs them emotionally, as well as physically," she told *Christianity Today*. "There are times when almost anyone might confess to feeling like a vampire—for using or abusing someone else, for taking rather than giving, for being in pain yet wanting to hang on to life no matter how difficult it gets."

Vampires are creatures who search for immortality apart from Christ. While sacrificial love may be attractive, one must take a closer look at the vampire morality. When becoming a vampire, one is given eternal youth, beauty, strength and power. One can have sexual relations at will with all the partners one wants. One can control others through various means, as well. While the vampire is a killer, the vampire is much more. He, as the serpent in the garden, is a seducer.

Imagery: Wizards and other Harry Potter type characters--they can call up powers and forces to get their way.

Relevance: Harry Potter speaks to youth because he is one of them. He attends school and has teachers he likes and teachers that he considers evil. He has power. As J.K. Rowling noted, "The idea that we could have a child who escapes from the confines of the adult world and goes somewhere where he has power, both literally and metaphorically, really appealed to me" (found at Scholastic.com). He has close friends who are willing to die for him, and he himself is willing to die to save his world of good people; and he will also save the muggles, the human race. Harry only practices white magic, which is used for good purposes. He is in a battle of good versus evil, against the Dark Lord, who is a satanic creature, who speaks the language of serpents. We have a tendency to see this in light of the Genesis story, except Harry also speaks the language.

A U.S. consumer research survey reports that more than "half of all children between the ages of 6 and 17 have read at least one Harry Potter book."

Yet the values of friendship and sacrifice are exemplary values.

Caution: A major issue is that might makes right is contrary to Christian teaching. Harry is successful because through white magic he overpowers the dark arts.

Some Christian ministers hold that God does not differentiate between the types of magic in their condemnation ([Deut. 18:10-14](#)).

Yet others at the same time follow the view of author C.S. Lewis in explaining his *Chronicles of Narnia*, and in reference to Merlin in his sci-fi novel *That Hideous Strength*, differentiating between two kinds of magic. Invocational magic is the dangerous kind that's warned about in the Bible, calling upon dark forces and ancient spirits to serve our selfish desires. Incantational magic, by contrast, is about harmonizing with the will of our Creator—and that's the sort of spell we find in the works of Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, two of Rowling's favorite authors. The use of these types of images can interest contemporary young people into tradition theological themes.