

Saturday, November 22, 2008

## Angels, Demons, and Prayer

Frank Peretti can write a page-turner. I just read a borrowed copy of *This Present Darkness*, remembering how some of my associates were reading it (or something like it) in about 1990. Previously, I'd read a copy of *The Oath* while we were on vacation. Different, yet still a page turner.

The great thing about his fiction is that it assumes the reality of angels and demons, not to mention a personal, almighty, and gracious God. The characters struggle with the usual problems of life, but Peretti manages to cast those struggles in a spiritual light.

I must caution avid Peretti readers, though, about the way he describes angels and demons. It makes for a fiery, swashbuckling story, but there is not enough detail in the Bible to say that his angels and demons bear more than a passing resemblance to the real thing. Personally, I would expect the real thing to be even more awe-inspiring, if we could sense those beings in their fullness. Thankfully, we can't, and probably won't until the End.

The problem I've seen with Mr. Peretti's fiction is not in the sincerity of his faith, nor in his storytelling skills. It's his depiction of the way salvation comes to sinners. In the worlds of his novels, sinners are first convicted by God's law, made to realize that they don't measure up to God's standard of acceptability. So far so good. But then, when the penitent characters realize they need God to save them, the answer is always found in prayer. That's not good. In these novels, prayer is the ultimate means of grace, the required instrument by which God finally brings the salvation won by Christ to the individual sinner. Without the prayed request for God to save the penitent sinner; without the penitent sinner's giving of his heart to God in prayer, salvation is incomplete.

With this slightly but gravely mistaken understanding of prayer, it then comes as no surprise that Mr. Peretti's description of spiritual warfare revolves entirely around prayer, and not the things in which God would have us place our trust (Romans 1:16, 1 Peter 3:21, 1 Corinthians 11:23-29).

For a summary of the biblical doctrine concerning these things, please read [The Augsburg Confession](#).

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Fun at 21:34

Monday, August 11, 2008

## Tolkien and Contemporary Worship

You probably never thought of these two things at the same time before. I don't think I did, until I read just now this great little commentary in the words of Saruman of Many Colors. (White robes were no longer good enough for him.) I am amazed at how fitting they are in the context of contemporary worship. You see, worship is about power. In the true worship of the Christian Church, it's God's power to save, manifested in the forgiveness of sins and administered through the Means of Grace -- Word and Sacrament -- by those appointed to do so, according to His will. However, it's possible to substitute something else for that power of God. Hear Saruman:

"And listen, Gandalf, my old friend and helper!" he said, coming near and speaking now in a softer voice. "I said we, for we it may be, if you will join with me. A new Power is rising. Against it the old allies and policies will not avail us at all. There is no hope left in Elves or dying Numenor. This then is one choice before you, before us. We may join with that Power. It would be wise, Gandalf. There is hope that way. Its victory is at hand; and there will be rich reward for those that aided it. As the Power grows, its proved friends will also grow; and the Wise, such as you and I, may with patience come at last to direct its courses, to control it. We can bide our time, we can keep our thoughts in our hearts, deploring maybe evils done by the way, but approving the high and ultimate purpose: Knowledge, Rule, Order; all the things that we have so far striven in vain to accomplish, hindered rather than helped by our weak or idle friends. There need not be, there would not be, any real change in our designs, only in our means."

The point is that God has provided certain means to accomplish His gracious will, when and where it pleases the Holy Spirit. I use the term "Contemporary Worship" to describe the worship movement that seeks not "any real change in our designs, only in our means." If you or your pastor is considering changes to the Divine Service in the interest of evangelism, or in search of effectiveness among a certain demographic, then there is a good chance that you are playing the part of Saruman of Many Colors. Yes, there is such a thing as Christian freedom, but even the Wise can easily lose their way in matters greater than themselves.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Doctrine, Fun at 15:12

Monday, February 11, 2008

## Book Tag?

Hmm. Well, I've been tagged by [Bruce](#). It seems like kind of a silly game, really, but I'm sure it has interesting results sometimes. And it's not without some fun. Those who know me understand that this is how I appreciate virtually all games.

When you're tagged, you're supposed to

Pick up the nearest book of at least 123 pages. (How's that for an arbitrary number?)

Open to page 123.

Find the fifth sentence. I don't know what you'd do if you run out of text. Maybe keep turning pages, or even get the next book.

Post the next three sentences.

Tag five people.

Tag another. (Which seems completely unnecessary)

I don't think I'll tag five people. It reminds me too much of Amway.

However, the closest book was one I just bought from the book racks of a Goodwill in Portland. It's not even shelved properly. It says:

"*Maybe* we'll be able to hear the difference between alien phonemes, given enough practice, but it's possible our ears simply can't recognize the distinctions they consider meaningful. In that case we'd need a sound spectrograph to know what an alien is saying."

Colonel Weber asked, "Suppose I gave you an hour's worth of recordings; how long would it take you to determine if we need this sound spectrograph or not?"

For the curious, the book is *The Best of SF 4* edited by David G. Hartwell, from 1999. Those lines are from "Story of Your Life" by Ted Chiang.

I tag the Abrahamsons. That counts for all my tags.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Fun at 23:53

Friday, July 13. 2007

## Magnatune

I enjoy music, but several years ago I promised myself that I wouldn't buy any more albums. They were -- and are -- ridiculously expensive, and the rules for sharing, borrowing, and such were so restrictive that "buying" CDs no longer made any sense. Beside that, I have plenty of CDs already, but usually find myself out of range of a CD player.

(I don't spend lots of money on portable gadgets like music players. My only one now is a Palm Tungsten E2, which I use constantly and appreciate for its long battery life.)

Recently I've been listening to my music collection in digital form. I've ripped nearly all my CDs to [Ogg Vorbis](#) format, a flexible, high-quality, royalty- and patent-free encoding. Most recently I've been ripping to FLAC, a lossless encoding. One reason for my reluctance to buy a portable music player is the paucity of players supporting the Ogg Vorbis encoding and useful with a Linux desktop. There are some, however, and I think some day I'll take the plunge. Meanwhile, it's been nearly alarming to see the intrusion of the wma (Windows Media) format into the arena of digital recordings, and also the various drm (Digital Rights Management) -encumbered systems.

But now, there's an alternative that will have me buying new music recordings again: [Magnatune](#)! Get on over there and check it out. Apple enthusiasts will tell me "We already have this with iTunes!" Not so. Magnatune is an online recording label with a growing collection of quality artists from a broad spectrum of genres. According to a current [Linux Journal](#) article, fifty percent of the purchase price of Magnatune music goes directly to the artists. You can sample full albums before buying them. At this moment, I'm sampling a delightful album from American Baroque called *Mozart, 4 Quartets for Strings and Wind*. It's wonderful music to work by, and I'm only on the fourth track. I may actually buy this album, not only for the music but to support the great work that American Baroque are doing.

When I'm finished sampling this album, I'm going to check out at least one album from American Bach Soloists. They have a recording of Bach's Mass in B Minor. I already have an outstanding recording of that, but I'm curious to hear the differences of interpretation. I'm already tempted to buy their recording of Bach's *Cantatas Volume V*, and I'm excited to sample an album of Heinrich Schutz music: *Musicalische Exequien*.

Later, I'd like to hear the music of The Seldon Plan, just because the band's name caught my eye. (Since first writing this post, I've taken a listen. The Seldon Plan is pretty good, but I liked the bluesy guitar of John Williams even better. I'm tempted to buy one or more of his albums.)

So, how much will I pay for the albums I buy? According to the same Linux Journal article, there is a minimum cost of \$5 per album, and there is also a maximum. Within those limits, I'll pay what the music is worth to me. What a system! I hope Magnatune's business thrives. Understood in a non-theological sense, their motto seems to be right on the mark: "We are not evil."

Oh, and apparently, Magnatune also provides recordings in the Ogg Vorbis and FLAC encodings, among others.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Fun, Technology at 08:13

Friday, June 29, 2007

### **Wolf Time available as a free e-book**

The publisher Baen, which publishes science fiction, makes certain titles available as free e-books. This was begun to combat the problem of piracy, which I suppose happens when someone buys an e-book and shares it with others by giving them a copy. (There's an unfortunate limitation for e-books, since sharing your printed copies of the same books is not piracy.)

Anyway, one of their freebies is [Lars Walker's \*Wolf Time\*](#). If you haven't read any of his writing yet, this would be a good way to try it out. I found *Wolf Time* to be provocative and entertaining, but you have to like a dark plot. I enjoyed Walker's *The Year of the Warrior* more than *Wolf Time*, and have been trying to buy a copy to send as a gift to my dad, but so far it hasn't worked. Amazon can't seem to find a copy. Next, I'll try Powell's.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Fun at 13:39

Saturday, April 28. 2007

## More Readers

I've been quite busy this last week with unusual tasks, catching up with some of the big projects at home that have been "on backorder" for a while. I've hardly thought about posting to *The Plucked Chicken*.

It seems we're getting visitors from surprising places now. There have always been some in Australia. Now I'm seeing more in the UK and elsewhere in Europe. In fact it looks as though the only continent from which *The Plucked Chicken* is not receiving any visits is Antarctica. Well, it's running on Linux, so I know [the penguins](#) are interested at heart.

In Ohio:

Perrysburg

Toledo

Mechanicsburg

Trenton

Tipp City

In Michigan:

Plymouth

Menominee

Troy

Saginaw

A new town in Minnesota with a lone visit this week is the town of Jacobson. Never heard of it before. I wonder if it's spelled right. Also:

Rushmore

Adrian

Princeton

Owatonna

Lewiston

Mcintosh

In Illinois:

Skokie

Chicago

Buffalo Grove

Windsor

If you recognize among these names the place where your ISP is located, please be welcome to drop me a note introducing yourself. Send it to [jmjac at gorge dot net](mailto:jmjac@gorge.net), after fixing the address.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Fun at 22:09

## The Worms Complex

(A Dissociated Press story from the trenches of our Postmodern Psycho-Times)

(For your enjoyment. If you do not enjoy it, do not read it.)

It's well known that Martin Luther had his problems. Here is a brief study of one of them that seems to be resurging in some circles.

No, we will not bring up his medieval opinions about how Christian rulers could best defend the eternal well-being of their subjects from the persistent challenge of unbelieving Jews. We'll save that study for another time.

I'm writing today about the *Worms Complex*. Martin Luther is the first known case, and it has passed on to Lutherans and others ever since. It seems to be a mutation of the more general *Martyr Syndrome*, exhibited by the likes of Stephen in Acts chapter 7.

The initial outbreak of the Worms Complex has been captured and reproduced in multimedia, and [made available online](#).

The symptoms are as follows.

First, the subject acquires a dreadful certainty that truth exists, and that it's knowable, and that he has somehow learned what it is.

After that, the subject writes about it in some form of media. Note that earlier outbreaks of the Martyr Syndrome were mostly exhibited outwardly in speech rather than writing, but the invention of [movable type](#) by [Gutenberg](#) in 1445, may have actually *caused* the mutation into what we know as the Worms Complex. Consider the following observations from an eyewitness of these times:

Initially, some wondered if Gutenberg's invention was purely a tool of Satan. When some authors published things with which readers disagreed they spread debate from town to town and from village to village, well beyond the natural limitations of spoken arguments. Subsequently, entire publishing industry was labeled by the establishment as "wicked" and "a waste of time." Some even wondered how a pastor/professor like Dr. Luther could have any time for publishing, and whether he *should* have any time. Wasn't he kept busy by his duties in Wittenberg? Or was he, perhaps, even being *unfaithful* to those duties by spending so much time sitting or standing at his desk, with pen and ink?

It certainly seems that media was a factor in the development of the *Worms Complex*.

The next symptom occurs when the subject is confronted with a forcible attempt to make him publicly withdraw or recant his published writings. This is what happened at Worms in the case of Martin Luther. Following the Luther pattern, the subject may use the word "conscience" in an appeal to some "absolute truth" (as though conscience should determine a person's course of action). He may even try to distinguish between the different things he has written or statements he has made, as though some parts are better than others.

The final symptom is the strangest of all. The subject refuses to withdraw what he has written, unless he is shown that he is wrong. The strange thing is that he will not accept just any proof that he has erred. With the Worms Complex, the subject will, without exception, consider only the highest authority as worthy of consideration. It seems that he considers himself, or his conscience, to be subject ultimately only to that one authority, so that any lower authority does not carry the same weight! In fact, even given a situation in which the highest authority contradicts *all* other authorities, the subject will still become emboldened to state that *all* the other authorities are wrong! Note the strong presumption of real, knowable truth, and a frightening lack of tolerance. In addition, there is an assumption that contradictory truths cannot peacefully coexist.

In the Lutheran Church, the Worms Complex has been perpetuated among many (but not all) clergy by the continued insistence that they take an oath to teach according to the Lutheran Confessions. While some consider this a mere formality, many of these clergy take the oath seriously. They are apparently willing to suffer harm rather than break this oath, again illustrating a deep-rooted belief in truth, while also identifying the highest authority for determining what the truth is.

Suprisingly, the Lutheran Confessions themselves are not the highest authority for these pastors, despite the oath they take. Instead, the Lutheran Confessions identify the highest authority as "holy scripture," colloquially known as the Bible.

The Worms Complex today is manifested in much the same way that we see with Luther in Worms. The symptoms follow the same pattern, though the media used for publishing have multiplied. In fact, the advent of digital media and publication on the Internet seems to have empowered individuals in a way similar to the invention of movable type. Now, those suffering from the Worms Complex have more effective tools to convey their peculiar notions, and there is a corresponding danger that this situation may lead to an epidemic, as happened in the 16th Century on a smaller scale.

Church bodies worldwide are still searching for a cure, though it seems that the more theologically progressive/liberal ones may have made a breakthrough. While theologically conservative churches have generally attempted to curtail the effects of the Worms Complex through reprisal or even stonewalling of communication, the liberal ones have had much greater success by altering the fundamental concept of truth, thereby preventing the activity known as "confessing the faith" by eliminating the need.

It has been observed, however, that the so-called Ecumenical Creeds have made this process difficult, so efforts are underway to update them with more practical content.

This article has very little basis in fact, but some may say that it has a strong foundation in reality.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Fun at 17:16