

Tuesday, November 25, 2008

Teaching Children to Learn by Heart

One of the responsibilities parents have is to teach their children the Way to heaven. Young children are very good at learning and memorizing things, so that is the best time for them to begin learning by heart what they will need to know later.

Well-run Christian schools are a great blessing to parents, because they are essentially the cooperation of many parents in teaching their children the Way to heaven, among other things. A long time ago in this land, it was understood that every school was supposed to teach the Way to heaven, but at some point, the state and national governments began taking the responsibility for education. When that happened, the quality and course of education was no longer determined by the judgment of parents, but by the judgment of experts associated with the government. Again, the great American experiment of individual liberty was replaced by something else. But I (a product of our public school system) digress. The point is that Christian schools today can still serve parents by teaching children the Way to heaven. Some do this better than others, which is why [Lutheran Schools of America](#) may prove to be rather important.

Whether children learn the Way to heaven at home only, or also at school, the very young should start learning it by heart as soon as practical. To that end, parents (and other teachers) should consider using [Memory Work for Lutheran Schools and Homes](#), a rework of a well-thought-out curriculum for teaching the Way to heaven, by heart.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Life at 14:24

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

Concealed Carry: Why Ever?

For what reason might someone become trained and licensed to carry a concealed handgun in public? Hmm. What are the choices here?

for personal security

Umm. Hmm. Well, there's personal security.

I suppose another reason, [according to James Madison and Alexander Hamilton](#), should be that Americans have this unique constitutional right (i.e. to "bear" arms) as an American defense measure against tyranny, both foreign and domestic. In other words, they'd say it's just good citizenship.

Yet good citizenship notwithstanding, isn't personal security pretty much the only reason someone would

want to carry arms legally? In fact, even defense against tyrants amounts to personal security.

Now read [this news from Oregon](#):

Newspapers across the state have been requesting that local sheriffs release information about the identity of individuals who have been issued Concealed Handgun Licenses within their respective counties. Earlier this year, after the Jackson County Sheriff refused a request for similar information from the Medford Mail Tribune, a circuit court in Jackson County ruled that individuals who apply for or have been issued CHLs must document that the license is for personal security reasons in order to be exempt from state public records disclosure laws. The Portland Oregonian reported last week that in response to this ruling and subsequent requests for information, the Washington County Sheriff's Office has decided to mail letters to the tens of thousands of individuals who have been issued CHLs by the county, asking them if they obtained their license for personal security reasons and whether they want their information released as part of a public records request. CHLs in Washington County also have the option of answering these questions by visiting the sheriff's office website at <http://www.washtech.co.washington.or.us/handgunholder/>. The Washington County Sheriff's Office should be commended for recognizing the importance of keeping a personal security decision to obtain a CHL private -- and for developing a mechanism that complies with the court's ruling, but still gives CHLs a choice in the matter. We've also received information that the Coos County Sheriff has done the same for his CHL holders, so bravo to him as well. Members are urged to contact their county sheriff and ask him or her to devise a way to accommodate CHL holders and their privacy concerns as the Washington and Coos County Sheriffs' Offices has done. You can find contact information for your county sheriff's office by visiting <http://www.oregonsheriffs.org/>.

I hope a wise judge revisits this, and realizes that there's really only one reason anyone would want to carry legally, and that reason is compromised if licensees are publicly identified.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Civics at 15:57

Juxtaposition

Some say that religious-minded people will believe anything. I have a hard time believing in mere coincidence, though it may be theoretically possible. Here are three things that appeared before me within half an hour of each other this morning.

[This timely article.](#)

[This devotion text.](#)

And the email tag below.

-- For it pleased the Father that in Him [Christ] all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Life at 08:53

Hamilton and Madison: Security Against a Standing Army

Before the United States Constitution was ratified by the states, there was a discussion in print concerning its merits and possible effects. The State of New York was reluctant to ratify, at least partly because of concerns about the potential abuse of power by the national government. The response to this was printed as [the Federalist Papers](#) for consideration by the general populace.

The Federalist Papers were written by John Jay, Alexander Hamilton, and James Madison. It's not too much to suppose that they represent an authentic and original understanding of the Constitution.

Hamilton wrote The Federalist, [Number 29](#), "Concerning the Militia." It addresses a general distrust in standing armies, and especially in national control of the same. A "militia" is a body of armed men who are not soldiers by profession, but have been called together for the common defense. Hamilton suggests that properly organized local militias, available for national needs, would make a standing army unnecessary.

As Hamilton points out, it would be thoroughly impractical to discipline all the militia (armed citizenry) of the United States. Therefore, it is not a suitable proposition for the general defense of the nation. However, the state ought to organize its own militia "of limited extent," which ought to render a standing national army unnecessary. He writes:

This will not only lessen the call for military establishments, but if circumstances should at any time oblige the government to form an army of any magnitude that army can never be formidable to the liberties of the people while there is a large body of citizens, little, if at all, inferior to them in discipline and the use of arms, who stand ready to defend their own rights and those of their fellow-citizens. This appears to me the only substitute that can be devised for a standing army, and the best possible security against it, if it should exist.

Alexander Hamilton considered the local armed citizenry of each state to be security against the abuses of a national standing army. Isn't that interesting? How far we've come from that time, yet reasoning like this led to the adoption of our nation's Constitution -- the same Constitution that our (national) soldiers still swear to

defend thus:

I (insert name), having been appointed a (insert rank) in the U.S. Army under the conditions indicated in this document, do accept such appointment and do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic, that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter, so help me God.

James Madison, in *The Federalist*, [Number 46](#), compares his vision of state government to federal government. It's fascinating. There, he addresses the same question that Hamilton had addressed in number 29. I quote at length, as he mentions several points of interest.

Extravagant as the supposition is, let it however be made. Let a regular army, fully equal to the resources of the country, be formed; and let it be entirely at the devotion of the federal government; still it would not be going too far to say, that the State governments, with the people on their side, would be able to repel the danger. The highest number to which, according to the best computation, a standing army can be carried in any country, does not exceed one hundredth part of the whole number of souls; or one twenty-fifth part of the number able to bear arms. This proportion would not yield, in the United States, an army of more than twenty-five or thirty thousand men. To these would be opposed a militia amounting to near half a million of citizens with arms in their hands, officered by men chosen from among themselves, fighting for their common liberties, and united and conducted by governments possessing their affections and confidence. It may well be doubted, whether a militia thus circumstanced could ever be conquered by such a proportion of regular troops. Those who are best acquainted with the last successful resistance of this country against the British arms, will be most inclined to deny the possibility of it. Besides the advantage of being armed, which the Americans possess over the people of almost every other nation, the existence of subordinate governments, to which the people are attached, and by which the militia officers are appointed, forms a barrier against the enterprises of ambition, more insurmountable than any which a simple government of any form can admit of. Notwithstanding the military establishments in the several kingdoms of Europe, which are carried as far as the public resources will bear, the governments are afraid to trust the people with arms. And it is not certain, that with this aid alone they would not be able to shake off their yokes. But were the people to possess the additional advantages of local governments chosen by themselves, who could collect the national will and direct the national force, and of officers appointed out of the militia, by these governments, and attached both to them and to the militia, it may be affirmed with the greatest assurance, that the throne of every tyranny in Europe would be speedily overturned in spite of the legions which surround it. Let us not insult the free and gallant citizens of America with the suspicion, that they would be less able to defend the rights of which they would be in actual possession, than the debased subjects of arbitrary power would be to rescue theirs from the hands of their oppressors. Let us rather no longer insult them with the supposition that they can ever reduce themselves to the necessity of making the experiment, by a blind and tame submission to the long train of insidious measures which must precede and produce it.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Civics at 08:53

The Hidden Cost of Embarq DSL

When you look for an ISP, you might some time consider Embarq. If you do, then you need to add a certain undisclosed installation fee when you compare Embarq's prices with those of other providers. This might also be true for other providers too, so caveat emptor.

The extra amount to add in the case of Embarq is about [\\$173.99](#), as of this moment. If you already use Microsoft Windows, then you have already paid the extra fee, and will continue paying it. But if you use MacOS, Linux, or any number of equally capable operating systems instead of Windows, then at the moment, you'd better factor in the extra \$174 when you consider Embarq.

To be fair, it seems that this fee is not tacked on by Embarq itself, but by some other entity that Embarq uses to handle new account set-up. Nevertheless, when you attempt to use <http://install.embarq.com>, even in Mozilla Firefox, it won't work. This is by design. The Embarq installation process requires Windows as a prerequisite. Here's a bit of EcmaScript code from a relevant install web page to demonstrate:

```
var is = new Is();
if(!(is.win98 || is.winme || is.win2kSP4 || is.winxp || is.winvista)) { //alert("You are using a VA UnSupported OS"); }
```

The good news is that Internet connectivity seems to work whether or not you have completed the Embarq DSL installation.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Technology at 15:43

Monday, November 10, 2008

Wanted: Children

Speaking of adoptions, did you see what [Gene Veith](#) posted today? There are many more prospective parents wishing to adopt children in the United States -- including minorities, ages 6-12, and children with disabilities -- than there are children waiting to be adopted. Then why are *any* children waiting? Apparently, because of [the bureaucratic adoption process](#).

Hey, I know how we should fix that. Increase government involvement!

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Life at 17:15

Unwanted Children

The "abortion problem" is not really about choices. It's not that some person has to decide whether an unborn human is also person. It's not that s/he has to decide whether intentionally ending a pregnancy is better than subjecting the child to a particular start in life. The problem is almost as old as sin: some children are simply unwanted.

In some places, it may still be in fashion to dispose of unwanted children by exposing them to the elements, without care, until they die. When that sort of thing was done routinely in the west, Christians were well-known for objecting to it. It won them friends, and also enemies.

Abortion is pretty much the same thing: the disposal of unwanted children. There are differences, but it becomes apparent that the two practices are the same in kind, when you ask why someone would submit to an abortion. The answer is so obvious that the question doesn't even need to be asked: to escape having a child.

In the United States there is an abortion industry, which we probably ought to call "Big Abortion." It has at least as much influence upon the government as Big Tobacco and Big Oil. Ironic that Big Tobacco is accused of not caring about human lives, while Big Abortion is heralded by many of the same people as a humanitarian good.

The stem cell debate in the United States has become ridiculous. How many hundreds of treatments are there now from stem cell research? Offhand, I don't know. It's a lot. Now, how many of them are from *embryonic* stem cell research? Last I heard: none. All those advances were from so-called "adult" stem cell research, which can be done without any harm to a human life. As if that were not enough to show the vanity of destroying human embryos for research, medical research heroes have now actually *made* the equivalent of embryonic stem cells from adult stem cells -- again, without harm to a human life.

So, why do some continue to insist upon federal funding (i.e. my money) for embryonic stem cell research? It's not because of any therapeutic promise. It's not for the economics. The answer is obvious, isn't it? Because embryonic stem cell research depends upon harm done to human life. If you know of another reason that makes more sense, do tell.

If that sounds morally twisted, you're right. But then, any student of history will gladly inform you that moral twistedness is nothing new. This insistence upon federal funding is an outgrowth of Big Abortion, which is founded upon the desire for (or at least apathy toward) the harming of human life.

All this leads us to an important realization. Our society is in a moral crisis. There are these thousands of frozen embryos, and Big Abortion salivates at the possibility of destroying them. Dubious claims are made

that nobody wants them anyway. In most cases, the parents probably just don't know what else to do with them, and have a praiseworthy moral reluctance to discard them. Christians like me claim it's wrong to destroy them with medical experimentation, because they are human. But what can be done about these unwanted children?

I'm happy to say that people are already working on a morally acceptable solution. It's possible for parents to adopt these embryos. See <http://www.snowflakes.org> . Meanwhile, maybe we should reconsider whether it's a good idea to create so many fertilized human embryos in the first place. It may be a practical way to accomplish something, but is it a morally *responsible* way to do it?

I'm not saying there should be a law, necessarily, but that individuals should learn to exercise their freedom with good, informed judgment and love for their neighbors -- even the ones yet unconceived. If that became the norm, Big Abortion might just go right out of business.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Life at 15:42

Some Problems With Socialism

I recently heard a comment along these lines: perhaps many people who recognize the ideals of socialism in our president-elect actually think it's a good thing. Can that be true? It's bugged me since election day. I had thought that Americans in general were astute and freedom-loving enough to recognize a threat to our liberal (as in freedom) republican (as in a republic) ideals and neutralize it. On the other hand, it's possible that so many Americans disregarded such an important issue altogether because of race.

Unfortunately, race has been a seriously divisive problem in the US even up to November 4. Others may disagree with me on this, but I believe that *any* discrimination based upon race, as such, is morally wrong -- even the kind of discrimination called "affirmative action." We are all descended from one gene pool: first Adam and Eve, and later Noah and his wife. (Well, I suppose there could be some rare instances where someone could justify racial discrimination, such as in auditions for a character in a play whose description calls for a particular race. But qualifications like that are not usually the case. In fact, notice Denzel Washington's excellent casting in Kenneth Branagh's [Much Ado about Nothing](#).) God created us to have many differences in appearance, and these are often manifested as family resemblances. Racial discrimination is exactly the same thing as discrimination based upon family resemblances.

Socialism is an economic philosophy meant to be a halfway point to pure communism. In reality, the ideal of communism was never realized by the communist countries, so that their economies -- until China's recent capitalistic infusion -- were more accurately described as socialist.

The economic philosophies of the most famous fascist countries in the 20th Century (Italy under Mussolini and Germany under you-know-who) were also socialist. In fact, the full name of you-know-who's infamous party even incorporated the word for socialism. During the rise of these governments, they were heralded as a wonderful thing by many Americans, particularly the Progressives. Even the German use of eugenics (the systematic elimination of "undesirable" genetic traits by forced manipulation of the reproduction of a populace) was welcomed in some American circles. By the way, that was also a form of racism as morally wrong as anti-semitism.

Speaking of Nazi anti-semitism, it wasn't all about race. It was just as much about socialism. For historical reasons, many Jews had become an economically independent, capitalist force in Europe, standing in the way of the progressive socialist spirit. Genocide became another means for the advancement of socialism. (Interesting parallel today: the sterile genocide of unwanted children before they are born. Abortion also has racial overtones, since most of its millions of American victims are minorities.)

Mussolini was a rock star in America. His form of socialism was a bit different than the one in Germany, but they were kindred spirits. It's interesting to note that one of Mussolini's inspirations was the American national efficiencies implemented during and after WWI. Those efficiencies involved the loss of certain freedoms, which has often been justified in war, including the War on Terror, with the assumption that the freedoms will return afterward. I suspect that some freedoms do not return.

Socialism is all about the sacrifice of individual freedom and responsibility in the hope that a central government will be able to bear that responsibility for us all, and do it better than we could do it individually. By contrast, the United States was founded and flourished upon the principles of individual freedom and responsibility. This entails individual risk-taking, which means that everyone has the chance to fail in what we do, and in fact we will fail sometimes. It entails the assumption that hard work, wisdom, good character, and a godly life are the best way to earthly success. It's what the founders of the United States called "the pursuit of happiness." It can't happen without "life" and "liberty." Socialism, on the other hand, promises that if you give

up your liberty -- freedom to act and assume responsibility for yourself -- the government will control your life to the extent that you will not have to pursue happiness any more. Instead, the government will give you happiness.

Socialism has never kept its promise. Why not? Because we live in a sinful world, after all. Read Genesis chapter 3. That still applies in a socialist economy. Socialism appeals to most people on some level, because we covet the success of our neighbors. Greener grass, and all that. The covetous part of us wants the government to "spread the wealth around," to use recent campaign rhetoric in which Mr. Obama was defending his socialist agenda.

Capitalism, on the other hand, promises much less, and often keeps its promises. It doesn't promise success, but rather the freedom for you to pursue it. It doesn't promise wealth, but the opportunity for you to create it. Sometimes great injustices have taken place in a capitalist system, because again, we still live in a sinful world. That is exactly the reason why we have a justice system. But the existence of lawbreakers does not mean there's something wrong with the laws. It means there's something wrong with the lawbreakers.

Capitalism, not socialism, respects the Seventh Commandment: "You shall not steal." It respects the concept of private property, which we should have the freedom to use as we wish in the pursuit of success. While for many, this pursuit may be motivated by pure selfishness and greed, for Christians it is motivated by love for our neighbors. When we succeed, it's a blessing upon our neighbors in a capitalist economy. It creates and improves jobs, and provides the Christian with wealth which we can use to spread the Gospel of forgiveness in Christ and also alleviate the physical suffering that naturally occurs in an imperfect world. If we don't do this as well as we should, it is not a reflection upon capitalism, but upon the sinfulness in each of us.

Because socialism favors the collective over the individual, it doesn't recognize individual rights, such as we find in the Bill of Rights. Even freedom of religion, particularly Christianity, is inimical to socialism. Just hear [what happened in East Germany](#) first under you-know-who, and later under the communists. Socialism's advocates have trouble implementing socialism where the people cherish and make use of those rights: freedom for the free exercise of religion, of speech, of assembly, of the press, and to petition the Government for redress. That's only in the first amendment, but the second amendment gives those individual freedoms teeth.

A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.

The purpose for allowing the populace to keep and bear (carry) weapons is not only to provide a last line of defense against foreign attack, though it does have that good effect. It's also to better secure the freedom of the people from the tyranny of the federal government, which might some day try to take away that freedom. In other words, the second amendment is a defense against socialism.

The president-elect has pledged not "to take away your guns." But will he try to prevent Americans from acquiring new arms? Will he try to prevent us from buying ammunition? Will he seek to make the keeping and bearing of arms prohibitively expensive through punitive taxation? That's what's been happening to the cigarette industry: taxation as a means to shape society. I don't advocate smoking, but who can deny that what's being attempted there is the loss of freedom and individual responsibility? Some fear that the president-elect will use the same strategy against the second amendment.

Why? Why would a socialist work against the second amendment? The reason should be obvious: because a well-regulated (armed) Militia is necessary to the security of a *free* state.

Socialism is not a good thing. Its advocates pander to the sin of coveting, and break the seventh

commandment by not respecting private property. Some of its advocates go further, breaking the fifth commandment by either seeking the harm of some individuals or at least failing to protect them.

Capitalism, as an alternative, does not fix all our woes either. In fact, no economic system can do that, because this is a sinful world. However, capitalism encourages individual liberty and responsibility, which are in accord with God's will.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Life at 09:16

Wisdom

As I write this, I'm not fully certain of the outcome of this presidential election, but it looks as though Mr. Obama will be elected. It is a hard-fought win for him and his followers, involving every kind of tactic and strategem. If it's not too soon, I congratulate them. Raising and spending nearly a billion [650+ million](#) dollars on a political campaign has got to be a record-breaker all by itself.

Assuming an Obama presidency, the bad news is that he espouses a classic [socialist](#) point of view (as in the USSR, the fascist regimes of Germany and Italy of the 1920s and 1930s, and to a lesser degree the New Deal and other American embarrassments), advocates the barbaric, morally indefensible, and swiftian practice of [butchering the weakest humans in our society while victimizing their mothers](#) for convenience and profit (as in two go into the abortion mill, but only one comes out), has a short but consistent record of eliminating freedoms guaranteed by the Bill of Rights (as in the individual right for Americans [to keep and bear arms](#)), and has no experience actually running an organization larger than either his senate office or his neighborhood in Chicago. He's reportedly on personal, friendly terms with terrorists, both foreign and domestic, so maybe his lack of foreign policy experience won't be a problem.

The good news is that regardless of who wins the election, Christians can still rely upon the providential rule of our Creator. His job experience goes back to the Beginning, whether people acknowledge it or not. More importantly, His plan continues: the salvation of sinners through the message of the gospel and the sacraments, leading to the imminent destruction of this entire world, when He will bring His people to live forever in paradise (as in a place where elections are unnecessary). The blood of Jesus Christ still cleanses those who repent from the guilt of all our sins.

What strikes me now, regardless of who wins the election in the end, is the wisdom of this nation's founding fathers. Reading the Constitution, it seems that safeguarding freedom was rather important to them. With the separation of powers, and their understanding of how long it takes for a large group of people to decide something, the founders clearly wanted us to have a rather weak federal government. It seems amazing, but somehow they answered the question, "What kind of earthly government can best protect this nation many years from now, in case a socialist, morally-twisted strong-arm somehow finds enough of the right votes to be elected president?" The answer is the balance of powers, the checks and balances between the three branches.

"Yes," you say, "but Congress may be in his back pocket."

Maybe. But at the moment, not the Supreme Court. Beside that, the members of Congress have to find enough agreement between them to jump when their Leader says "toad." If they don't jump together, they will automatically mitigate the damage done by our government in the next four years. You and I can contribute to the disagreement between them, because we are the ones who send them there. Political gridlock is nightmare for socialists, but it's usually a godsend for Americans.

The portent darkening our skies is the word "change." It's well known that Mr. Obama does not consider the Constitution to be the essence of our national government. Would he change that, too? Just how far might this "revolution" go?

I'm also sort of wondering how long it will take before the next major terrorist attack comes to the American homeland. I've got to hand it to "the failed policies of the current administration:" they've kept us safe from another 9/11 for 8 years. That can change too. We might be dealing with the fallout for quite a while. Maybe a half-life. Maybe longer.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Life at 21:41