

Digest urth.v026.n008

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 01 May 1999

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/1609>

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Alex David Groce — 01 May 1999, 12:48

On Apr 30, 5:48pm, Kieran Mullen wrote:

Subject: (urth) Re: Digest urth.v026.n008

From: "Ori Kowarsky" <orik at sprint.ca>

Subject: Re: (urth) Are TBOTNS and UOTNS Christian Texts?

Date: Thu, 29 Apr 1999 18:45:04 -0700

I think we're talking to cross-purposes here. The fact that bits and pieces of the Christian story crop up in TBOTNS may mean nothing more than that Christianity was once part of the culture, once informed its myths and legends, and still remains in the form of a half-remembered cultural substrate. If by "theological overtones" you mean that physical miracles are happening, then we'll have to agree to disagree.

Hmm... resurrection from the dead, miraculous healing. Seems like a few miracles to me.

The question is, does the BOTNS necessarily mean Christianity has completely failed in Urth? Well, as far as being a clearly present religion,

yes. However, the church invisible, as I understand it, can continue even if the visible church has vanished--and as I see it, the patterning of Severian's

I'm sorry, I don't know what "the church invisible" is.

The "church visible" is the worldly manifestation of christian religion in organizations, hierarchies, clergy, buildings etc. The "church invisible" is the deeper mystical elements that would exist even if all churches were destroyed.

Severian is a torturer who goes on a journey to his new place of work, on the way he picks up a gem which appears to have magic powers, meets a variety of people, arrives at his job, leaves his job, goes to war, becomes an emperor. Which book of the New Testament should I pick up to compare these events with?

Wolfe has written in one of his essays about Jesus the carpenter, who like many carpenters in his time, may have been called upon to make a cross for some other person's execution. You may feel it's silly, but this are Wolfe's words, not mine. I think that TBOTNS is an "ascending Christology", a story about a person who grows into the role of Incarnation. But that's just my view.

I have to agree with James Jordan's take here (after Wolfe talked him out of the gnostic universe with Sev. as Antichrist) and say that Severian isn't an Incarnation, but a "Christian" figure--he works out the acts of Christ's life, but is, as it were, participating in Godhead rather than being part of it himself.

In what sense is the New Sun an eschatological completion? It's the opposite--it starts things up, and prevents the icy/entropy future of Abaia & co.

Well, it depends upon your eschatology. We only see what happens in the physical world. Maybe they're all partying it up in Heaven. The fact that on Earth the world is restored to a fecund state seems to be a good thing. It's a renewal.

I don't understand what you mean by point (A). Did not the coming of the New Sun kill every human on the planet save a few here and there? Oh, and the genetic breeding stock thoughtfully supplied by the Hieros. As for point (B), Silk cannot restore Christianity unless he knows what it is; that involves somehow learning about, and then believing in, the death, resurrection, etc. Until Silk (or Sev) starts witnessing, again, we're going to have to agree to disagree.

The New Sun didn't kill everyone, just lots of people. And that is not an absolutely bad thing if you believe in an afterlife, since **everyone** is going to die anyway. (You may not like this argument, but it is an inevitable consideration in any theology involving life after death.) "Christianity" can survive in some sense even if no one hears about some guy from Nazareth. In this world there is still the story of the Conciliator, who reconciles the created world with the Pancreator, and suffers in the process. There is still a sense of incarnation.

You seem to be saying that there is no Christianity in Sev's world without televangelists. I think that Wolfe is saying that Christianity is woven more deeply into the nature of things, and that our understanding of the ultimate Christianity may be shallow.

What are these underlying patterns of salvation? In UOTNS the survivors are: Sev, an undine, two men and two women of indeterminate character, who may be very nice people, but are not Christians because they don't believe in Christ.

In certain Christian theologies, that's not necessary. The clams on Mars have never heard of Christ, but this doesn't mean that (in this view) that they don't live in a universe created by the Christian God and that some day there would not be a clam Conciliator.

(I nominate the "clam Conciliator" for silliest concept on the listserver this year.)

The underlying pattern of salvation that I see is that human beings apparently chosen (or bred) for some purpose have been deposited by the Hieros on the planet after the original population has been exterminated. I certainly hope that this isn't a sign of the Christian God.

So God can only work via a Holy Zap? If he guides a doctor to heal someone's arm rather than doing it supernaturally, that's not holy? God can work in mysterious ways. Or maybe not. Wolfe is often ambiguous.

A new chance for whom? 99.99% of the planet is dead! The choice between Ushas may be the lesser of two evils, but that shouldn't blind us to the fact that it **is** evil.

How can it be evil? Evil is the willful infliction of unnecessary pain. You've said that the other choice is worse. Now you can ask why a beneficent God would allow the Earth to get to that state, to force such a choice, but that's a different question.

Everyone dies. The very very scary thing about religion is that it

allows for "greater goods" that seem to allow killing. (Read Chesterton.)

True--although I hardly think Chesterton would have hurt a fly unless it were in defense of something he loved that was under mortal attack (Wolfe loves the story of his buying a pistol on his wedding day to "defend his wife"). Of course, any civil order that allows war under certain circumstances allows for "greater goods" that allow killing. Which includes most religions and all states I can think of. In the 20th century at least, the "greater goods" of the state have the numbers--off the top of my head somewhere on the order of 100 million of their own citizens exterminated by the various attempts to bring a secular eschaton/Utopia to poor old Urth--hence, I'd imagine, BOTNS seeming to imply that although war against the Ascians is necessary and even good, the Ascians themselves are human and to be pitied (and fought "for").

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." - John 8:32

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Carlos Martinho — 01 May 1999, 17:54 · follows Alex David Groce

The "chru
invisible" is the deeper mystical elements that
would exist even if
all churches were destroyed.

This is a very interesting point. When I started to read TSOTT (and I didn't know where things were going to), I thought, at first, that the myths about the "Conciliator" and the "New Sun" were some sort of memory of Christianity, just weakened, warped by time. And I don't know why, but I always thought of Dr Talos play as some sort of Gospel, just warped by time and age (as the Minotaur myth, in the story of the cannon-boat in the labyrinth).

Severian as the Second Coming? I guess it's a possible interpretation. But it leads us to a sort of egg-and-chicken question: in the past of TBOTNS world (suposing that the history, there, was similar to ours) was Christianity just a mythical interpretation of alien/science events, or are the alien/science events of TBOTNS a materialistic interpretation of mystical ones? Or doesn't it matter at all?

Those questions, I believe, make the whole of Wolfe's work even richer; they are not meant to be answered, but to enlarge the reader's worldview while pondering about them.

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"The nostalgia of things unknown, of lands forgotten or unfound, is upon me at times. Often I long for the gleam of yellow suns upon terraces of translucent azure marble, mocking the windless waters of lakes unfathomably calm"

Clark Ashton Smith, "Nostalgia of the Unknown"