

Religion and Politics

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 04 Jan 2002

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/2883>

Exported from an unofficial mirror of a public mailing list. Copyright in each message remains with the person who wrote it. Email addresses are obscured as `user at host`, the form the original archive published. This file was rebuilt from parsed fields rather than retained headers, so it is faithful in content but not byte-exact.

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 04 Jan 2002, 18:37

Sorry for combined answers, but I get digest.

Andy R wrote:

I would suggest that the Whorl books contain a lot of experimental writing about the forms of politics.

This would, I think, be particularly true of the Short Sun books: but it's actually true of the Urth books, too.

If none of the city-states described there are utopian,
I can only suggest that that is because Wolfe does not
think Utopia acheivable in this life.

That would be a Christianly-correct point of view; this is the Fallen World.

Then Nutria wrote:

The "Christian model" of societal hierarchy, to which Wolfe surely subscribes, and which people on this list are free to reject, affirms the following matters, among others:

I would observe before continuing that this is _a_ Christian model of society, though certainly a very common one.

1. The poor you will always have with you. Some people just won't be able to "make it."
- 1a. Corollary: Some people need to be taken care of, by others.

This is the Christian duty of charity. No problem here.

2. Some people have a gift for leadership, and others (most) are gifted in other areas of life.

Which is so obvious as to need no comment.

- 2a. Corollary: Pure democracy is nonsense, though a relative democracy such as the American Constitution envisioned is a good thing. To wit: a variety of ways of selecting leaders, checks and balances in a diversified government, and rulers at various levels (county, state, federal) -- all of which is a Protestantized feudal order.

My only quibble here is with the word "Protestantized." I think that the Protestant rebellion/revolution/reformation is the result, and not the cause, of this kind of thinking. Specifically, I would posit that the proximate cause of the Protestant reXion is the nonaccidental near-simultaneity in Western Europe of (a) the rise of the middle class* and (b) Gutenberg and the moveable-type printing press. The result was that, for the first time, the Bible was available and had a large class of persons with the leisure to read and study it. But that same class was already calling the whole feudal model, and especially the Divine Right of Kings [tm] into question.

* this is wandering near to a sort of Christian Marxism, "the rise of the bourgeoisie" as the cause of everything, but...)

It is also worth noting that, on the one hand, the Christian Utopia, the New Jerusalem, is a _Kingdom_; and on the other hand, that it is a Kingdom in a pre-feudal sense. The model for the New Jerusalem is the Kingdom of Israel under David and Solomon.

3. People usually but not always grow into their callings as a result of their upbringing.

... and the "not always" is the hinge that deconstructs the entire feudal model: medieval stories are full of peasants and seventh sons and the like who wind up rising above the station the feudal system would assign them through sheer ability (calling); less frequent but not unknown are stories of people who fall from position through inability. Thus the persistent medieval image of the Wheel of Fortune.

3a. Corollary: Some kind of political aristocracy, with sons (and daughters nowadays) reared for rule, in inescapable: Kennedys, Bushes, etc. The "skull & bones" elite." The Eastern Establishment. Etc.

Hidden in this assumption is the progenetic model of leadership, which nothing in Christianity warrants (or, admittedly, disallows). The Great King, David, is not the son of a king, but an eighth-son of a shepherd; Jesus, though descended from David, is the son of a carpenter's wife (note the evasion there). From Moses to Saul, Israel is ruled by a priestly class of "judges" rather than a king. Etc.

4. The way differently gifted people relate to one another should be through mutual service and joy in being who they are and in doing what they do best.

Absolutely.

The artisan enjoys his work, and does it to produce things for others to buy.

I would say only "to use."

... Same with the ruler, who is to serve his people with wisdom. This is not a matter of "lessers" serving "betters,"

Thank you. And bringing us back for the moment to Catholicism (after all, GW _is_ a Catholic, by choice), it's worth remembering that one of the titles of the Pope is "the Servant of the Servants of God."

Entrepreneurs become rich by seeing what other people need and/or want, and by serving them by providing it. Monopolists, on the other hand, become rich by "lording it over" other people, and preventing competition.

All of which leaves me a bit puzzled, if you are discussing GW as a libertarian: I have never seen an adequate explanation, in libertarian terms, of how to differentiate a successful entrepreneur from a monopolist, nor of how a "free market" will prevent the latter without governmental intervention(ism). But that's really not relevant to this, is it?

In short, some kind of societal hierarchy is inescapable.

This is where I ask the big question: whether "leadership" need be "hierarchy." That is, because I follow a person, need I accept him as in some way "over" or "better than" me? In the ideal

model, I should think, following would be joyful and voluntary and no need of "hierarchy," as such, would be needed.

Finally, "dark ages" is just sarcasm. What most of us were taught in high school about this period is mostly rubbish, and Wolfe knows it (or believes it, anyway).

Right: there is a very real continuity from the "dark ages" to the "renaissance" which contrasts sharply with the equally real _dis_continuity that strikes at the "enlightenment."

--Dan'l

James Jordan — 04 Jan 2002, 19:55 · follows Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Dan'l,

No problem with your post on my part. I'm only interested, on this list, in understanding where Wolfe is coming from. To answer your question:

This is where I ask the big question: whether "leadership" need be "hierarchy." That is, because I follow a person, need I accept him as in some way "over" or "better than" me? In the ideal model, I should think, following would be joyful and voluntary and no need of "hierarchy," as such, would be needed.

It's just a matter of what the word "hierarchy" means. If someone dislikes the term, that's fine with me. I don't see how we actually disagree in substance.

Nutria