

(no subject)

The Urth list — 14 messages, 10 voices, 17 Dec 2010

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5838>

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Lee Berman — 17 Dec 2010, 09:03

In a previous discussion of this topic I found it a pretty compelling conclusion that if Briah is Christian and Urth is Earth in the future then either:

1. God has broken his Covenant with humanity to never again send a Flood.

or

2. Severian, Tzadkiel and the White Fountain are (somehow) entirely secular and have nothing to do with God.

or maybe..

3. Severian and everyone around him are not really humans so God was allowed to Flood earth again.

I have been assuming everyone here is familiar with Gene Wolfe's words in the James Jordan interview:

JJ: This universe that you set in Briah, or part of it--is that our universe? Or is that a universe that resurrected saints have set up in the world to come as part of the cities that they made?

GW: No. I thought of it as a long past universe. Something that we are repeating rather than something that we are.

I have heard all the arguments on both sides, and I am not one who thinks an author always has the final word on interpretation of his own work. I AM a person who thinks human beings very rarely just sort through all existing evidence to come to their conclusions. Especially in today's complex world, there is just too much contradictory evidence on both sides of any controversial issue.

Instead what we do is start with a conclusion and then sift through the evidence to find support for it and try our best to ignore or invalidate all evidence to the contrary that we encounter.

So for me, the time has come to stop the evidence war on this and each ask ourselves about the personal reasons which have led us to the conclusion we have regarding Christianity in the Sun series.

For me, it was simply the Gene Wolfe quote. Previous to finding it, I hadn't considered the anti-Flood covenant

or the Norse meaning of "Urth" or any of the other evidence. Since I am not a Christian or religious, it didn't bother me to think that Severian and the story I treasure was not in a Judeo-Christian universe. I was willing to take Gene Wolfe at his word. I'm not too political but I am rabidly anti-torture and generally averse to parasitic exploitation of humans by other humans in the manner of chatelaines-khaibits. So, distancing myself from Urth isn't so difficult at all, for me.

I think there are perfectly valid personal reasons for one to prefer the Christian interpretation of Briah and Urth.

I'd be interested in hearing a bit of self-analysis from whomever is willing to share.

Jeff Wilson — 17 Dec 2010, 09:42 · in reply to Lee Berman

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I think it the flood thing was an oversight, though the retcon of it being a previous creation is a laudably clever answer to the riddle of just how far in the future the books are set.

Of course it could be one of the intentional errors put in the book, like in Islamic art, though also as part of the collection of golden age SF tropes. Whacking great technical bloopers appear in otherwise classic stories, and this would explain the unexplainable problems like how tall the Wall of Nessus really is, or Lune's "closer" orbit.

Jeff Wilson - jwilson at io.com
Computational Intelligence Laboratory - Texas A&M Texarkana
< <http://www.tamut.edu/CIL> >

Son of Witz — 17 Dec 2010, 15:18 · in reply to Lee Berman

On Dec 17, 2010, at 1:03 AM, Lee Berman <severiansola at hotmail.com> wrote:

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I see Christ there because it is heaped with Christian symbols. I am not Religious.

Again, a BOOK tells us WHY the Deluge happened. In fact, hundreds and hundreds of stories tell of the deluge differently, with different causes. I believe the Deluge happened in our Earth's past, but any guess as to why is the province of that realm of Speculative Fiction known as Revelation. So what is to say that Severian's Deluge isn't our own, and the scripture has it wrong? Just sayin'.

Marc Aramini — 18 Dec 2010, 15:32 · in reply to Lee Berman

On the flood and whether it is a transgression of scripture -

This is one case where the actual religion of the author has an influence on the way the book was written. A strict perspicuous reading of scripture is NOT a feature of catholic orthodoxy. Indeed, the bible itself and any contradictions contained therein can be dismissed out of hand since the bible was put together by men, and the first 11 chapters of genesis which may contradict any science or themselves are easily washed away by allegorical exegeses, something literal minded protestants cannot do, who appeal to biblical ultimate biblical authority.

When talking to the literal reading protestant interviewer, Wolfe seems to slip back into an

evasive tactic to deal with the problem of God breaking his word, but while writing, I think his original intention did not see a second deluge as a problem because genesis is an allegory in his mind, it is not a literal story, it is simply a nonfactual truth that reveals a deeper truth, so the details ARE NOT AS IMPORTANT AS THE SYMBOLIC TRUTH.

So he thinks for a second and says, I have multiple universal time lines, oh yeah, this is a different timeline, and solves the biblical problem in terms his protestant audience ideologically agrees with.

So he may change his story later when talking to protestants who cannot view portions of the bible as nonfactual and nonauthoritative because they tend to ideologically supplant the parts for the whole: well, if any part is untrue, the whole thing can be untrue. Yet Gene, knowing full well that stories like that of the good samaritan are in the bible but ARE ONLY STORIES ANYWAY, and never existed except to highlight a more nonfactual but truer absolute truth, does not have to be concerned with the details of the symbols when creating, especially in the first 11 chapters of Genesis, which are regarded as a story for primitive man in terms he could then understand, not being factual but being true none the less. This is something that is absent for the most part in Protestant philosophy because it allows too much room for ecclesiastical interpretation and selection and can come to an abusive control over doctrine and policy - read, the Catholic church of the middle ages. BUT ironically it makes Catholicism much more suited to surviving science. Oh, those early chapters were just a story like the good samaritan to teach us God was real, that flood is a symbol of god's purification, and we need not be concerned with the exact details.

Just my Catholic opinion. Maybe I'm wrong.

--- On Fri, 12/17/10, Lee Berman <severiansola at hotmail.com> wrote:

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Son of Witz — 18 Dec 2010, 16:36 · in reply to Marc Aramini

Thanks for that Aramini. Great post.

I don't know the ins and outs of the sects, but I LOVE hearing it when ANY Christian can look at the scripture, understand it as allegory, understand that while not being "factual" something can still be "true". I don't want to offend any Christians, but I almost never encounter any who are willing to look at the symbols with new eyes.

And somehow I'm proud to have pulled you out from lurking... :D

~witz

On Dec 18, 2010, at 7:32 AM, Marc Aramini <marcaramini at yahoo.com> wrote:

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David Stockhoff — 18 Dec 2010, 16:42 · in reply to Marc Aramini

I think that is a vitally important concept in reading Wolfe. Once again, BOTNS, like all other books, is a book made of other books, and the Bible is stories.

On 12/18/2010 10:32 AM, Marc Aramini wrote:

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Jack Smith — 19 Dec 2010, 02:07 · in reply to David Stockhoff

Most protestants do not read the scriptures literally either. There is a strong emphasis on the conscience of the individual, as opposed to top-down authority, which fits in well with scientific inquiry. The know-nothing literal-minded anti-evolutionists are a small minority.

On Sat, Dec 18, 2010 at 11:42 AM, David Stockhoff <dstockhoff at verizon.net> wrote:
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avast! Antivirus: Outbound message clean.
Virus Database (VPS): 101217-1, 12/17/2010
Tested on: 12/18/2010 11:42:48 AM
avast! - copyright (c) 1988-2010 AVAST Software.
<http://www.avast.com>

James Wynn — 19 Dec 2010, 02:58 · in reply to Jack Smith

Jack Smith -

Most protestants do not read the scriptures literally either. There is a strong emphasis on the conscience of the individual, as opposed to top-down authority, which fits in well with scientific inquiry.
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"Literal-mindedness" and a lack of skepticism about Genesis is not really a small minority among _observant_ Christians, Jews, or Muslims in my experience, including observant Catholics. And for many of those "anti-evolutionists", Science is their day job, just not their religion. And perhaps that's all we need know about Wolfe's Christian beliefs and why tBotNS could be interpreted as potentially violating them: SF fantasy is his day job.

u+16b9

Gerry Quinn — 21 Dec 2010, 15:14 · in reply to James Wynn

From: "James Wynn" <crushtv at gmail.com>

Jack Smith -

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I don't really follow. Do you think Wolfe is a Bible literalist? I would find it easier to believe he is a crypto-communist!

- Gerry Quinn

James Wynn — 21 Dec 2010, 16:12 · in reply to Gerry Quinn

James Wynn-

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It's true. You've failed to follow.

That thread was regarding why and whether "The Book of the New Sun" contradicted Christian theology. What I said was that there is no reason Wolfe would have necessarily felt compelled to have Severian's futuristic world align with Christian theology. So, the basic plot and setting of the novel is irrelevant.

u+16b9

Jack Smith — 21 Dec 2010, 21:15 · in reply to James Wynn

Forgive me if this discussion of Biblical literalism is getting off-topic.

The relevance to Wolfe, I think, is how Christians and Christian writers regard the holy

scriptures.

Marc Aramini views Protestants as reading the Bible in a literal fashion, while Catholics read it figuratively. James Wynn says that in his experience both Catholics and Protestants lack skepticism about Genesis.

It seems to me that the main Christian tradition has never favored a literal reading of scripture. But I don't have the evidence at hand to back that up. Let me just give the view of my Presbyterian Church:

"The Scriptures, given under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, are nevertheless the words of men, conditioned by the language, thought forms, and literary fashions of the places and times at which they were written. They reflect views of life, history, and the cosmos which were then current. The church, therefore, has an obligation to approach the Scriptures with literary and historical understanding. "

" Scripture is not authoritative for any and everything, in any and every question. It is not an encyclopedia of information about every area of human knowledge and understanding. So, for instance, it is not appropriate to go to the biblical sources for scientific understanding of such things as biology, astronomy, the structure of the universe, or historical knowledge in general. "

***Presbyterian Understanding and Use of Holy Scripture*, 1982**

On Tue, Dec 21, 2010 at 11:12 AM, James Wynn <crushtv at gmail.com> wrote:

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Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 21 Dec 2010, 21:38 · in reply to Jack Smith

Jack,

Thanks for the Presbyterian view. Here's the (fairly nuanced) Catholic view, from the Catechism

of the Catholic Church:

108 Still, the Christian faith is not a "religion of the book." Christianity is the religion of the "Word" of God, a word which is "not a written and mute word, but the Word which is incarnate and living". If the Scriptures are not to remain a dead letter, Christ, the eternal Word of the living God, must, through the Holy Spirit, "open [our] minds to understand the Scriptures."

109 In Sacred Scripture, God speaks to man in a human way. To interpret Scripture correctly, the reader must be attentive to what the human authors truly wanted to affirm, and to what God wanted to reveal to us by their words.

110 In order to discover the sacred authors' intention, the reader must take into account the conditions of their time and culture, the literary genres in use at that time, and the modes of feeling, speaking and narrating then current. "For the fact is that truth is differently presented and expressed in the various types of historical writing, in prophetic and poetical texts, and in other forms of literary expression."

111 But since Sacred Scripture is inspired, there is another and no less important principle of correct interpretation, without which Scripture would remain a dead letter. "Sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted in the light of the same Spirit by whom it was written."

134 All sacred Scripture is but one book, and this one book is Christ, "because all divine Scripture speaks of Christ, and all divine Scripture is fulfilled in Christ" (Hugh of St. Victor, *De arca Noe* 2, 8: PL 176, 642: cf. *ibid.* 2, 9: PL 176, 642-643).

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

Matthew Weber — 21 Dec 2010, 21:41 · in reply to Jack Smith

On Tue, Dec 21, 2010 at 1:15 PM, Jack Smith <jack.smith.1946 at gmail.com> wrote:

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" Scripture is not authoritative for any and everything, in any and every question. It is not an encyclopedia of information about every area of human knowledge and understanding. So, for instance, it is not appropriate to go to the biblical sources for scientific understanding of such things as biology, astronomy, the structure of the universe, or historical knowledge in general. "

Presbyterian Understanding and Use of Holy Scripture, 1982

I think it would be fairer to say that there has always been a tension between the tendency to interpret Scripture literally and the tendency to treat certain elements in it figuratively. There was great hostility to Darwinian theory from Anglican clergy, for example, although we wouldn't think of the Church of England today as being particularly interested in Biblical literalism. But

the goalposts have moved, in a sense, with each major scientific discovery, and we're forced to sift our understanding of Scripture with what we know about how our world works--though to be frank I don't think a figurative interpretation of the first 10-15 chapters of Genesis really has much of an effect on the validity of Christianity, any more than understanding that the parable of Dives and Lazarus was a story Jesus made up to illustrate a point.

Having a knowledge of literary genre and historical context is indispensable for understanding the Bible. On the surface, there's nothing objectionable about the Presbyterian statement above, although the limits for that hermeneutic don't seem to be set very clearly. There's an awful lot of special pleading and fancy dancing in the mainline churches these days regarding Scripture, most of it looking for loopholes to justify things which are fairly clearly condemned in it. It's unfortunate that many seem to abstract their religious principles from their politics, rather than the other way around.

Matt +

There is something beyond the grave; death does not end all, and the pale
ghost escapes from the vanquished pyre.
Sextus Propertius (54 B.C.-A.D. 2), *Elegies*, IV, vii, 1

James Wynn — 21 Dec 2010, 22:38 · in reply to Dan'l Danehy-Oakes

Jack Smith-

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Matthew Weber-

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I really can't say anything about the opinions of people who write creeds and Statements of Faith. I have known only people who sit in the pews. Of those who attend church devotedly, religiously so-to-speak, regarding what is said in Science Journals they have a curious or professional interest. About what is said in the Bible they care a great deal. That includes Catholics. On the whole, their attitude is like that of Roman Catholic Flannery O'Connor regarding the Eucharist:

"Well, toward morning the conversation turned on the Eucharist, which I, being the Catholic, was obviously supposed to defend. Mrs. Broadwater said [snip] now she thought of it as a symbol and implied that it was a pretty good one. I then said, in a very shaky voice, Well, if it's a symbol, to hell with it."

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