

Michael and the Dragon—On Earth the Battle Continues. Two Case Studies: Narnia and India

Colleagues,

Case Study #1. Narnia

Marie and I saw the Narnia movie yesterday, “The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,” C.S. Lewis’ classic tale of Christ the Redeemer [a.k.a. Aslan, “not a tame lion”] confronting the power of evil in an imaginary world. Yet it is the world we live in ourselves, Lewis wants to tell us. Narnia is OUR world on this side of that mysterious wardrobe door. Though the decisive battle is over (the Christ-figure wins), lethal local warfare continues.

Granted, the daily news keeps the power of evil—both in “them” and in “us”—constantly before our eyes, but we don’t readily see through the headlines to get the cosmic picture, the Big Screen behind the TV screen. And besides, even we modern Christian folk have demythologized “that ancient serpent.” For the most part, it is only the biblicists, or the paranoid—so we think—who tune in on this Big Screen. Most of us, I suspect, hear the lectionary text for St. Michael and All Angels (Revelation 12), the cosmic struggle between Michael

and his angels (we who call ourselves his disciples) and the Dragon with his human cohorts, but we don’t really think it’s about us. Who believes in, let alone fears, that ancient serpent? It’s the terrorists who are the evil empire. That’s

what makes us humans an endangered species. Dragon shmagon! No, that was then, but this is now.

So it takes something like C.S. Lewis' classic tale to show us again the big picture, the Cine-MAX, the cosmic screen on which our own stories are unfolding. Even then, after leaving the theater, it takes effort to keep believing that my own world is the world we've just seen on the screen. It is epic fantasy-fiction, and super-high tech to boot in the film. But is it really us? That all depends on the glasses you're wearing to watch it all. If there is a cross etched on the lens, you'll see more.

In that Narnian world Aslan, the Lion of redemption, struggles to the death (his own) with the Witch of Unending Winter to rescue traitors like us, who have joined her cause. Deep down, she's not really "super-wicked." What she asks for is nothing more than just deserts for the culprits, that the "deep magic" of retribution for sinners merely be carried out. Her icy image in the film, with visage to match, knows nothing of mercy. She will settle only for equity-justice--nothing more, nothing less. Reminds me of that quip from the 70s: "The young demand justice; the old will settle for mercy." Aslan is the agent for "even deeper magic," whereby God's Gospel trumps God's law. But, of course, it's very "costly" gospel.

Lewis' Narnia series is a seven-book series. As our kids were growing up we read all of them out loud. Twice over. So when we have family gatherings these days it's fun to watch three 40-somethings try to stump each other with Narnia trivia quizzes. In these texts Lewis reads the modern world (in his day the world of WW II) as the writers of the New Testament read their own world. "Our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6).

Or again back to Revelation 12: "War broke out in the heavenly courtroom--Michael and the Dragon." After the decisive battle [Good Friday and Easter] concludes before the divine bench, with Michael/Christ winning--mercy-justice trumping equity-justice-- "there was no longer any place for the Dragon in the heavenly courtroom." But not so "on earth." There the warfare continues--twixt Michael and his crew and the Dragon and his crew. The dragon's down-on-the-ground strategies are signalled by his titles: Devil (in Greek, the wrecker), Satan (Hebrew for prosecuting attorney) and Deceiver. On the receiving end of this evil empire is "the whole world." And the wrecker, prosecutor, deceiver is not a happy camper. "For he has come down (to the earth and sea) with great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"

When you get to the finale in the movie, there is planet-wide war in Narnia--creatures of earth, sea and air too taking sides--and, yes, being slaughtered. Whether that is the final apocalypse, you don't know, though it seems as if the White Witch escapes to mount another angry onslaught another time.

But is this really our world? Depends on our eyes. Are we those who claimed 20-20 vision (John 9) and yet were diagnosed as blind by Jesus? Reading the daily news, and our own lives, but not seeing beyond the nose on our face? The Gospel for Christmas day, the prolog (chapter 1) of John's gospel, shows us the lenses he uses. John shows us the Big Screen on which "Little Town of Bethlehem" is playing. It is cosmos-wide. To get the big picture about Bethlehem, says John, you've got to go back to "in the beginning." Three times in this Christmas-day text John mentions "the cosmos" to signal his wide-angle lens. And he carries through with this Big Screen till the end of his gospel. But I digress. Back to Narnia.

If these NT texts are valid, then Narnia tells it like it is.

The reality of evil in God's creation is "bigger" than flesh and blood. That is a constant theme throughout the scriptures. When in our daily lives we encounter (or are the agents for) destruction, deception, accusation, then powers bigger than our own person-power are in the mix, powers that require a lot more than our own energy to cope with--and to overcome. So the "angels of Michael" (Christ-disciples) down on the ground in Revelation 12 do not go against the dragon's accusation, destruction, deceit with their own resources, but they "conquer him by the blood of the Lamb, and by their words of testimony claiming that cosmic victory."

No wonder in John's gospel that Jesus himself is called "parakletos," the Greek term for Defense Attorney. To confront a cosmic prosecutor we need a cosmic defender. When down here "on earth" (where, remember, the BIG battle still rages) we ourselves confront destroyers, deceivers, accusers--even smallish ones--our own resources won't suffice. We need a "bigger and better" defense attorney. Whom indeed we have, who has already done in the dragon in the decisive battle. Easter was "tetelesthai," Greek for "case closed."

Our Easter paraclete urges us to repeat his testimony about us to the destroyers, deceivers, accusers assailing us. Should we forget his testimony--it has been known to occur--he has supplied "another paraclete, the Spirit of truth . . . whom I will send you from the Father" (Jn 15: 26). That second defender's job-description in John is nothing more than "to take what is mine and declare it (again) to you."

But, you may still ask (and I ask myself too): is all that really so? It does seem so far away from how we "process" experience day in and day out. As far away as Narnia. But that may be the myopic malaise of our post-Christian western world. The world of the New Testament (Narnia) was the world we entered

on some of our mission volunteer stints in the past 12 years-- specifically Ethiopia and Indonesia. It was the world of "cosmic powers of darkness" confronting "the light that shines into the darkness." And the darkness was not extinguishing it.

And it still is for fellow Christians we cherish there.

Case Study #2. India

Here's an example from some Christmas mail we just received. Darlene Large, when she is stateside, lives almost next door to us in St. Charles, Missouri. But half of her life (maybe more) each year unfolds in India with child care homes of the agency she created called HOINA, Homes of the Indian Nation. Her regular newsletter "is published to inform our readers of the work HOINA does among the handicapped and abandoned in India." Here's an excerpt from December 2005.

THE BLESSING GROVE

The month of December is here, and everyone in HOINA is busy. We are planning ways to thank God this coming year for all of His mighty blessings and miracles to us. I would like to tell you a story that has gone on for the past three years. About three years ago we were just starting to build a boys' home on our 21 acres of land. After getting the walls up on the dormitories, a villager put a court case against us. Many of you prayed us through that troubling time. I ended up writing the Chief Minister, Chandra Babu Naidu, for help. He replied the next day. Because of him, the magistrate threw the bogus case out of the court, and we were able to continue building.

At the same time, another group whose leader is a pedophile moved into our neighborhood. They bought more than 60 acres of land near us, and I was worried. I took our engineer, Giri; our

watchman; and another staff person into the mango grove across the driveway. We stood there while I prayed. My prayer was one of praise and thanksgiving. It was also a prayer asking for God's protection. I asked Him specifically to send Michael the Archangel to come with his angels to surround the property and keep us safe from evil and allow us to continue our building. As I finished the prayer, I started to open my eyes; but it was nearly impossible because in front of me stood a tall, shining figure. It was like looking directly into the sun. I closed my eyes for one or two moments and prayed a bit longer. In that brief moment, raindrops began to fall on us. When I next opened my eyes, the entire sky from one end of the valley to the other was black with heavy rain clouds. I realized then that this was a heavenly person who had stood in front of me. It could not have been the sun.

A few days later, I went down to Madras to our girls' home. I received a phone call from an old friend. She is a sister with Mother Theresa's nuns, Missionaries of Charity. She wanted to know if we had space for a boy with cerebral palsy. After sorting that out, I told her about what I had seen. She said, "Do you know who that was?"

"No, Sister, I don't have a clue."

She said, "The Lord sent you Michael the Archangel. He is so powerful. You don't have a thing to worry about."

"How do you know this?" I asked.

"I know. The Lord is telling my heart right now."

"Sister," I replied, "that is just what I prayed."

"Well, God is answering your prayer. He is a mighty God."

About a year went by. We built the house. Things went on well.

Giri said, "Mom, we need more toilets in this plan. We can build a block of them in the far back of the property and connect them with a hallway to the main building. But to do this, we need a well." I walked about the property, mostly in the back of the house. Giri called in a hydrogeologist to look into the problem. "Mom, come and see. We found the water," Giri called to me. He took me across the driveway to the mango grove, to the space where the angel had stood. By this time, the mango grove had been properly named, the Blessing Grove.

The next surprise came from a wonderful Christian, an American friend working in Canada. He sent me an email. "I have not been able to sleep for four days. He keeps telling me that you need money for the boys' home. I thought you built the boys' home already. Why would you need money now? I am, however, His obedient servant, and after four sleepless nights, I decided to obey Him and send the money so I wrote a check for 1000 dollars and sent it to your office." I was stunned! Amazing Lord! We needed a bit over 900 dollars for the well. The problem was solved again, and Jesus did it all.

Peace & joy!
Ed Schroeder