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Good Movies and Bad Election

George Lucas had a problem. He wanted to complete the 3-film prequel to his classic Star Wars films, but to do that, he needed to depict the Jedi knights at war. And while everybody knows that a twirling lightsabre is a beautiful thing, it's not so beautiful when it's chopping human beings into twitching piles of hamburger.

Lucas' solution? Have the Jedi fight armies of robots. That way, the Jedi can slaughter enemies by the dozen without seeming cavalier or cruel. Something in us knows that killing humans is distasteful, but killing robots is funny.

The reason for this is that when the Son of God united himself with humanity, he infected human nature with his fundamental care and concern for human beings. But this complicates our lives in those moments when we really need to kill someone. So we resolve that conflict by de-humanizing our enemies:

Obi-Wan Kenobi doesn't kill people; he just kills droids.

Aragorn doesn't kill people; he just kills orcs.

Iron Man doesn't kill people; he just kills bad guys.

And as luck would have it, we have a whole theological system that undergirds this thinking. John Calvin's doctrine of election divides the human race into what is essentially TWO human races:

- 1). The Elect -- the people God created for the purpose of saving them from sin, and
- 2). The Damned -- the people God created for the purpose of damning them, so the Elect would feel more special.

Or in other words, there is one human race that is truly human and is therefore deserving of compassion. And then there's another human race that's not quite as human, at least not so that we'd have to care about them as much as the other guys.

This kind of thinking (whether it's directly related to Calvin or not) opened up all sorts of possibilities in human history which would have otherwise been morally difficult:

Christian crusaders didn't kill people; they just killed Muslims.

General Custer didn't kill people; he just killed Indians.

Nazi's didn't kill people; they just killed Jews.

Now, the average Adopted Life reader has a lower-than-average murder rate, at least according to the criminal background check we run on all subscribers. If you are one of those Mostly-Non-Homicidal individuals, you may think this article doesn't have much to do with you. But Matthew 5.22 tells us that even when we successfully avoid murder, that doesn't mean that we've avoided dehumanizing ways of relating to others.

Speaking of dehumanizing, we Americans have once again entered our yearly election season. Whenever we turn on the TV, we can see that the Calvin effect is alive and well. Because

apparently, there is a good political party with good politicians in it. They love freedom and apple pie and they want our country to be a good place to live. And there's also a bad political party that's full of little Hitlers who hate freedom and are scheming to take over the world and kill your grandma and your little dog too! BWAAHAAAHAHAHAHAAAA!!!

At least according to commercials and the deep, resonant voice that narrates them. And which party is good and which is evil, well, that depends on which party paid for the commercial.

It was in the midst of all this that Jonathan asked me to write an article about the Atonement and its implications for human life. So my big idea right now is that when Jesus united himself with humanity, he also united humanity WITH ITSELF in an unprecedented way, and we've been thrashing out the implications ever since. There is no more US-versus-THEM. There is only US.

Still, US-versus-THEM is a powerful (not to mention politically useful) myth. A myth that gets louder than usual at this time of year. And regardless of your political orientation, your side is working hard to tell you that the other side is made up of inhuman monsters bent on unmitigated evil.

Don't listen to them. Atonement is real.

~ John Stonecypher