

Andrews University

Digital Commons @ Andrews University

Memory, Meaning & Life

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

12-12-2010

History and Conspiracy - Part II

Nicholas Miller

Andrews University, nicholas@andrews.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/mml>

Recommended Citation

Miller, Nicholas, "History and Conspiracy - Part II" (2010). *Memory, Meaning & Life*. 76.
<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/mml/76>

This Blog Post is brought to you for free and open access by the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Memory, Meaning & Life by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact repository@andrews.edu.

Memory, Meaning & Faith

[Main](#)

[About](#)

[Archives](#)

December 12, 2010

History and Conspiracy - Part II



Last week I began a [discussion of conspiracy views of history](#). I distinguished small-scale conspiracies within history, such as criminal syndicates, corporate agreements to “fix” markets, and state secrets, from grand conspiracy theories that attempt to explain the course of history by the work of a small, secret group like the [Masons](#) or the [Illuminati](#). The former types of conspiracies certainly exist. But I proposed that the latter, the grand conspiracy theory, generally violates certain basic principles of the proportionality of historical causation and human nature in relation to secrecy. This week I discuss two other principles of human nature and governance that grand conspiracy theories violate. I conclude by revealing the one grand conspiracy theory that the [Bible](#) supports.

1. Grand conspiracies assume an efficiency and an evil that public institutions and workers generally do not possess – I worked for the government in Washington for a number of years. Whenever I hear conspiracy theories about government, such as the claim that the United States government orchestrated 9/11, my response is that “governments are just not that good or that bad.” They are not that good in efficiently carrying out large events and keeping them entirely secret. Nor are they generally that bad in purposefully pursuing horrific evil, especially when it would be incredibly counterproductive politically.

Governments on the whole are operated and run by people like you and me, possessing a combination of good and bad instincts and desires. Like all humans, they are morally complex, capable of wrong, but also sensitive to issues of fairness and justice. In my experience, on the whole, civil servants desire to serve the public trust as best they can. Those elected to political office can become star-struck with their own importance and charisma, and act with a sort of narcissistic blindness to others. But most civil servants, who are usually anonymous to the public, don’t have to deal with those sorts of temptations.

While government workers have the same tendencies as all of us to procrastination, insensitivity, and inefficiency, I never met a co-worker during my time in government who actually wanted to hurt members of the public. And yet for most grand conspiracy theories to work, there have to be lots of ordinary people within the government pulling levers for evil causes

against their own citizens and keeping horrible secrets from them. This is not only contrary to my experiences, but also to the Biblical view of government, which states that, at least generally, civil leaders are "God's servant to do you good." [Rom 13:4](#).

Some might point to the [Holocaust](#) or [Stalin's](#) Russia or the killing fields of the [Khmer Rouge](#) in [Cambodia](#) as examples of government agents killing their own citizens. Indeed, these are good examples of where civil leaders strayed from Biblical guidelines for the state. And yet again, these stories show the limits of secret state action. The governments in these cases were working against weak, unpopular minorities, or at least political enemies of those in charge. The events were not entirely secret, even at the time. [Hitler](#) had made his hatred of the Jews publicly apparent in his book *Mein Kampf*, the Russian novelist [Alexander Solzhenitsyn](#) had detailed the workings of the [Soviet labor camps](#) in his *Gulag Archipelago*, and Hollywood itself graphically illustrated the violence of the Khmer Rouge in *The Killing Fields*.

It is true that government leaders often *use* a crisis or tragedy to further their own agendas and plans. Their philosophy often is "let no crisis go wasted." But rarely will political leaders *cause* a crisis or tragedy to further a political goal. Causing a disaster or tragedy is a reckless gambit that usually only those on the outside looking to gain power will undertake. Such an example would be Hitler and the [Reichstag fire](#), which he had set to provide an opportunity to seize power. Again, we know about this event because even very powerful, very evil people have a great deal of difficulty keeping major secrets.

The difficulty of secrecy is compounded enormously in the age of the Internet and groups like [Wikileaks](#), anxious to embarrass and expose any group with sensitive secrets. That the U.S. Government could have orchestrated the events of 9/11, and then kept entirely secret about their involvement, is just not plausible, given what we know about government efficiency and the short-shelf life of truly explosive secrets.

2. Lack of Susceptibility to Contrary Evidence – A final point to be made about the grand conspiracy theories is that they are faith positions rather than based on meaningful evidence. This is shown by the fact that most grand conspiracy theories are immune from disproof. Anything that might count against them actually serves, according to their proponents, to support the theory. The government denies that it knew anything about 9/11 ahead of time? Of course they would deny it, that is part of the conspiracy. Why does the mainstream media not report evidence of government knowledge or even collusion in 9/11? It is because the media are part of the conspiracy.

When all proposed evidence that challenges a conspiracy theory is just explained as evidence supporting the theory, then you know you are facing an entrenched ideology rather than a meaningful hypothesis about actual historical causation. History is messy. We can never know all the facts. Most large events will have multiple causes. The swirl and confusion surrounding the facts mean that some evidence will point one way, and some another. If all the evidence only lines up on one side of a question, it is often because the real uncertainties and contingencies of history are being ignored. Rather, a pre-conceived overlay is being pressed down on the messy facts of reality.

All historians face the temptation to press facts to fit pre-conceived historical hypotheses. But grand conspiracy theorists view the vice of pre-conceived ideas as a virtue to be embraced. Their commitment to their "secret knowledge" is one of the marks of the elect—those in the "know" who need not worry about messing with the difficult facts of history.

3. The one true grand conspiracy theory: The Great Controversy – The Bible reveals, especially in the books of [Daniel](#) and [Revelation](#), that the world is a battleground in a universe-wide, spiritual conflict. This conflict is not of human origin, but is guided by supernatural principalities and powers. The book of Job, considered to be one of the oldest parts of the Bible, reveals that certain earthly events, whether tragedy or success, are part of a cosmic conflict between forces of good and evil. The Biblical grand conspiracy really consists of two sub-conspiracies: one for evil, orchestrated by a powerful being termed Satan, the other for good, coordinated by God and His angels.

But these same scriptures also reveal that both God and Satan do much of their work not directly, but through secondary causes. One does not have to deny the existence of miracles to recognize that the Bible sets out much of the work of God and Satan as occurring through normal, earthly cause and effect. Those that choose to follow God's ways and principles are often rewarded by healthy lives, relationships, and finances. These blessings, though, are usually the result of following principles of temperance, kindness and discipline. Those that engage in destructive and evil acts are also typically rewarded by unpleasant consequences to body and spirit. The books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes affirm this view of cause and effect.

Even books that reveal more direct interventions of God and Satan show them often working through earthly agents. The tragedies that befell Job consisted of what appeared to be ordinary, earthly causes: his children were killed by raiding Sabeans, his camels and servants were killed by the Chaldeans, some other children were killed by a tornado, and his greatest challenges came from his friends and wife. In the book of Daniel, the prophet is told that a visiting angel was delayed because of a conflict with the Prince of Persia. It seems apparent that even supernatural intervention interfaces with and respects to some degree the natural order of cause and effect that makes up the world.

Thus, while the Bible acknowledges the existence of this larger grand conspiracy of good and evil, it is one that generally operates within the principles laid down above: the proportionality of cause and effect, the difficulty of absolute secrecy of major actions and influences, the mixture of good and evil within all people.

Some may point to Christ's death on the cross as an example of the violation of the proportionality principle. The death of one person saves the entire human race. And yet remember, that one person was God. Thus, the cause was, in a sense, infinite. It also was not a secret event, but many people have known about it. Indeed, even those that were not or are not directly aware of the cross itself believe in the struggle between good and evil that it represents. This universal struggle is seen by all, the Bible merely reveals the main actors and fills in some details. It explains the evil that does reside in both people and institutions, but balances that by pointing out that good resides in them as well. It is a faith view of history, but there is significant evidence upon which that faith is based, both in the natural world as well as in scripture.

Pastors, theologians, historians and Christian thinkers of all types who believe in the Great Controversy view of history found in the Bible will immediately bring discredit upon themselves and their message should they promote other types of grand conspiracy theories. Yes, the United Nations, the Masons, and even the Illuminati are historic, real world entities. It can be a legitimate exercise to study and understand them in their historical contexts. But attempts to elevate them to positions of grand control, as if their actions can explain the grand sweep of history, are misguided, counterproductive, and unbiblical. We must remember that in the real Grand Conspiracy of history, "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness of this age, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." Eph. 6:12.

Posted by Nicholas Miller on December 12, 2010 in Church and Society, Church History, Philosophy of History | Permalink

Save to del.icio.us | 

Comments

 You can follow this conversation by subscribing to the comment feed for this post.

If the divine cause is infinite, then how could there be a controversy? If the great controversy is based on the war in heaven and the struggles of man against spiritual powers then the center of mass for the controversy is the creature. If the revelation of Christ exposes that we are nothing (For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Gal 6:3); then the idea that the creature can contend with God is an illusion, a deception. If the presumption of power by the creature results in ruin then the revelation is that there is no game, there is no controversy. How can the creature contend with the creator? Perhaps the war in heaven and the conflict of humanity is playing out to reveal this message. The creature who trusts in his own capability deceives himself to his own ruin

and annihilation, while the creature who surrenders his life even to destruction to God finds life from the source of life itself (Whoever seeks to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. Luke 17:33).

Posted by: David de la Vega | [December 12, 2010 at 10:07 PM](#)

Well, the divine cause is infinite because God is infinite, although His actions within the world are not infinite. I think you are well making the point that the Great Controversy cannot be over the question of mere power. The primary cause of all cannot be met or overturned with the lesser power of His creation. Rather, it is over questions of the character of the One exercising that power, whether He truly has the best interests of others at heart, or whether Satan's accusations of arbitrariness and self-interest are correct. Christ's actions on the cross showed that God is worthy and merits the surrendering of our life to him.

Posted by: Nicholas Miller | [December 12, 2010 at 11:44 PM](#)

A few observations:

- 1) We must not limit God by our ability to comprehend or define him.
- 2) An infinite God could have the power to choose to be affected by the actions of his creatures or choose to be indifferent to his creatures, not excluding other possibilities.
- 3) It seems plausible to me that God's Love (if indeed such exists) could affect how he chooses to exercise his Power.
- 4) Within the realm of human experience, an inevitable consequence of choosing to love someone else is choosing to be affected by their actions (including their responses to my attempts to show my love), which may in turn affect my actions.
- 5) It seems conceivable that God's Love might allow his creatures to affect to some extent how he exercises his Power. (Admittedly this is projecting human experiences into my concept of God.)
- 6) I concur with Nick that the Great Controversy motif would ultimately challenge God's Love, even more than his Power.
- 7) One might conjecture that a God who chooses to allow his creatures to affect his actions, without thwarting his ultimate purposes, would be even more infinite in purpose and capability than a God who cannot or does not so choose. (Before objecting to this usage of infinite, be informed that mathematicians have defined multiple infinities, some of which are supersets of others.)

Posted by: [Jim Hamstra](#) | [December 25, 2010 at 08:42 AM](#)

Nicholas Miller wrote:

"This is shown by the fact that most grand conspiracy theories are immune from disproof."

Is the Great Controversy theory immune from disproof?

Posted by: [Jim Hamstra](#) | [December 25, 2010 at 09:18 AM](#)

The Great Controversy is founded upon the premise of universal law and the preeminence of the creatures independent will. The conspiracy advocated is that Lucifer and God are gathering evidence that will prove their case in a celestial court where Lucifer has accused God of establishing an unjust universal law.

Asking if this theory is immune to disproof would submit this theory to experiment that is not within the control or the perception of humanity. The Great Controversy is not comparable to political conspiracy theories because it is based on an entirely different epistemology. Political conspiracy theories are based on historical evidence attributed to human agency but limited to speculation due to limited documented evidence but aggravated by a sheer suspicion of that documented evidence. The Great Controversy is a theory based on the absolute trust on the documented evidence (the Bible) but subject to the interpretation of that documented evidence. The trust in Scripture separates the theory of the Great Controversy from political conspiracy theories. If someone wishes to disprove the Great Controversy because they do not acknowledge the authority of Scripture then the whole discussion is irrelevant. It's like disproving the JFK conspiracy by saying JFK never existed. There needs to be common epistemology in order to approach the Great Controversy theory: a shared trust in the authority of Scripture.

If the author of the Great Controversy claims that her interpretation of the evidence is absolute then disproof is precluded as a matter of faith that would make anyone who claims an alternate interpretation a heretic. Gratefully the author has not presumed such authority; leaving the Great Controversy open to disproof by the authority of Scripture.

Posted by: David de la Vega | [December 27, 2010 at 01:08 AM](#)

Verify your Comment

Previewing your Comment

Posted by: |

This is only a preview. Your comment has not yet been posted.




Your comment could not be posted. Error type:

Your comment has been posted. [Post another comment](#)

The letters and numbers you entered did not match the image. Please try again.

As a final step before posting your comment, enter the letters and numbers you see in the image below. This prevents automated programs from posting comments.

Having trouble reading this image? [View an alternate.](#)



[Contact](#)

[Archives](#)

[Feeds](#)

Powered by [TypePad](#)

Copyright © 2010 Andrews University