



Old Scratch

by Al Schneider

I've come to like Old Scratch as a name for the Devil. The Deceiver goes by many names, of course, among them Satan, Mephistopheles, and Prince of the Air. There are images, as well, one of the most graphic being that of a roaring lion, going to and fro to see whom "he can devour." That one still has me looking over my shoulder from time to time to see whether the ferocious kitty is anywhere in sight. I thoroughly dislike that image. There are also more poetic names like Lucifer, Belial, and Beelzebub. So many to choose from. "Old Scratch," a name used by Washington Irving and a few others, remains among the more sufferable.

In *The Devil and Tom Walker*, Irving reveals a trait of Old Scratch that is quite different from that of the devouring lion. Here, the Devil is revealed as ready to exploit man's weakness. Whatever a man's sin preference, Old Scratch will "scratch up" the soil around it to enhance its growth. Tom Walker's weakness happens to be a passion for wealth. So Tom is eager to make a deal with Old Scratch to gain more. Poor Tom. Alas, he discovers his plight too late. My reading sometimes takes on strange patterns. While reading about Tom Walker's misfortune, I also happened to be engrossed in two other pieces.

One was Ayn Rand's *Anthem*. Rand readers will know that her themes are fiercely supportive of individualism (as opposed to collectivism). It's the "I" versus "we" encounter. No one does that better than Rand. I'm convinced



Things Catholic

by E. J. Lozicki

Science agrees with the Pope on condoms

During his recent visit to Africa, Pope Benedict repeated his objection to the policy for reducing the infection rate of HIV. The core of the policy consists of massive distribution of latex condoms, while the Pope's recommended policy is to increase abstinence education. The condom approach has not improved the situation.

For example, despite a slew of insulting criticisms of the Pope and his recommendation, the infection rate in Uganda, which had an infection rate of 30 percent in the 1990s, now has lowered the overall rate to 8 percent since emphasizing the abstinence education program.

Despite the success in Uganda, the prestigious medical journal, *Lancet*, continues to promote the ineffective massive condom approach. If condoms are so perfect, then why is there such a failure to decrease HIV in Africa?

The first problem is the fact that condoms don't always work. They are not perfect. Anyone who assumes that condoms are perfect will be asking for any and all manner of infection and STDs. Those who have too much confidence in the perfection of the condom manufacturer will get more than they ordered. The more the active users stay clean, the more careless they become, even to the point of discontinuing the use of condoms, and are, therefore, more likely to contact STDs, including HIV. They are also likely to have multiple partners, and the greater amount of sexual activity increases the likelihood of HIV. This has caused the Pope to suggest that the massive condom approach is making it more difficult to heal the HIV epidemic. In other words, the medical journal, by recommending it, is making it more difficult to make progress. The moral lesson is morality must come first. When morality is ignored, immorality grows by leaps and bounds.

Congressman Cris Smith has witnessed and reported on the positive results of abstinence when he toured Uganda.

Dorothy Kwanze, an HIV activist in Kenya, has reported, "Abstinence education remains the best strategy, especially for the risk group aged 15 to 25. In addition to encouraging the massive spread of HIV and other STDs, and by their failure to accept the scientific facts of the progress of abstinence, these scientists are guilty of spreading fornication and having a negative impact on marriage, the family, and personal integrity. This appears to be of no concern to the promoters of "out of control sex."

Edward Greene, director of Harvard University Aids Prevention Research Project, also agrees with the Pope. "He's right. The latest evidence supports the Pope's stance. We already knew in the 1970s that condoms were among the least effective contraceptives, and we now have studies that show an association between condom use and higher infection rates of HIV. So the Pope says that the answer really lies in monogamy, and marital faithfulness. That's exactly what we found empirically."•

Old Scratch much prefers "we" people.

A good friend of mind passed away a few years ago. At the back of the church I spotted a copy of Ayn Rand's *Fountainhead*. I asked one of his sons about the book. "It's the only book dad ever required us to read," he said. I was impressed.

The second piece was an essay written by Catherine Taylor which I found in the *Witness*, a literary journal.

She quotes a South African gentleman who has been to America. He finds Americans "unbelievably stupid. You 'can't talk to them.' We are evidently "shallow, boring and arrogant," and he is "appalled by the narrow-minded, self-centered aggressions of our President" (Bush). Another South African offered similar views. Americans "are all alike. They are duffer-stupid." (Duffer: incompetent, dull-witted.)

If the Africans were critical of American similarities during the Bush administration, how might they view us now? We have since become even more alike. We're working toward an equal distribution of wealth, our work habits are becoming more unionized, our health system is becoming standardized, and as a society we're closely huddled in fear of environmental catastrophe. We've come to look and think alike as though we have all been tossed into a giant blender. We walk hand in hand to the beat of a single drummer. Where, exactly, are we headed?

How dumb of me. How could I not learn from the astute Africans? Or from Ayn Rand? Or from Tom Walker, even?

Now look at me. I'm very much alone as I stand in the presence of my Maker. He reminds me that I was created a person like no other. I was gifted with talents that I was to use while on my journey. What have I done with them? He asks. I am uneasy. I look around. Where are the others that marched with me? Not one in sight. I see no advocates from the government to come to my aid. No sign, even of Old Scratch, except that I can hear his shrill laughter which I fear will echo far into the night. And so I stand there, guilt ridden, forlorn, and without hope.

But you needn't be concerned about any of this. It won't happen to you.•



Friend or tyrant?

by Rev. William Randall

Do you view the law of God as a friend or a tyrant? One can see it as a blessing or as a joy zapper. Maybe God's laws grow more dear the older one becomes.

If the negatives are exaggerated it becomes a heavy burden. If one knows someone who kept it in its entirety, the law looks like a way of life with possibilities. Jesus is the wonderful example.

I started life in a home void of religion and spirituality. We were almost as unchurched as one could be. In my junior and senior years of high school, life took a complete turn. Part of the family found Christ, or I should say that the shepherd found us. I accepted Jesus as my Savior and have never regretted that. We joined a church that called for a very strict form of life. There could be no movies, dancing, drinking, smoking, or playing cards. I'm not complaining because I was spared several of Satan's attacks. We were especially limited to activities on Sunday. Reading the Sunday paper was out, as well as interest in professional sports because games were played on Sunday. One of the positives about the college I attended was that we were told not to do homework on Sunday because that was work. I liked that rule; it made for very relaxing weekends.

All of this is to say that if the negatives are highlighted, the wrong impression is given. Jesus blessed others on the Sabbath day and showed that He is Lord of the Sabbath. The emphasis should not be on what we can't do on the Lord's Day, but on what we can do. Jesus kept the Sabbath. He did not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it.

We are able to go to church on Sunday, and that is a blessing. Many are able to spend time with their families though some cannot, due to employment demands. What we do to make Sunday a time of worship, rest and fun is up to us.

If there are no Sunday evening services at the church one attends for the rest of the summer, I am suggesting attendance of the 7 p.m. services at Maranatha Bible Conference. The conference is located at 4759 Lake Harbor Road.

Sometimes special planning or special expenditures are required, but it would be worth it. We have heard the old saying, "The family that prays together stays together." Projects of Christian service can also fill our Sunday hours and be a blessing. We can add, "The family that serves together stays together."

In closing, I want to say that keeping God's law does not save the soul, but it gives direction for living the abundant and eternal life that is available through faith in Jesus.•

The results of covetousness

by Walter Soderstrom

This is a continuation of the previous articles concerning covetousness. I should begin by emphasizing that to be comfortable financially, and in some cases even rich, is not evil because certain people have honored God and He has blessed them not only spiritually but also financially.

One example from the Bible is the story of Abraham, who was first called Abram. In Genesis, chapter 12, we are told that God had asked Abram to leave his place of residence, and his relatives, and go to a place where God would lead him. Abram was obedient, and although he later did some things which were not exactly right, he generally respected and obeyed God. Because of this, in verses such as II Chronicles 20:7, Isaiah 41:8, and James 2:23, Abraham was called "the friend of God."

The Bible tells us in Genesis 13:2, that Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. Verses following in Genesis 13 show us the unselfish character of Abram displayed in the situation involving the conflict between the servants of Abram and the servants of his nephew, Lot. Since Abram was older, it would seem that the customs of their culture would have required Lot to defer to Abram. Instead, Abram allowed Lot to choose first. Lot certainly appeared covetous in his choice of land, because although verse 10 says that it was a very desirable land, there were serious problems of a spiritual nature, as well as moral. Verses 12 and 13 tell us that Lot pitched his tent toward Sodom, even though the men of Sodom were wicked, and sinners before the Lord exceedingly. In fact, Genesis 18:16 through 19:38, shows some of the evil things that Lot was exposed to and involved in because of deliberately involving himself in an environment so wicked that God in His wrath sent such terrible judgment on the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Genesis 19:28 says that the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace. Lot suffered many things. Genesis 19:1 says that Lot sat in the gate of Sodom, just before the city was destroyed, and in Genesis 19:12-26, we can see that Lot barely escaped, all because of bad, covetous choices. Abraham hoped for a future with God (Hebrews 11:8-16) while Lot, because of coveting temporal things, vexed his soul with the deeds of the wicked city of Sodom (II Peter 2:6-8).•



Recognizing the truth

by Al Wezeman

That's what it really boils down to. Do we see ourselves as knowing the answers to life, or are we sort of out on a limb, so to speak, not sure what's going on in this world? Who's right, who's wrong, or maybe who's in control? Another thought may be that people are brought up, taught to believe a certain way; or maybe, for convenience and fear of losing control, use strong-arm means to gain control.

However, we think the fact remains that there is a realm other than physical. Whether we pay attention to it or not, there exists the spiritual realm. When we think about the spiritual, we are acknowledging the fact that there is a creator. We recognize a creator when we observe the universe. We don't need to go far in our modern world to get huge amounts of information about our universe. All our media sources are telling us many things. Then we can get more and more specific to gain additional information. So, really, there is no excuse for not knowing or realizing that there has to be a creator. The problem in believing that there is a creator could be an unwillingness to stop what we are doing and pay attention.

When we do stop and pay attention, we can have a ready source of information prepared by none other than the Creator of the universe Himself.

The Holy Bible is the only source of undisputed truth. It's undisputed because it is backed up by the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. All the writers of the Holy Bible were inspired by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Bible gives us all the information we need to know about the universe. Man continues to learn more and more about the physical universe but the whole Truth is in the Holy Bible.

Some of the information from the Holy Bible deals with the beginnings of the universe. Some deals with the history of mankind. There is the knowledge of the fall into sin and the consequences of that. The whole Holy Bible tells how God the Creator deals with the tragedy of sin.

The whole spiritual truth as told in the Holy Bible must be recognized as personally needed for every individual on this earth. God the Creator is a personal God and ultimately wants each of us to be with Him in eternity. The only way to obtain this spiritual knowledge is to read the Holy Bible.

A good way to start is to read the Gospel of John in the Holy Bible's New Testament. Once you recognize God's purpose for you, you will want to read the rest of the Holy Bible. May God bless you as you honor Him through His Holy Word!•