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Bad theology, bad art, and a good blog

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Back in 2001, I wrote an essay for *NCR* on my experience reading some of the *Left Behind* book series. It turns out I wasn't nearly ambitious enough -- at least not compared to Fred Clark of the slacktivist blog. Clark, a progressive evangelical Christian, has since 2003 been systematically analyzing, scene by scene, the *Left Behind* novels, which purport to depict the coming end times in fictional form.

Clark's treatment is insightful and a great read; I look forward to seeing the latest installment pop up in my feed every Monday (or Tuesday -- he's not always prompt). If he can be said to have a basic thesis, it is that bad theology leads to bad art.

As he explains in the 2008 post *Growing Pains*:

The Rube Goldberg machine of Tim LaHaye's dispensational eschatology is Bad Theology not just because it's a silly 19th-century invention that requires the vivisection and pureeing of scripture, but also because it's based on assumptions about human nature (and divine nature) that are incompatible with what most Christians believe. It's based on assumptions about human nature, in fact, that seem irreconcilable with what most humans believe -- with what most humans know from experience.

Any attempt to dramatize, to act out, this theology is thus going to result in something that seems false, unreal and inhuman.

For new readers, catching up may be a daunting prospect, but if you're up for it, or just want to browse, one fan helps out by compiling an ongoing index of all *Left Behind* posts. But for a taste, here are a few

memorable ones:

Tin Men, on Christian vocation and what this means for the Christian artist

Fact and Fiction and An Inconvenient Sooth, on the difficulties of finding this neat apocalypse timeline in the Bible

Care Less and The ever-present absence of absence, two entries that take on the books' "insurmountable, fatal failure" to depict the reality of a world in which all children have disappeared

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