

MAGNOLIA MINDS: The true nature of conspiracy theories

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I've been thinking about the mechanics and mindset of how conspiracy theories work. My conclusion is that conspiracy theorists can often create a world that is much worse than the one in which they actually live.

This may seem like an odd topic for a Magnolia Minds column. I intend to take this to a virtuous place, and we'll end up there. Promise.

I'd add, too, that this isn't about COVID, necessarily. The new variant seems to be one in a perpetual series. This has been a ripe place to look for conspiracy theories, but it certainly isn't the only place. I'll strive mightily not to judge you or your beliefs. I have my own, as do you, so no condemnation.

I'll make a distinction between conspiracy theories and *plots*. History is rife with people plotting – starting wars, planning assassinations, even the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. A conspiracy theory, though, operates in a different realm. I'll give you an example.

I'm old enough to remember the assassination of U.S. President John F. Kennedy. The official, final word is that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone. But did he? I won't use my space here to delve into all the Kennedy assassination conspiracy theories, because there are a gazillion out there.

Here's what common sense would say. Kennedy was considered the leader of the free world, right? Isn't that the traditional title bestowed on the President of the United States? So is it plausible that a "nobody" like Oswald could pull off such a heinous act?

I mean, isn't it more reasonable to assume that someone or some group equally as powerful as Kennedy had to have been responsible? Because if a lone wolf like Oswald could pull off something like that on his own, then none of us are safe.

That's kind of scary so the natural human impulse is to seek out what *really* happened, because the thought that one person, working alone, could assassinate the President is much more disconcerting than believing there was a worldwide conspiracy in place.

I think it's reasonable to assume there are plenty of bad people out there who would relish the opportunity to profit from a tragedy. It happens all the time.

Many years ago my hometown of Elba, Ala., was flooded by a breach in the levy that protected the town. My parents' home was right in the flood zone. As soon as the water subsided, it wasn't long before they heard a knock at the door.

There was a large truck and trailer with a crew of men who

wanted to pull up the ruined carpet in their house and replace it with fresh new carpet. As it turned out, the offer was a legitimate business deal. My parents accepted and had new carpet in a couple of days.

The company made some money off my parents, money that wouldn't have come their way if the flood hadn't occurred – but did the carpet company cause the breach in the levy that cost my parents that sum of money? Uh, no, but that's an exaggerated example of how a conspiracy theory works.

Because of some odd quirk in human nature, we assume there is a “they” out there. Off the top of my head, I can think of the Freemasons, the Illuminati, Scientologists, FEMA, the New World Order, the Federal Reserve, Halliburton, Google, the Vatican, the Bilderberg group, Walmart, the Rothschilds, the Knights Templar, the UN, Skull and Bones, the Koch brothers, George Soros, the Trilateral Commission, the Knights of Malta, Exxon Mobil, Zionists, and the lizard people who might be considered “they” in a good conspiracy theory.

If the world is beaten down to a place of despair, famine, illness, and chaos, “they” benefit. “They” will force us to do awful things, like convert to the metric system or listen to atonal music.

What happens is that conspiracy theorists piece together a narrative based on snippets of information that seem credible. Problem is, they don't ask themselves if such a conspiracy could actually exist. They don't challenge their own thinking. Rather, they simply want the essential parts of their story to mesh with the beliefs with which they identify. (*Read that again.*)

It's easier for some people to believe in lizard people running the world, because that absolves them of accepting the reality that we live in a fallen world where bad things – disease, poverty, natural disasters, etc. – happen, and happen

frequently.

The impulse is to find scapegoats. *Someone* has to be responsible for the bad and that *someone* is out to get us and we're not about to be enslaved by some nefarious overlord(s).

If you're still with me, hear this: evil is rampant in the world. Satan wants to destroy. He uses human agents to further his wicked purposes. He might even use conspiracy theories. This is a fact. If you're a believer, you know this already. More on that later.

The problem is that we can struggle to identify what is *real* wickedness. I'd suggest that conspiracy theories are, in themselves, potentially satanic. Conspiracy theories divert us into looking at imaginary, irrational beliefs rather than identifying true evil and confronting it where it's really occurring.

Resisting evil is always appropriate. Fight it tooth and nail. Just make sure you're fighting a real enemy and not some imaginary boogeyman.

I've observed that people resent it when I'm not as troubled as much by the state of the world as they are. I see evidence of that in veiled or sometimes overt putdowns. Using terms like "sheeple" to describe me or being encouraged to "wake up" are very revealing. Devaluing me is not a good way to bring me around to your way of thinking.

Occam's Razor comes into play with conspiracy theories. What's the most likely scenario? It's going to be the simplest. Conspiracy theorists always concede more power and ability and competency to their theory than is actually there.

Conspiracies are like chains. The more involved a conspiracy, the more likely it will be outed and then just like that weakest link in the chain, it will cause the whole thing to fail. Conspiracies won't stay a secret for long when there are

a lot of people involved.

Most of us have never experienced a really major catastrophe. Most of us missed the 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic, the Great Depression, and two world wars. We've seen bad things happen in other countries but not in ours, so if we're being submitted to a major catastrophe these days there has to be a deliberate hand at work, right?

There has to be a plot of some sort of evil human design. That's the way many people try to make sense of it.

I'll say this again. We live in a fallen world. We deal with evil in tangible and spiritual ways alike. Before Jesus returns, we will continue to live in this fallen world. What are we to do?

We are to fight the *realevils* and not sensationalized, hysterical, unreal monsters. Let's make a difference in the life of that terrified young woman who is pregnant and alone, or the neighbor who is dealing with a terminally ill spouse, or the family who through no fault of their own has had their electricity turned off because both the mom and dad are out of work and struggling to find jobs.

Be salt and light. Encourage the downtrodden with words and deeds. If you want to invest in something, invest in that individual who is yearning for Jesus and doesn't even know it. Take the energy you'd otherwise expend wondering what the Freemasons are up to and instead make a difference in the life of someone you can actually impact with Christ's love.

Remember – it's always appropriate to look in the mirror from time to time and say, "You know, I could be wrong."

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