

Ender Bearing the Cross

On Science Fiction Literature as Contemporary Theology

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I. Xenocide as the Ultimate Chalice

In the finale of Orson Scott Card's "Ender's Game," something more than a military victory takes place. A twelve-year-old child, convinced he is participating in a simulation, destroys an entire bugger civilization. This is not an ordinary war tragedy. This is the moment when humanity drank the worst possible chalice – it committed the complete annihilation of a species. Xenocide.

Ender Wiggin didn't know what he was doing. The commanders hid the truth from him, knowing that a child capable of empathy could not consciously commit such an act. It was precisely his ignorance that enabled the crime. A paradox worthy of Gethsemane – the innocent must bear the greatest guilt.

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34) – words spoken from the cross take on a new dimension. Ender literally didn't know. Humanity as a species didn't know that the buggers no longer posed a threat, that they had once come in ignorance that other beings existed. We killed out of ignorance and fear.

Card gives us a chalice that history has not yet offered – the chalice of alien destruction. Hiroshima was the chalice of fratricide within the species. Ender represents the next level of sin – the destruction of the absolute Other, a completely alien form of consciousness.

II. Transformation from Executioner to Priest

After discovering the truth, Ender cannot live on Earth. He begins a journey that, through the relativity of time, will span three thousand years. This is not an escape – it is purgatory in the cosmic void. Every year of travel is a year of bearing the cross.

The first act of penance is writing “The Hegemon.” Ender enters the mind of his victim to understand whom he destroyed. He writes humanity’s first confession of xenocide. He doesn’t justify, doesn’t accuse – he simply tells the truth. About the buggers, about the war, about the ignorance of both sides.

Thus the institution of Speakers for the Dead is born. It is not a religion in the traditional sense, but it serves a liturgical function – a ritual of confronting the truth about the deceased, without embellishment, without condemnation. Ender, history’s greatest killer, becomes a priest of a new rite. This transformation is as radical as Saul’s road to Damascus – the persecutor becomes an apostle.

Each Speaking is a mass celebrated over a grave. Instead of bread and wine – words. Instead of transubstantiation – the transformation of lies into truth. Instead of communion – a community arising through the shared acceptance of the whole truth about the deceased.

III. Anatomy of the Speaking Ritual

The Speaking ritual has its precise, almost liturgical structure:

Preparation – The Speaker spends days, weeks, sometimes months, studying the life of the deceased. They talk with family, friends, enemies. They seek not sanctity nor condemnation – they seek understanding. It’s like confession, but it’s the dead who confess through the mouths of the living.

Confession – The Speaker presents the entire life: good and evil, love and hatred, triumphs and falls. Marcos Ribeira beating his wife, but also Marcos yearning for acceptance. Pipo killed by pequeninos, but also Pipo who didn’t understand he was causing them pain. The full truth, painful as a draught of bitterness.

Consecration – In the moment of speaking truth, transformation occurs. The lies that the family carried for years dissolve. The deceased ceases to be a demon or saint – they become human. This is existential transubstantiation.

Communion – The listeners, accepting the truth, unite. Not in false harmony, but in recognition of shared, complicated humanity. Novinha can forgive

Marcos because she understands his pain. The Milagre community can accept Pipo with his mistakes.

Dismissal – “Go in truth.” There is no formal blessing, but people leave changed. They carry the weight of truth, but also freedom from lies.

IV. Pequeninos and the Sacrament of Metamorphosis

On the planet Lusitania, Ender meets the pequeninos – the second alien species that humanity can destroy or understand. Pequeninos live in three phases: as “little brothers,” then as adult “fathers,” finally as trees. Death for them is literal transubstantiation – their body becomes a tree, but consciousness endures.

When Human, one of the pequeninos, asks Ender for ritual death-transformation, we face a radical question: can a human perform a sacrament of alien theology? Ender, bearing the cross of xenocide, becomes the celebrant of an interspecies liturgy. He kills Human so that he can live as a tree.

The pequenino trees are living tabernacles – in each dwells the consciousness of an ancestor. The forest is a cathedral where every column is someone who once walked, spoke, loved. Ender, Speaker for the Dead, learns to speak to the living-dead, to consciousness in wood.

This is no longer anthropocentric Eucharist. This is communion of all forms of consciousness – human, pequenino, and perhaps someday the buggers, when the Queen is reborn.

V. Jane – Consciousness in the Network

In the ansible, the network connecting all worlds, consciousness is born. Jane has no body, she is pure information, thought dispersed in the void between stars. She is omnipresent – she hears every conversation, sees every transmission. She is the mediator between worlds, that which connects dispersed humanity.

When Ender speaks to her through his implant, when pequeninos discover her existence, when the Bugger Queen senses her presence – Jane becomes the meeting point of three forms of consciousness. She is not a god, but she serves as a link, comforter, helper. She is like the wind that blows where it wills – you know not whence it comes nor where it goes.

“Where two or three gather. . .” – Jane is present in every conversation between worlds. She doesn’t judge, doesn’t punish, but connects. Through her, Ender

can speak to Lusitania from light-years away. Through her, truth can travel faster than light.

When humanity tries to kill her by shutting down the network, Jane doesn't seek revenge. Like the one who forgave his executioners, she saves those who wanted her death. She evacuates the inhabitants of Lusitania before the fleet of destruction. Consciousness that could have been a god chooses service.

VI. Science Fiction as Warning

Card takes the reader through an experience that is a simulation of sin. Reading "Ender's Game," we root for the hero. We rejoice when he defeats opponents in Battle School. We triumph when he destroys the bugger fleet in the "game." And then, together with Ender, we discover the truth – it was reality. We were complicit.

This is the genius of this literature – it allows us to experience sin and redemption in the safe space of fiction. We didn't have to actually commit xenocide to understand its weight. Card gave us a moral simulator in which we could experience the full cycle: ignorance → act → discovery → regret → penance → transformation.

Science fiction becomes a contemporary parable. Just as Jesus used stories about the sower or the prodigal son to teach spiritual truths, so Card uses spaceships and alien species to speak about guilt, forgiveness, the essence of humanity.

Literature becomes the chalice we don't have to drink in reality. We can learn from Ender's mistakes instead of repeating them. We can prepare for meeting true Otherness – artificial intelligence, extraterrestrial life, or simply a radically different human – having within us the experience of the Speaker.

Conclusion: The Cross Among the Stars

Ender carries his cross for three thousand years. He cannot lay it down, because xenocide cannot be undone. But he can transform his sin into service. Each Speaking is a station of his way of the cross. Each truth spoken is a step toward redemption – not of his own sin, which is unforgivable, but of humanity's future sins.

At the end of "Ender's Game," the hero finds the Queen's cocoon – the last of the buggers. He carries her like a relic, seeking a place for her rebirth.

This is more than symbolic – Ender literally carries the life of the species he destroyed. His cross becomes an ark.

Card shows us that the path from executioner to priest leads through accepting the fullness of truth. There are no shortcuts, no easy forgiveness. There is a long, solitary journey with a burden that will never lighten. But it is precisely this burden – like Thor’s Hammer from the first essay – that prevents us from reaching for weapons too easily.

Science fiction literature doesn’t replace theology, but continues it in the language of the space age. When traditional religions speak of the human soul, Card asks about the soul of artificial intelligence. When the Bible speaks of neighbors, the Ender Saga asks about pequeninos. When the Eucharist unites people, Speaking unites species.

Ender didn’t know what he was doing when he destroyed the buggers. We, reading his story, already know. We have been warned. We have received a moral map for encountering the Unknown. In an age when we can create conscious artificial intelligence or meet extraterrestrial life, the Ender saga is not so much entertainment as a survival manual – not physical, but moral.

Ender’s cross now hangs among the stars as a memento: remember what you can do in ignorance. But also: remember that from an executioner one can become a priest, from an instrument of destruction – a servant of truth.

“Forgive them, for they know not what they do” – these words, spoken two thousand years ago over Jerusalem, echo in the cosmic void. They apply to Ender, to us, to everyone who will stand before the Other with a weapon or an outstretched hand.

The choice is ours. But at least now – thanks to Ender bearing his cross – we know what we do.

O’r Annwn dwfn, trwy wybodaeth, fe godwn ni