

KELVIN BUECKERT

The Decline of the Church (And Other Stuff
Church People Don't Like to Talk About)

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Introduction

What have I got myself into?

I'm sure that question is burning in your mind. That is good. That means you are thinking and thinking is exactly what this collection of blog posts is intended to provoke.

I write a post for my blog at least once a week, so naturally, after awhile these posts start to pile up. I went through them and compiled all the ones that dealt with religion, the Church, and/or Christianity.

In these posts I tackle issues of race, the problem of evil, the problem of suffering, and many other issues that Church types are often afraid to discuss. However, they are not meant to tear down specific people or personalities. They are only meant to provoke constructive discussion on different ideas.

That's it. I promise.

Did I get it right all the time? I'd love to think so, but the entire world knows that probably isn't the case. All I ask is for reasonable consideration and discussion of my ideas and I'll grant the same to you and yours. If Scripture can be found to settle the issue, then we'll leave it at that.

Fair enough? Good.

Thanks for diving into this collection, I hope it provokes you...in a good way :)

Feel free to get in touch with me if you want to discuss any of these items further.

Have a good day,

Kelvin

www.kelvinbueckert.com

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The Problem of Evil



To say that evil is a problem is an understatement.

If you doubt the capacity of the human race for evil, take a moment to watch the news sometime.

However, is it possible to say that someone is being evil without also assuming that there is also some standard of good?

If there is no real standard of good, then there can be no evil. All that would exist in a world without standards would be meaningless actions, none any

better than the other. In such a world it would be foolish to expect justice for anything, for nothing could really be considered as wrong.

However, if there is some standard of good, then, wouldn't it follow that the opposite of this standard would be evil?

In world subject to some standard of goodness, it would only be natural to long for justice...for goodness.

The next questions are natural ones. If there is a higher standard, who created this standard?

If there is a higher law, who was the chief justice who handed down this law?

Could a higher law be a product of evolution?

Well, caring for the weak is usually celebrated as a virtue, but this and other virtues don't really fit in with the evolutionary theory that only the strongest specimens survive. Caring for the weak, showing love and mercy to your enemies doesn't help you get ahead. Might and cunning is what you need to survive in a world full of animals. Think of it, allowing the weaker genes to survive would only weaken your own genetic line and eventually ensure your own extinction.

If there is a higher standard standing in opposition to the evil instincts found in the human race, wouldn't it make more sense that this standard would come from a source outside the human race?

Could it be that there is more to this universe than the madness we see on our televisions?

I have faith that there is, that faith is the foundation of my hope.

The Quest

*For now you may find yourself stumbling
but I urge you, choose the path leading upward, toward the battle
noble squire, don't stop walking
away from that valley cursed by the death rattle
for there are only two paths to choose from here
at the dark crescendo of your ordeal
the easy path that leads downward to the crowded cauldron of fear
the feast of fools, where the filthy rags of the jesters reveal
the empty reward that comes from avoiding the trial of fire
choose instead the way of the crown prince, your master
feed all you have to give to its foundry, watch its flames leap higher
for through the struggle, you will be given jewels glistening with luster
the priceless souls you've encouraged through the example of your courage
those you've freed from the cackling of jesters living in poverty valley
stay strong in your convictions, cling to the words of this weary sage
our prince longs for a greater reward to tally
indeed dear squire, longing to be a knight
the punishment for those who choose to travel the narrow road
will be victory, ultimate freedom from this treacherous night
the well-deserved harvest of all good seeds that you have sowed...*

The Problem of Evil 2



1. Evil exists, therefore a good God doesn't exist. Taking this argument further, if humans were actually good, they too would restrain evil. Many times humans don't give a hoot about anything other than themselves, so,

does that prove that good humans don't exist?

2. If God is good how could he allow humans to do so much evil? On the other hand, what if the fact that humans don't immediately get exactly what they deserve for the evil they do, shows that God is actually good, slow to anger and full of grace?

3. How could a good God send anyone to Hell? Would God actually be good if he never got around to punishing people who do evil?

4. What if the human race would shake their fist at the sky and shout, "look at this world you created, it's a mess!" And God would shout back, "Wait a minute, isn't that mess something you people created?"

And the human race would shout, "God why don't you do something good for a change?" And, God would again shout back, "I already did something, I created you. I gave you a good world to live in, an abundance of talents and good opportunities to use them for the good of those around you, is this not good?"

The Pilgrim and His Lack of Progress

The city is doomed!

Get out while you can!

Find Jesus!

With these words of the prophet echoing in his brain, Pilgrim went out wandering on the path of life...searching for Jesus.

The dour Village of Tradition was the first stop on his quest. Yet, it didn't take Pilgrim very long to realize that all the rules he had to follow to be accepted in the village, all the cliques he had to join to be loved had little to do with Jesus. The prophet had said that Jesus was a friend of sinners...while the residents of the village of tradition avoided sinners at all cost.

The prophet had said that Jesus spoke of loving their enemies while the residents of the village devoted their lives to the pursuit of political power in order to force their their enemies to follow their own agenda...indeed, the residents of the village prided themselves on being righteous, but it what clear to Pilgrim that the residents were simply self-righteous pharisees, much like the residents of the city of destruction he had just left.

Somehow, despite the many unspoken and unwritten laws against speaking the truth in this village, Pilgrim summoned up the courage to point this out at one of the many meetings that were held in the town square. As he spoke, the gathering soon dissolved into a crescendo of bellowing and outrage. Pilgrim

soon found himself running for his life, chased by a mob of pale zombies, all baying for his blood.

Somehow, he managed to escape their clutches...but he knew that the pharisees would continue to hunt him until he received the punishment they thought he deserved. His time was running short...he had to find Jesus.

Pilgrim picked up his pace as he traveled the trail of life.

The next stop on his quest was Vanity Fair...a riotous carnival on the open plains just outside of the city where he had come from. Towering over the revelry was a giant neon sign that flashed the word, "Jesus," in bright red for the world to see. After the grim colors of the village of tradition, the sight was a refreshing one. Perhaps here he would at last find Jesus!

As Pilgrim eagerly plunged into the swirling mass of happy revelers, he could see a long line of colorful, brightly lit booths. There in the booths were the well dressed carnival vendors, all preaching loudly of wealth, health and happiness...all available for a small monthly donation. For a moment Pilgrim was tempted but then he remembered the whispered words of his teacher, the truths that Jesus was homeless, a man without a place to lay his head. With that in mind it seemed unlikely that Jesus could be found here in the chaos of carnival games. Pilgrim turned his back on the loud shouts of the carnival barkers and continued in his search. For a few joyous hours he was caught up in the thrill rides of Vanity Fair. The thrill riders were a fun bunch to hang around with and many good times of fellowship were shared. Perhaps these people had the answers...perhaps they knew where Jesus could be found. In a quiet moment between thrill rides, Pilgrim summoned up the confidence to raise some of the deeper questions of life. The questions that he had been wrestling with ever since he left behind the city of his birth.

Yet, these questions set off the same reaction one might expect if someone had walked naked into a Church.

After a moment of disturbed chatter, the thrill riders deserted Pilgrim with the dour comment, "we don't like to talk about those kinds of things around here."

Pilgrim was left as a lonely black silhouette, lit up in the colorful strobe lights of the carnival. Again he remembered the words of his teacher, the shabbily

dressed prophet who had encouraged him to leave the city of destruction in his search for truth.

Jesus had said, the truth will set you free...so, people who refused to speak of the truth, just because it was difficult, could not be serious students of Jesus. Pilgrim sighed as he realized how much time he had wasted here in this fun but ultimately shallow and empty carnival.

When it got right down to it, the Village of Tradition and the Vanity Fair had much in common. They both were more concerned about themselves and their own agendas than about actually finding Jesus.

Pilgrim searched the empty, nuclear blasted, horizon. As he took in the landscape of scarred, twisted trees he wondered where he could travel next in his quest for truth.

Just outside the town limits of Vanity Fair the angry mob of tradition still waited for him, hungry for his blood. Cackling, licking their lips with anticipation over the judgement he would soon receive. Within the carnival he was simply ignored and left to his own devices...an uncomfortable intrusion into the lives of citizens whose priority was their own comfort. He couldn't stay here.

Where to go?

What to do?

He had to do something!

Rockets were falling from the clouded sky like a rain of meteors, the destruction prophesied by the prophet was at hand. This gave Pilgrim an urgency he had never known before as he again set out on the trail of life...searching for truth, running to avoid the zombie mobs of tradition that waited for him at every turn.

Years later, after he had finally found rest at the feet of Jesus, Pilgrim reflected on the lessons he had learned in the terrible days he wandered the world of the walking dead. How true success isn't found in gathering up things doomed to destruction...but in investing in the human beings of eternal value. How a divine victory isn't found through self-righteous boasting but in the humble voice of surrender. How Jesus isn't found sitting in the grand halls of

human grandeur...but by all those wretched Pilgrims who whisper for mercy when they stumble...when they falter...

Motivational Meditation of the Month.

Karma says we'll all get exactly what we deserve for everything we do...which is actually pretty terrifying when you think about it. However, what if divine grace is available for those rich in wealth but poor in character, all the wretched souls that grasp for things instead of for love, for all the ugliness in a fallen race?

Wouldn't embracing a grace like this give us true peace, freedom from the fear of karma?

What if the great mystery isn't, why does God allow evil?

But why does God still allow so much beauty and goodness to enter a world where humans constantly create evil?

Wouldn't a grace like this be the most amazing mystery of all?

5

The Crazy Preacher



The preacher was a nutcase!

Something had to be done!

But what?

As the discussions continued late into the night, the board members took

turns listing the many sins of the preacher.

Word around town was that the preacher had been seen in the company of prostitutes and other sinners. He had even taken a trip down to the reserve of undesirables just a few miles out of town. Nobody did that! Everybody around the table that night knew that only people of a certain race could ever be accepted by God. Their own race! The board members shook their heads and gnashed their teeth at the horror of all the the things they had heard. Someone in a position of leadership should maintain an air of respectability!

The mood around the board room table was dire. Most thought that firing was too good for a preacher like this. Yet, even at this point there were still a few moderate board members who urged restraint until all the evidence could be heard. So it was that the chairman gave permission and the reports of the preacher's misdeeds continued.

"He preaches stuff about loving your enemies, but you know how things are, we've got to fight to get things back on track. If we turn the cheek like he says, where's that going to get us? Under somebodies thumb, that's where."

"He's always out there with the common people, you'd think if he took his job seriously, he'd spend more time with the right people. People with money and influence. People who can help us build an even bigger building!"

"Indeed. Indeed."

Everyone around the table stroked their long grey beards in agreement. It was common knowledge that the business of Holiness was confined to a certain sacred building and that the board members themselves were the ones appointed to administer this business of righteousness...for a reasonable fee of course.

"Um. Pardon me. What did the preacher say when you confronted him with all these things?" The last remaining moderate member of the board asked timidly from his position in the back corner of the room.

"That so-called preacher called us children of the Devil!" The chairman of the board snapped, irritated that anyone could still be on the fence about a preacher like this.

Everyone in the room gasped with horror.

They, the ones so well-trained in the art of preaching?

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