

Things We Do (and Don't) Believe

Grace called me from college to talk religion. It was the day after Bill Nye ("the Science Guy") had debated Ken Ham, the founder of the Creationist Museum on such questions as whether the world had been created in six days (about 6,000 years ago) or billions of years ago by the process of evolution. Also, I think, whether the dinosaurs died in Noah's flood. Ham, representing Biblical Christianity, holds to the six-day, six-thousand-year, drowned dinosaur theory. And that was Grace's frustration: "But I'm a Christian, and he doesn't represent me! I also believe God created the world. But I don't have a problem with evolution! And now the whole internet is sneering at the ignorant things that people think I believe!"

In fact, most people have no idea what Christians really believe, and if you asked most people (including, sadly, many Christians) what we teach, you would get something like this:

What do Christians believe about God the Father? He is omnipotent and holy; he has laid on humanity impossible demands and gets angry if they aren't carried out. He sometimes interferes in the world arbitrarily, showing a great deal of favoritism. He likes to be pandered to and is always ready to pounce on those who make mistakes or have a bit of fun.

What do Christians believe about God the Son? He's not like God. He's friendly to us and did his best to reconcile us to God.

How did that reconciliation happen? God really wanted to damn everyone, but his vindictive sadism was satisfied by the crucifixion of his own Son, who was quite innocent and therefore an attractive victim. This is called "the Atonement."

Why did God want to damn everyone? Because of sin.

What is sin? Sex (unless it's for the purpose of having children, in which case it's permitted so long as we don't enjoy it), getting drunk, saying "damn," murder, cruelty to animals, not going to church, most kinds of amusement. "Original Sin" means that anything we enjoy doing is wrong. *

Doesn't that sound about right? When I talk to people who've left the church, they usually say it's because Christians believe stuff like that.

NO, WE DON'T!

But how can we tell people about the God who truly is love, who created every earthly pleasure, who teaches us to love our enemies, until we've made it clear that we don't believe all this nonsense. In March and the first part of April, I'm going to preaching about some of the things that we don't actually believe – so that maybe someone can hear what we do believe: the message that the Bible calls "good news."

* This description of what people think we believe is adapted from the essay "The Dogma Is the Drama," by mystery novelist Dorothy Sayers.