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How can we explain evil in the world?

Renée Schafer Horton | Apr. 4, 2011 NCR Today

Reading the newspaper today made me think the writer of "The Adjustment Bureau [1]" just might be on to something.

The premise of the film is that angels dressed as businessmen are walking among us, their only business to keep humans on the right track. There are hokey references to ?the chairman? and ?the plan? in the beginning of the movie and I was just about to write it off when I found some interesting theological food for thought.

The protagonist, played by Matt Damon, meets up with one of the leading angels to argue his case for being with the woman he loves. During that conversation, the angel explains to Damon's character that humans are not really free. Indeed, he says, human beings only have the ?appearance of having free will.?

He says that God tried free will a couple of times and was rewarded for this effort by the Dark Ages and the two World Wars. Since that time, the Almighty thought it better to depend on his adjustment bureau team to keep humanity headed in the right direction. When the protagonist points out the obvious -- that the world isn't in that great of shakes -- the angel replies: "At least it is still here." Not necessarily a rousing endorsement of God's powers.

While one should not determine their faith based on a trip to the movies, I couldn't help but think when I was reading the paper that, if there is an Adjustment Bureau, surely it's gone dark.

How else to explain the continued human-against-human hatred, intolerance and violence around the world? How to explain good people dying of cancer every day while some folks with questionable morals prosper [2]? How to explain parents who beat a 73-year-old school crossing guard [3] as he tried to break up a fight between two 7-year-olds, one of which was their son? (They were arrested and charged; I hope they are also sterilized.)

The typical religious answer to questions such as these is that evil persists because of free will and the presence of sin in the world. Okay... but a cursory glance around the world makes it seem that much of humanity is more inclined toward the bad than the good, which leads to another question: How can humans be so inclined to the bad if we are made in the image of God, who, as we know, is all good?

That, my friends, is a topic for another day.

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Links:
[1] http://www.theadjustmentbureau.com/
[2] http://www.rte.ie/ten/2007/0626/hefnerh.html
[3] http://www.aolnews.com/2011/04/02/parents-arrested-for-beating-crossing-guard-james-thompson-at-mi/