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The YouTube video that sparked a necessary conversation

Kate Childs Graham | Jan. 26, 2012 Young Voices

Unless you were under a computer-free rock these past few weeks, you've probably seen the YouTube video "Why I Hate Religion, But Love Jesus." With more than 16 million views, this video has stirred up quite the conversation on my Facebook feed. Many people, young people especially, resonate with the message of the video, featuring Jefferson Bethke of Mars Hill Church. His poem amplifies a common trend among today's youth, a trend that distrusts hierarchical institutions, a trend that says, "We're spiritual but not religious."

Many videos have been posted in response, but one in particular caught the eye of my Catholic friends, conservative and liberal alike. In this video, Fr. Claude Burns, aka Fr. Pontifex, sets out to prove that Jesus and the church can't be separated. He suggests that to do so fuels "atheistic opinions."

The artists are unanimous on this point: They love Jesus. But religion? Well, that they see differently.

Bethke says: "If religion is so great, why has it started so many wars?"

Burns replies: "See, what makes his religion great is not errors of wars and inquisitions. It's that broken men and women participate in his mission."

So, the whole religion-is-the-cause-of-most-wars argument is not new and is not false. Religion -- or, more accurately, religious people -- have fueled wars since, well, forever. Does that mean we should abandon ship?

That religion is flawed and broken reflects the brokenness of its people. Wars don't make religion great, people do. But religious people have too often used religion as an excuse to go to war. If these people would more often stand of the side of peace, that would make religion even greater.

Bethke says: "Why does it build huge churches, but fails to feed the poor?"

Burns replies: "And lines about building big churches and tending to the poor sounds a bit like Judas when the perfume was being poured. See, His religion is the largest worldwide source of relief for the poor, the hungry, the sick and repentant thief."

This is a tough one for me. My family and I just took a trip to Rome. We spent hours upon hours going from floor to floor of the Vatican museum, absolutely awestruck by the amazing art and architecture. On the other hand, though the Catholic church is the No. 1 service provider to the poor, there is so much, too much, to be done.

Bethke says: "Religion might preach grace, but another thing they practice -- they tend to ridicule God's people, they did it to John the Baptist. They can't fix their problems, so they try to mask it, not realizing that's just like spraying perfume on a casket."

Burns replies, "But blaming religion for contradiction is like staring at death, and blaming the hearse."

Honestly, this is why I remain Catholic -- the hope that underneath those layers of injustices and hypocrisies painted on by religious people, there is a church that believes that God is love and wants what is just for all of God's people, not just the chosen few.

Bethke says: "Don't you see He's so much better than just following some rules?"

Burns replies: "If I have the jersey and I'm playing for the Bulls, there's going to be some boundaries, regulations and some rules."

Oh, those rules. I agree that when religion is reduced to a set of rules, it loses both its appeal and its value. But for me, religion isn't about rules so much as it is about values shared among community. Those values sometimes breed guidelines in which to live our lives. Above all, I try to love God, love my neighbors and follow an informed conscience.

Bethke concludes: "Because when Jesus cried, 'It is finished,' I believe He meant it."

Burns ends: "I believe when Jesus said, 'It is finished,' His religion had just begun."

There are parts of each poem that I resonate with, and there are parts in each that make my stomach turn. Two things are clear: The overwhelming response to Bethke's video (it got almost 300,000 likes on YouTube and only 40,000 dislikes) proves that religion as it stands isn't serving the needs, feeding the souls of a bunch of people. And the dozens of response videos like Burns' shows that this is a conversation people are eager to have.

Let's discuss.

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