

Killing The Buddha:

Exodus Reconsidered

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<http://mccue.cc/bob/spirituality.htm>

There are few things I prize more than perspective. Since I have found a nice little perspective expander, I will share a few tidbits relative to it.

Killing The Buddha (<http://www.killingthebuddha.com/>) can be described as a book of Gen X spirituality. Some of it goes right past me, but it is good exercise to read it, and parts are brilliant. Each chapter is by a different author.

Killing The Buddha goes through various books of the Bible and "re-writes" them in contemporary terms. Parts are each of whimsical, goofy, thoughtful, and solidly analytical. Quite an eclectic read.

I quickly read one chapter – on Exodus – before heading to the office this morning. Here are a few ideas that stuck.

The author was Jewish. He writes of his experience growing up with respect to the Passover ritual. He reviews the relevant parts of Exodus, including considerable detail about the ten curses God, through Moses, doled out to encourage Pharaoh to let the Hebrews leave Egypt. He recognizes this as metaphor, but what a metaphor. The whole thing was in part retaliation for the manner in which the Egyptian people tried to kill the newborn Hebrews to slow the growth of that community – what other rational thing could one people threatened by the birth rate of another do? This caused a variety of things I have recently read in a demographic context to echo.

So, for a variety of reasons Pharaoh's poorly planned attempt at genocide failed. Not so in God's case. The initial nine plagues loosened things up, and the finale really got the job done – all of the first born in Egypt died. And to really make the point, an entire army was drowned in the Red Sea when Pharaoh welshed on the deal he had reluctantly made with God. Serves him right!

The author reviewed in an interesting way the means by which the Passover tradition, and the divinely mandated genocide at its core – is used to shape current Jewish culture. He concludes that the acceptance of the idea that God kills people who stand in his way is profoundly unhealthy. Karen

Armstrong has written extensively about the ills that flow from this kind of tribalism (See "The Battle for God", for example) but I don't recall her hitting this particular nail on the head so squarely. The clearly genocidal nature of this story has been so much a part of my life's wall paper that I did not notice it.

In any event, Killing The Buddha is not at the top of my reading list, but I can recommend it as something different, and both mind and perspective expanding.