



Life Without God

Can there be, in fact, any life without God? The obvious answer (for most people) is no. If that which we call “God” is in fact the creator of what we and the entire world are, a “creation,” then, no—there cannot be life without God. Most peoples in the world have some sort of creation story in which the earth and its inhabitants are created by some divine power or presence. Even in our modern, “scientific” world, our human wisdom and knowledge can tell us a great deal about our world, but they cannot adequately explain the origins of that world. Logic and empirical observation posit an originating force that must be beyond us, for we cannot bring ourselves into being. There cannot be life without God.

Yet this is not what is meant in the modern realm by the phrase, “life without God.” Modernity follows the eighteenth-century Deists, who allowed for a creator God, but banished that God from any further interaction with the created world. Like a “watchmaker,” God set creation in motion, but does not “interfere” in creation. Thus God can be “there” in a sense, but God has no impact on how life on earth is proceeding. This is what is meant by modern observers in the phrase, “life without God,” a sense that God is irrelevant to a human person’s day-to-day existence. Modern secular people may understand God as a creative concept, but believe that such a God, like an absentee parent, does not give a damn about them, one way or the other. They might ask, “If I do not matter to God, then why should God matter to me?” Good question.

This is exactly why theology, especially Christian theology, matters. Because how you understand God matters. Who and what God is makes an important difference to how you and your life relate to God. Some people get all put off by some of the stories about the God of Israel in the Old Testament—so much that they fail to understand the deeply profound theological statements about God in those stories. The God of the Bible, the God of Israel, cares deeply about these stubborn and fractious people and is intimately involved in their lives. And after a long history of Israel’s infidelity to their Creator, that Creator sends Jesus Christ, God incarnate, to live among them and call them to their senses. Jesus ultimately loves these people so much that he dies for them, and in his resurrection, destroys the very thing they fear most—death. After Christ, we are a new creation.

Now there are two parts to this—God, and we human persons. This is why fully understanding the true nature of human beings is as important as understanding the true nature of God. We human beings are flawed and stubborn

beings, capable at times of great goodness, but also prone to self-centeredness, greed, sin, and evil—immensely complicated beings. One of our worst and most self-destructive failings is self-idolatry, the belief that we are our own god (despite all evidence to the contrary). Often this means ignoring God completely, but at times it just means creating other, little gods (idols) that we can worship and give our lives to. These little idol gods are manageable to us—we have created them, and we can make them fit into our lives. Of course these gods really cannot do anything for us, nothing of any significance—they cannot love us, care for us, discipline us, or save us in the end. But these gods give us the illusion of control—that we are in charge of our destiny (even though we are not).

The real God, the God of the Bible, the God of the Christian people, is a mighty God, but mighty inconvenient, as well. We want an ordered world that we can control, even though it means our own death. The God of Israel, the God of Jesus Christ, breaks into our world and cares for us, cares for us so much that this God demands that we surrender our very lives to him. This is a powerful, personal, jealous God—a God that wants our whole being, but in return gives us life, real life; not just at the beginning of our existence, but every day, and even beyond the limits of our existence in this world. God demands everything, and gives us everything in return.

Self-absorbed modern persons, captivated by the illusions of their own power, ultimately come to suffer the effects of their own flawed natures (or those of others). Then their gods cannot help them. If we do not proclaim the true and living God of Jesus Christ, present and real to them, demanding and loving, then we might as well fold up our tents and go home. The only way that those “living without God” will come to really know God is if we proclaim that God to them in power and in truth. This is the God who loves us so much as to demand everything, and to give us everything. This is a God worth living with.

—M.G.