

Looking For God – Why The Silence?

In April 1966, Time Magazine asked on its cover “Is God Dead?” The intellectual world at that time had confidence that modern science had destroyed all rational foundation for the religious worldview, the idea of God. The modern, secular viewpoint was that God was invented by humans as a kind of defense mechanism to help them cope with the rigors of survival. Humanity was not God’s creation, but an inexplicable byproduct of a random universe. And reason, the power of being able to think in a logical and rational manner, as distinct from experience or emotions, was the only path to truth.

In the past century, scientists’ understanding of the nature of the universe and its origins has greatly broadened and deepened. Scientific discovery seemed to be taking us toward, rather than away from, the idea that there is a God – that the universe is the product of intelligence and aim, that in the absence of intelligent organization of a multitude of details vast and small, we would not exist. Beginning in the 1970s, evidence began to emerge showing a powerful correlation between religious commitment and overall mental health. Today, there is even growing evidence that physical health, too, may have a spiritual dimension. All this does not suggest that anyone today can reason his or her way to faith in God. However, today, reason no longer stands in the way of faith in God, as it once clearly did.

In all the world’s great religions, people seek God. All of us are longing, at the deepest level of our being, for something more, something beyond our comprehension, someone in whom fulfillment lies. Christianity, however, introduces into the world an unexpected reversal: Christianity, through the life of Jesus Christ, reveals a God who seeks us, a God who loves us far more than we love ourselves. Indeed, faith for a Christian is a conviction that God loves us unconditionally as we are, not as we should be. When we wait with open hands and undefended heart, God comes, and he approaches us from the inside outwards. When we look for God, we will find Him. God is present in each and every human being. For those who freely accept God’s unconditional love, their acceptance has enormous consequences. They cannot pay God off, for they are loved by God. God delights in forgiving; forgiveness is the completion of love. They cannot beg God in prayer because they don’t beg those who love them. They cannot look on others without realizing the mystery of God’s unconditional love for them too – see God in all, seek God in all is the challenge to the human spirit. There is no escape from social justice and respect for human dignity and integrity. We are loved by God who is with us in all our living, our joy, our toil, our suffering, and our dying. Even this world of ours, with all its defects, cannot be seen as a place of exile and evil, but as God’s beloved creation, crying out to be improved and made just. Our lives cannot be imagined as a time of testing, for we are loved by God; our lives can only be a time of growing and maturing. With a divine judge, the wicked are somehow punished and the rest of us are instinctively secure. With an unconditionally loving God, this world is evidently not open to our moral calculations; the good get cancer. Without the order assured by a God who judges, we are insecure, left with only our trust in God, trusting God to love us – and no more. It is a vision of our world where God is not to be placated, because God is loving. It is a vision of the world where fear and anxiety before God yield to trust and love. Our behavior flows from that. It is a vision of life where there is no currying favor with God, easing vague anxieties. No payment of dues in return for divine good will. Not doing what God wants because it is God’s will – but because we both want it. A Christian’s commitment to moral behavior and full human living is a consequence of being loved by God, not a condition for being loved by God.

Faith’s challenge is wide. Do I accept God’s love – for me? for others? for the wicked? for the world? forever? The invitation is there. Talk is easy. Have we committed ourselves to accepting what we talk about? It is time for the challenge to be faced, for the invitation to be accepted. Our life is a journey and a relentless pursuit to infuse God’s love into the world. God wants our whole being and becoming a person who lives a life of response to God’s love is a full-time job, 24/7, never ending, with always more to be done. That is the challenge. The fire this view fosters in each of us cannot help but change the world for the better, the way God intends.

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