

There Shone a Holy Light



“God is dead” – that’s what the philosopher Nietzsche declared. And by all appearances, it looks like the death of God is winning. The fastest growing “religious” movement today is called the “Nones” – not the nuns! Those who hold to no religious belief are becoming more widespread.

This growth in no religious affiliation among young people has caused others such as Charles Taylor, a Canadian philosopher out of McGill, to study the rise of secularism. Why, asks Charles Taylor, was it most likely that 500 years ago that it was most probable to believe in God, whereas today it is most probable to be non-religious?

For many religious people, the rise of no religious affiliation among young people has caused great consternation and worry. Is the “God is dead” movement actually gaining ground? Is there any hope for religion in a secular age?

As a Christian, it is concerning that people find it easier to have no religious affiliation. People are throwing away something that was foundational for something that has no foundation. But on the other hand, when I read the Bible, I am persuaded that the God who has revealed himself will not let his name, his fame, his reputation be destroyed. Why do I have this confidence? Because God’s revelation is indestructible. Why can I say that?

Hear the Voice of the Sovereign God

At the beginning of the Bible, before there is anything, there is God. The Bible doesn’t make an argument for the existence of God. He just is. In a world where every nation had their gods, the Bible knew nothing of atheism or agnosticism. God just existed.

So when we come to Genesis 1, the Bible begins and is written to a world where people assumed there was the divine. In the ancient world, the belief was that creation happened out of some sort of conflict between the gods. But not with the One True God.

Instead, the Bible begins with a simple assumption – God is, God speaks, and everything is. At the start of the Biblical account is the One who is the primary character of this account. This book is about this One who starts it all off. If we want to rightly understand the Bible, we need to understand God. And it begins with formless futility – empty and void. And into this formless futility, God speaks and brings form and filling. He doesn’t have to battle to create – he just speaks.

Everything is made by his voice, not by a conflict or battle. Everything, therefore, is under his control. It makes no sense to have any other god because he controls sun and stars, plants and animals, birds and fish. All he has to say is, “Let there be...” and there is.

Let there be Light! The Dawning of Indestructible Revelation – Genesis 1:1-3

At the start, God simply speaks, and there is. His sovereign voice creates. Before there is anything, there is his voice and his Word. And this means that what is of first importance is his Word. His Word is superior to everything. His Word is what gives form and fills our existences.

There are many reasons why we prioritize God's Word. His Word exists before anything else. Everything comes after he speaks. We are people of the book because we prioritize this voice above others. In his book *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer suggested that the first and last word we should hear every day is the word of our heavenly Father. This was the counsel that he gave his students at his Finkenwalde Seminary – to prioritize this Word.

When we hear the word of God, what we hear is a command for there to be light. But before there is light, there is the Voice. And this means that before anything else, before light comes, before you can be rescued, before your formless and futile life can find form and be filled with meaning, you need to hear the voice of Sovereign Grace.

Isaac Watts understood these words in this way. The English hymn writer would write the hymn, "How Sad Our State" (1707-1709) with these words:

How sad our state by nature is,
Our sins, how deep it stains;
And Satan binds our captive minds
Fast in his slavish chains.
But there's a voice of sov'reign grace
Sounds from the sacred Word:
"Oh ye despairing sinners come
And trust upon the Lord."

At the beginning was chaos and darkness over the deep, and there was nothing but a void. But at the end there was a marvelous creation at rest, blessed and sanctified by God. God transforms the chaos which was unprofitable into that which is good, holy, and worth blessing. Out of the formless and futile God brings form and filling by speaking. This means that if we are going to find hope and life, we need to hear the voice of sovereign grace that forms and fills, that calms and creates. Have you heard that voice? It's the voice that changes everything.

See the Light of the Glorious God

God speaks, and there is light. But modern people struggle when they read Genesis 1 because they read it like it is a science book. Many people have rightly noted that first God forms the creation, then he fills it. He separates light and darkness on day one and then fills the sky with lights. He separates water from land on day 2 and then fills it on day 5. And he forms the earth on day 3 and then fills it on day 6. Form and filling.

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So for the modern person, they don't understand how can there be light on day 1 but the sun and stars on day 4. Where does this light come from? How can there be light without sun and stars?

I think that there is a simple explanation as to where the light comes from. At the end of the Bible, we hear in Revelation 22:5 that there is no more need for sun or moon because the Lord God is the light who illumines the city. God is the One who emanates light. So when God says, "Let there be light," the darkness is repelled by a God who creates in order to show himself. We could paraphrase v. 3 this way: "Let there be a revelation of me!"

The reason God creates is not due to the fact that he is lonely, needy, or desperate. God doesn't lack anything. Paul will make this point in Acts 17:25 by saying he lacks nothing. And when God sees the light, what does he say? It is good. It is fit, purposeful, useful. Yes, light is necessary for life – and John will make that point in John 1:5. We know you need light for plants to grow and thrive. But God creates because out of his goodness, it spills out. The love that he has as Father, Son, and Spirit causes all things to be!

So when creation happens, everything that exists is made to reveal God. So David can say in Ps. 19: "The heavens declare the glory of God...day after day they pour forth speech." God has created to show us his goodness, his graciousness, and his glory.

But there is a problem. People don't see the goodness of God. People don't see how gracious God is. How can God be good? How can God be gracious?

What unfolds in the Bible story is something very simple: that light comes after darkness. There is evening and there is morning. Before salvation comes, there is sin. The only way we can see is if the light of God breaks into our lives and God says, "Let there be light" and shines his light into our hearts. So the Psalmist will say in Psalm 36:9 "In your light do we see light."

The Bible is about how God initiates. God takes the first move. God breaks in to form and fill. God speaks. God shines. No Christian has believed that we initiate. Christians have always believed that God initiates.

Chris Tomlin, the popular worship leader and song writer, has a song that I think is quite profound called "Wonderful Maker." He sings:

"You spread out the skies over empty space
Said, "Let there be light,"
Into a dark and formless world your light was born.

You spread out your arms over empty hearts,
Said, "Let there be light,"
Into a dark and hopeless world your Son was born.

Let there be Light! The Dawning of Indestructible Revelation – Genesis 1:1-3

You made the world and saw that it was good.
You sent Your only Son for you are good.
What a wonderful Maker; what a wonderful Savior.

And this is why the voice of God, the light of the gospel, is so beautiful. God's revelation comes first. God's self-disclosure comes before sin and death. And that means that even in a world where people now find it easier to be an atheist than religious, we don't have to lose hope. Why? Because God's self-revelation, his disclosure came first, and it is the way to life and peace.

How you understand the origins of the universe tells a lot about how you view the solution: was it birthed in cosmic conflict and violence (I.e.: Big Bang), or was it birthed through the overflow of love by a Creator satisfied in relationship with Himself? If it's the former, then class struggle, overthrowing power, and conflict will shape your solutions to modern problems. But if the latter, then speaking peace and abounding love will be how you view the way forward.

This means that we do not lose heart. We don't give up. We don't lose hope. Formless and futility might abound when people live without God. But God loves to break into the formless and futile with his voice and light, to show that he is good. He sent his Son for this reason. So we can tell others of Jesus Christ and know that God rescues people from the formlessness of their lives and the futility of their daily existence and believe that God is good. He has spoken and shone his light. And he will again.

We know this is the case. Why? Because if you are a Christian, God spoke light and shone it into your heart. And you believed. So embrace his Word. Hear his voice. See his light. And share it. There is a God who forms and fills our lives with goodness. He's a Wonderful Maker and Saviour!