

Killing The “God Is Dead” Lie

By: Keith Keyser

“But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” Galatians 6:14

On February 28, 2012 the atheistic theologian William Hamilton passed into eternity. He was best known for co-authoring the book *Radical Theology And The Death Of God* with fellow liberal scholar Thomas J.J. Altizer. This incendiary tome inspired *Time* magazine’s famous 1966 cover story “Is God Dead?” That article summed up the issues with which they wrestled thus:

Nietzsche's thesis was that striving, self-centered man had killed God, and that settled that. The current death-of-God group believes that God is indeed absolutely dead, but proposes to carry on and write a theology without theos, without God. Less radical Christian thinkers hold that at the very least God in the image of man, God sitting in heaven, is dead, and—in the central task of religion today—they seek to imagine and define a God who can touch men's emotions and engage men's minds. If nothing else, the Christian atheists are waking the churches to the brutal reality that the basic premise of faith—the existence of a personal God, who created the world and sustains it with his love—is now subject to profound attack.¹



Hamilton’s obituary explains that his questioning of God’s existence began with the accidental death of two religious friends, while a third atheistic friend was spared. He went on to cite the Holocaust as a major blow to his belief in God, in his words: “I wrote out my two choices: ‘God is not behind such radical evil, therefore he cannot be what we have traditionally meant by God’ or ‘God is behind everything, including the death camps — and therefore he is a killer.’”ⁱⁱ

Two Facts That Vindicate God

Of course trite answers to the problem of evil and human suffering will not do. The harsh realities of history and contemporary life demand something more than shallow sound-bytes and

Pollyanna-esque platitudes. Thankfully, the Bible devotes a great deal of space to exploring this problem that sooner or later touches every human life.

The struggle of modern radical theologians like the late Dr. Hamilton is largely a product of their prior rejection of the Bible as God's Word. Two biblical truths in particular give a coherent defense of the Almighty's character in the face of evil and human pain. The first is the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the second is His empty tomb.

Boasting In The Cross

The cross clearly shows that God is interested in human beings, and is no mere spectator to their trials and sufferings. He is not an accomplice to atrocities like the Holocaust or 9/11; rather He is just and deems all such iniquity to be worthy of the severest judgment. If anyone questions whether the Almighty is impassive in the face of evil, they have only to look at the cross where He poured out His unrestrained wrath upon it. No wonder Paul boasted in this great act (see the verse at the top of the page), which demonstrated God's love and righteousness, while striking a mortal blow to evil and pain. Human suffering is on borrowed time, for the sin that underlies it, has been dealt with by Christ on the cross.

The Creator's knowledge of human pain transcends the theoretical, because God the Son took on flesh and suffered the death of the cross. In addition to the awful torture of crucifixion that He experienced at the hands of wicked men, He also suffered the unutterable divine wrath against sin. More than any other being He knows what pain is. Unlike men who have no choice about living in a world where suffering is commonplace, everything that the Son of God endured was voluntary. What is more, His substitutionary death on the cross makes it possible for people to escape eternal hellfire.

The Reports Of God's Demise Have Been Mistaken

The second great truth that kills the "God is dead" lie is the glorious resurrection of the Lord Jesus. After His ignominious and graphic death on the cross people wrongly assumed that that was the last they would see Christ. Nevertheless, three days later the Lord Jesus rose in power from the dead, at once proving His deity and the perfect accomplishment of His divinely ordained work. What is more, this astonishing miracle demonstrated that the grave does not have to have the final victory. Even the unimaginable pain of Christ's death was overcome by His rising again. That is to say, when He had suffered beyond what any human being has ever suffered, the Lord triumphantly rose again, proving that no pain is insurmountable. Further, if we belong to the Lord, the sufferings of this life will be superseded by eternal blessedness in the future. As He told two of His disciples after the resurrection, "Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" (Lk. 24:26.)

In turning away from the true and living God, people mistakenly abandon the only possible ground for hope in the face of human suffering. Among all of the belief systems of man – be they

secular or spiritual – only the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ offers the certain prospect of taking present sufferings and transforming them into future glories. Paul emphatically described this truth, affirming “that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18.) Moreover, he understood that sufferings themselves are tools in God’s hand for transformation into the most beautiful image imaginable: that of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. As he said: “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17.) Like a skillful reconstructive surgeon, God applies the scalpel of suffering to cut away the grotesque and unseemly parts of human character and conform the resulting visage into His own glorious likeness. Removing God from the discussion of human suffering only removes all possibility of salvation from unremitting and pointless pain.

ⁱ “Is God Dead?”, *Time* magazine, April 8, 1966,

ⁱⁱ William Hamilton, from a 2007 interview with *The Oregonian* newspaper, quoted in his obituary of the *Los Angeles Times* wire service, March 3, 2012, “William Hamilton dies at 87; theologian questioned God's existence” accessed here on 3/3/12: <http://www.latimes.com/news/obituaries/la-me-william-hamilton-20120303,0,1455686.story>