

COLUMN: BRYAN PATTERSON ON SPIRITUALITY

## God Lives, as Atheism Dwindles

- Bryan Patterson -

*An atheist is a man who has no invisible means of support* – John Buchan

IN 1960, *Time* magazine declared God dead. Half the world seemed officially atheist and the rest were expected to soon join.

The tables have obviously turned.

Now, only about 2.4 per cent of the world's population is considered atheist, according to the World Almanac, and the numbers are dwindling.

Meanwhile, spirituality is experiencing a global resurgence.

In his book *The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World*, historian and theologian Alistair McGrath examines where the atheist dream went wrong and explains why faith is destined to play a central role in the 21st century.

Interestingly, he also makes it clear that, despite a resurgence in faith, Western Christianity has not recovered from a faith crisis of the '60s.

McGrath says the origins of atheism lay primarily in a protest against the power, privilege, and corruption of church institutions -- beginning with the French Revolution and ending about the time of the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

The atheism that swept across Europe in the 19th century and dominated most of the Western world in the 20th century was encouraged by a cerebral Christianity with its emphasis on cold doctrines, which might have engaged the mind but left emotions and imagination untouched.

Atheism envisioned a glorious future for a humanity freed from outdated dogmas and moral restrictions, with the unlimited potential of scientific advancement and the human imagination. Humans could not only be good without God, but they could be much better.

God was chased out of heaven by Marx, banished to the unconscious by Freud and announced by Nietzsche to be deceased. Well, not quite.

McGrath, a lapsed atheist, documents what he says are the philosophical inconsistency and moral failures of atheism, especially when it acquired political power, for example in the guise of communism.

But he also documents religion's "failures of imagination" and complicity with oppression that often fostered an environment in which atheism could thrive.

Atheism proclaimed science was God. But scientific advances often coincided with moral confusion and environmental disaster. Science was expected to reveal a universe that was random and mechanical. Instead, science uncovered even more layers of intricate order that suggested an intelligent design.

The discovery that the universe began with a creation-like Big Bang around 13 billion years ago encouraged the argument for a creator as the first cause of nature.

The discovery that the fundamental laws of nature contained constants that appear to have been fine-tuned so that the cosmos would eventually yield intelligent life, lent new credence to the design argument for God's existence.

Quantum theory made the cosmos seem more like a thought than like a machine.

Modern science tells us that our universe cannot sustain itself, that it's dependent on something outside of itself, and that our universe had a beginning.

We are seeing not a battle between God and science, but a discovery of God in science.

The German physicist Max Born, who pioneered quantum mechanics, said: "Those who say that the study of science makes a man an atheist must be rather silly people."

Einstein said the world was like a well-constructed crossword puzzle. "You can suggest any number of words, but only one will fit all the facts," he said.

Science can't "observe" God. But we can all observe a universe that yields evidence of either God's handiwork, or an amazing accident. The evidence has to point one way or the other. And scientific discoveries of this past century clearly show that our universe is no accident, that there is an intelligent designer behind it all.

Albert Camus said death was philosophy's only problem. One of atheism's great failings is that it cannot offer any comfort in the face of death.

David the Psalmist said we could not hide from God. Ever. Anywhere. We either faced him in this life or the next -- one way or the other.

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