



SPENCER A. KLAVAN, Ph.D.

EDITOR AT THE CLAREMONT REVIEW OF BOOKS AND AUTHOR OF *LIGHT OF THE MIND, LIGHT OF THE WORLD: ILLUMINATING SCIENCE THROUGH FAITH*

Spencer A. Klavan holds a bachelor's degree from Yale and a Ph.D. in classical language and literature from the University of Oxford. He has written widely in both scholarly and popular venues, including *Classical Quarterly*, *The Atlantic*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Law & Liberty*, *City Journal*, and *Mnemosyne*. Klavan is an editor at *The Claremont Review of Books*, a quarterly journal of essays and book reviews focused on the ideas and history of the American founding. His own books include *Music in Ancient Greece: Melody, Rhythm and Life*; *How to Save the West: Ancient Wisdom for Five Modern Crises*; and two edited collections of Hellenistic philosophy. His latest book, *Light of the Mind, Light of the World*, is an accessible history of science from a religious perspective that argues that modern physics is not hostile to but actually supportive of religious faith.

Spencer's podcast, "Young Heretics," offers a lively introduction to the great works of Western literature. He is also a regular on "The Round Table," a weekly politics review from *The American Mind*. To get in touch with him, subscribe to his mailing list at <http://rejoiceevermore.substack.com>

Pick Your Champion

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You already believe in a god. The question is, which one? For a while it was much in vogue to maintain that as a new age of enlightenment dawned, science and reason would replace religion. This has not exactly panned out.

“Christianity will go,” said John Lennon in 1966 at the height of *The Beatles*’ celebrity. “It will vanish and shrink.”¹ He was only repeating a prediction that knowing sophisticates had been making for some time. The mathematician and popular philosopher Bertrand Russell, in his 1927 essay “Why I Am Not a Christian,” wrote that “religion is based, I think, primarily and mainly upon fear.” Thankfully “in this world we can now begin a little to understand things, and a little to master them by the help of science.”²

By the turn of the 21st century, the momentum seemed to be with the “New Atheists.” Richard Dawkins’s *The God Delusion* (2006), Christopher Hitchens’ *God is Not Great* (2007) and Victor Stenger’s *God: The Failed Hypothesis* (2007) gave the impression that faith would surely wane among right-thinking people and that humanist decency would replace it.

The opposite has happened. We can’t stop worshipping; we have only turned from worshipping the God of our ancestors to serving other powers like the state, the environment, and the scientific establishment. The reign of these counterfeit gods and their priests has been a disaster for the human race. It has produced not only the ruinous violence of Communist regimes the world over, but also the slavish devotion to politics that sets brother against brother in the streets.

When AI engineers talk of “building gods” and masked congregations intone oaths of allegiance to “truth, restoration, and equity,” it’s no longer even remotely plausible to suppose that secular culture makes people smarter, gentler, or more independent.³ It’s clear instead that every person alive is always, without exception, devoted to some ultimate purpose. It’s only a question of which.

The notion of a higher power isn’t merely a convenient fiction, as intellectual entertainers like Yuval Harari claim. It’s an inherent aspect of being human. You can’t help aiming toward some goal any more than you can stop your toenails from growing: We do things because we want things, whether it’s drinking coffee to wake up or making love to create a family. If you don’t pick a trajectory, your actions will create one for you by default. Even just lying in bed for days on end will set you on a path to becoming fat and depressed.

At the end of whatever path you choose there is a destination. You can pick an artificial one like fame or comfort or power. Or you can reason that since purpose is natural to us, we also have a natural purpose — a highest good toward which we were meant to aim. This is much the same as saying that we were created by a God who loves us, and whom we should love. No other candidate deserves the honor.

Footnotes:

1. Maureen Cleave, "How Does a Beatle Live?" *London Evening Standard*, 1996. <http://www.beatlesinterviews.org/db1966.0304-beatles-john-lennon-were-more-popular-than-jesus-now-maureen-leave.html>. Accessed 9/11/2024. Archived at <https://archive.is/aSfpe>.
2. Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian* (London: Rationalist Press Association, 1927). Accessed 9/11/2024. <http://users.drew.edu/~jlentz/whynot.html>. Archived at <https://archive.is/5iqu>.
3. See Carl Ohman, "We are building gods: AI as the anthropomorphized authority of the past," November 29, 2023. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4620986> or <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4620986>. Accessed 9/11/2024; Columbia University Irving Medical Center, "Columbia Med Students Recite New Hippocratic Oath," August 26, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AujwxJNZtp8>. Accessed 9/11/2024.