

Why a Humanist Would Reject any Spiritual Relevance of COVID-19

Our present crisis has us asking questions like, “Is there more going on here than a virus?” Or, “Is God somewhere in the midst of all of this?”

But we aren’t used to asking these types of questions. What we’re used to is asking for data and human analysis.

As the scientific revolution (1500s and 1600s) rolled into the industrial revolution (1700s and 1800s), then into the information age (1900s and 2000s), crazy breakthroughs in science and technology turned our collective gaze toward the natural world and away from the supernatural realm.

Breathtaking theories enabled us to understand and explain the mechanics of our physical world—and of the larger cosmos. These revelations, along with some cascading social currents, resulted in a new cultural mindset—one in which God and heaven and worship and prayer gradually began to seem somehow less immediate, less relevant, less essential. The idea that there might be something beyond the observable, something more basic than space and time and matter, began to strike many people as improbable. The idea that there might exist a spiritual reality beyond, above, beneath and intermingled with our physical world became sort of quaint.

The naturalists and humanists among us went ahead and rejected everything spiritual. They refuse to recognize the supernatural. They’ve just decided that none of it is reality at all. They’ve decided that, given our abilities to discover, God and heaven and the rest have become “unnecessary.” They’ve asked, “What role is there for God?”

A philosophical naturalist considers us physical beings and nothing more. He or she believes the natural world, the physical cosmos, is all there is. A philosophical humanist believes that humans are capable, in and of themselves, of discovering truth and devising ways—using the scientific method and reason—to meet all human needs, to answer all human questions and to solve all human problems. They, like naturalists, reject the idea that there is anything beyond the physical world.

The atheistic beliefs underlying naturalism and humanism originated in the ancient world but began to have wide cultural influence in the 17th and 18th centuries. Then they morphed and matured and increased their impact in the 19th century. And in our time, in the 20th and 21st centuries, these beliefs have come to dominate many of the cultures of our world.

What's *real*, our world has decided, is whatever we can see and hear and touch—and anything transcendent to our physical reality is simply less real (or not real at all). We've raised this belief to the level of pseudolaw or pseudoreligion. It's become an "everyone knows that" kind of thing.

We Christians are neither naturalists nor humanists, at least not in the philosophical sense. But we live in (and work in and raise our families in) a culture that's influenced heavily by naturalistic and humanistic ideas and ideals. And it's easy for us to get distracted and forget and begin acting like functional atheists.

Most of us have, indeed, just like naturalists and humanists, adopted an intense bias toward the physical world. We may *believe* in a spiritual realm. We may *believe* in God and heaven and worship and prayer. But we believe *more* in the here and now.

Much more.

“Our trouble is that we have established bad thought habits.” And things have just gotten more unbalanced since 1948, when the great gospeler A. W. Tozer wrote those words. We experience church on Sundays—maybe—but we put virtually all our energy and time and worry toward the physical world. Work. Security. Pastimes and entertainments. The spiritual realm gets what’s left, if there is anything.

Because the here and now is greedy and relentless. Demands and deadlines at work. Requests and responsibilities at home. Pressures to keep up and get ahead. These things are in our faces. We see them—email inboxes overflowing, to-do list items calling for attention. We hear them—mobile phones ringing, work calls never ending. And we feel them—texts and reminders and notifications buzzing, stress building.

“The world of sense intrudes upon our attention day and night for the whole of our lifetime,” continued Tozer. “It is clamorous, insistent and self-demonstrating ... assaulting our five senses, demanding to be accepted as real and final.”

Compared with this barrage, and with the busyness and hustle we muster to meet the barrage and survive as best we can, the spiritual realm can seem as if it’s a million miles away. It can become, in our minds, simply something we’ll (hopefully) experience someday. When we die. When we finally leave this physical, in-your-face world behind. *But not now.*

The Bible we claim to believe in—and to base our lives on—describes, quite clearly, a deeper, unseen reality. It describes a reality that somehow preexisted the space-time continuum. It describes a deeper, unseen reality that never began, actually, and will never end. “The things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:18).

The Bible describes a deeper, unseen reality to which time and space and matter owe their very existence. It’s this that our

everyday physical reality is dependent on. Time and space and matter were “called into existence by God’s word, what we see created by what we don’t see” (Heb. 11:3b, MSG).

This deeper, unseen reality is more vast, more wild and wonderful than the physical world. It is distinguished by majesty and mystery, goodness and love— “glory beyond all comparison” (2 Cor. 4:17b, BSB). It’s a reality where anything can happen. Even the impossible. In it, even viruses and death itself can be undone.

And it’s not just out there somewhere, out in the beyond. It is there, but it’s here too. Right here. Right now. “The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed,” explained Jesus, but it is already in our midst (Luke 17:20–21, NIV). This deeper, unseen reality is interwoven with everything in the physical world. It “holds everything together” (Heb. 1:3b. ERV).

And we can discover it. This reality. In it, we can ask God our burning questions: Where are you? What are you up to?

While we may have grown more comfortable with (and confident in) the physical world, that doesn’t mean we don’t have spiritual aspects too. We do. For “God is spirit” (John 4:24a, MEV). And he made us “in his own image” (Gen. 1:27b).

God formed Adam, the first man, from the natural world—from “dust from the ground” (Gen. 2:7). But he breathed himself into Adam—he “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being” (v. 7). He created us as physical beings. But he created us as spiritual beings too—*just like Him*.

Our spiritual nature is our essence. It’s what distinguishes us from the rest of creation: that we can access and experience and participate in this great reality that lies beyond our everyday reality.

And it's to *that* reality we must now turn. *There*, we will find answers to our questions.

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