

The Other Side

A. Soule

Now here's an interesting question, what would life be for you if you weren't a Christian? I don't mean the not going to the church kind, but having no religious belief whatsoever.

No big deal, a lot of people would say and probably add that they know many people who aren't religious, including some of their good friends and many of their family members. We all know people who believe in making a success of this life, and think of prayer as a bit of mumbo jumbo. They are usually self reliant and make their way in life rather heroically.

How different would life be if you were with the other side – those with no belief in God. It would be, I imagine, difficult to see a noticeable change overnight. One would still get up, go to work if one works, and in general try to enjoy life as much as one can. You would in time try to develop your own philosophy of life or follow others who are similarly not religious. There is though the fact that you are in a large measure what you think, and as your view of your own existence changes so would the way you react to circumstances.

There would be ups and downs, and as it is for all of us, and at times nothing would make sense. In your quieter moments you would sometimes wonder what it's really all about. Life may feel very much as described by Shakespeare in Macbeth:
"a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

You wouldn't try to dwell on complex issues like good and evil as that might lead you to abstract notions. You would be looking for answers but soon realise how narrow our own vision is which cannot see beyond the immediate, how quickly your circumstances can change and how powerless the human body is against disease and death. You would realise there is really very little that you control.

Whilst you may think you have got away from moral dilemmas and judgments which people always think as belonging in the realm of faith, one is still beset by rights and wrongs in the normal course of life. You would still be judged by yourself and the society around you. The load gets heavier - it is hard going.

There was an interesting article in the 'Independent' I read last year talking about someone (of no belief whatsoever) describing what it was to live with a Christian - an interesting observation made by him was: "when my partner panics or finds herself in a dilemma, sometimes

the best thing I can say to her is, 'Let your faith guide you'. It speaks to her, calms her, and brings clarity while communicating that I trust in her decision-making faculties — whereas, if she said that to me, I'd plunge further into uncertainty."

There it is - the sense of uncertainty at the bottom of one's being in the quagmire of unbelief.

There is then the other way; of placing trust in the goodness of God. God understands the heavy burden of journeying alone; and offers a clear invitation in Christ's words; "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest". Added to that is also the gift of divine peace in our lives, "My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." It all though hinges on the choice which people make; to either accept God with them in their journey of life or to go it alone.

It all sounds simple, but life seldom pans out like a well preached sermon. People may well choose to continue on the path they have chosen, and accuse the other side of living an illusion. As a Christian, one would no doubt accept that God loves the unbeliever too, and hope they find the peace that you have found in faith. You would support them and love them as you know God has loved you too.

In the end what people really believe in their hearts, for all the different things they say, always remains a mystery. There are people who aggressively avoid the mention of church and worship, but in times of trouble say a silent prayer. There is also the oft quoted saying that not many die as atheists. Who knows what changes in thinking may come about in the fullness of time, and who's to judge a person's relationship with their maker.