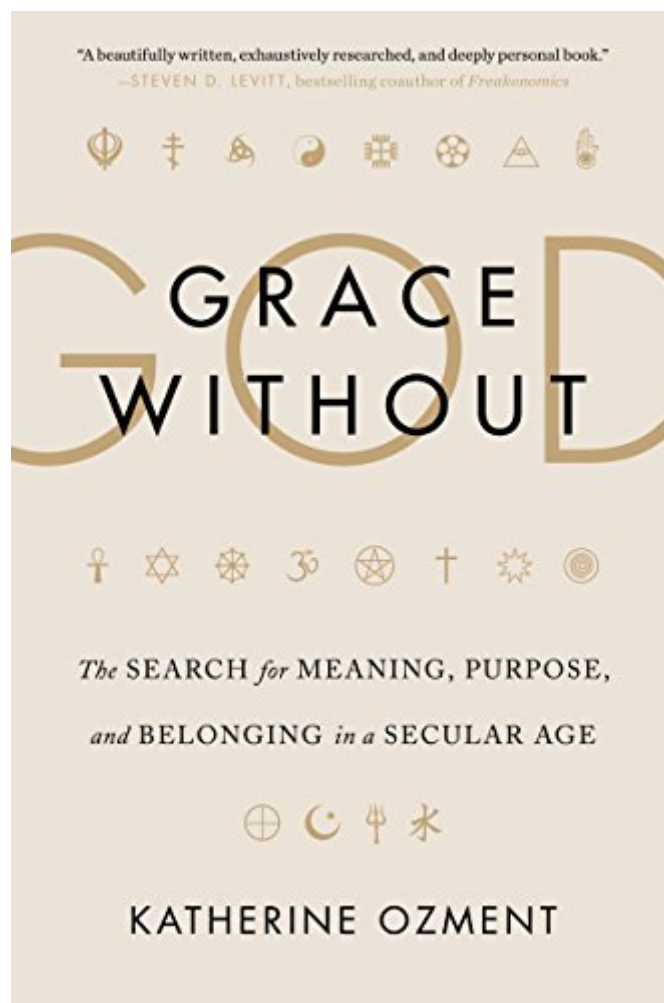


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Grace Without God: The Search For Meaning, Purpose, And Belonging In A Secular Age



Synopsis

Meet the Nones • In this thought-provoking exploration of secular America, celebrated journalist Katherine Ozment takes readers on a quest to understand the trends and ramifications of a nation in flight from organized religion. Studies show that religion makes us happier, healthier and more giving, connecting us to our past and creating tight communal bonds. Most Americans are raised in a religious tradition, but in recent decades many have begun to leave religion, and with it their ancient rituals, mythic narratives, and sense of belonging. So how do the nonreligious fill the need for ritual, story, community, and, above all, purpose and meaning without the one-stop shop of religion? What do they do with the space left after religion? With Nones swelling to one-fourth of American adults, and more than one-third of those under thirty, these questions have never been more urgent. Writer, journalist, and secular mother of three Katherine Ozment came face-to-face with the fundamental issue of the Nones when her son asked her the simplest of questions: "what are we?" Unsettled by her reply "Nothing" she set out on a journey to find a better answer. She traversed the frontier of American secular life, sought guidance in science and the humanities, talked with noted scholars, and wrestled with her own family's attempts to find meaning and connection after religion. Insightful, surprising, and compelling, *Grace Without God* is both a personal and critical exploration of the many ways nonreligious Americans create their own meaning and purpose in an increasingly secular age.

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Customer Reviews

It's sometimes hard for atheists to admit that the lack of religion in their lives leaves a hole that needs to be filled. In *Grace Without God: Meaning, Purpose and Belonging in a Secular Age* author Katherine Ozment squarely faces the challenges of living and raising children without the benefits of a religious construct. The book begins with her son's simple question, after seeing religious ceremonies being played out. "So what are we?" he asks. Her muddled response, "We're nothing," unsettles her, and the result is this book. While a firm atheist, the first part of Ozment's book acknowledges what many secularists too often ignore - the real benefits that religion brings to living one's life; specifically, a sense of purpose reinforced by others, a social community, and a general, scheduled time of reflection on one's life in a larger context. There's also a realization of the comforts of well accepted ritual, especially at times of crisis and death. Part of religion's strength in the past, and its continuing vitality, is due to these practical benefits that religion brings to living. However Ozment never backs away from the fact that religion's value is undercut by its theistic construct. But without this theistic structure, many of these benefits can be hard to establish in one's own life, especially when raising kids. And yet, in our non-theistic world that is what we must be doing, Ozment argues. The major part of her book is her search for appropriate substitutes for religion, without the theistic basis. Some are easily filled through already existing communities (think Meet-Up, reading, music, art, dance and sports groups among others).

I will divide this book into three distinct pieces: 1.) Katherine's personal stories struggling with religious culture as a secular person, 2.) a survey of the secular "start up" communities and 3.) an accounting for our human nature and religion. I found the first two pieces to be excellent and edifying enough in their own right to justify the price and time spent reading. The third piece was sorely lacking in a real meaning. Who should read this book? 1.) People who were formally religious and looking for a like-to-like replacement of religious culture with secular culture, especially folks with kids. 2.) Life long atheists such as myself looking to glean insight into folks who value religious experience but are secularists. Who will be disappointed in this book? Anyone who has done any serious research into human nature and religion. The author is a journalist, not a well researched person on the topic of human nature. As long as you keep in mind the human nature

proclamations are common enough tropes in the greater culture than you'll do find. Early on the author begs off being an expert on religion with "it could take lifetimes to understand the history of religion and the role it plays in the world." One might take this to mean that the author is going to refrain from making dogmatic or assertions without proof about religion and human nature. Sadly that is not the case, She goes onto to write, "Religion is powerful and pervasive because it provides so much that humans need, namely, identity, community, ritual, and a profound sense of meaning and purpose. Religion binds people in shared history, symbolism, and culture, and it is an important part of our inheritance.

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