

First Presbyterian Church
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First Presbyterian Church

Louisville, Mississippi

The Trauma of Holiness

*A Monthly
Publication of*

**First
Presbyterian
Church,
Louisville**

.....

For I resolved to
know nothing while I
was with you except
Jesus Christ and
him crucified.
(1 Corinthians 2:2)

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**February
2018**

This article, by R.C. Sproul, was originally published in Tabletalk magazine and is available on Ligonier's blog, <http://www.ligonier.org/blog/trauma-holiness/>.

As we read the works of nineteenth-century atheists, we find that they were not particularly concerned to prove that God does not exist. These atheists tacitly assumed God's nonexistence. Instead, they said that after the Enlightenment, now that we know there is no God, how can we account for the almost universal presence of religion? If God doesn't exist and human religion is not a response to the existence of God, why is it that man seems to be incurably homo *religiosus*—that man in all of his cultures seems to be incurably religious? If there's no God, why is there religion?

One of the most popular and famous answers was the argument offered by Sigmund Freud. As a psychiatrist, Freud knew that people are afraid of lots of different things. Such fears are understandable, as there are all kinds of things in our world that represent a clear and present danger to our well-being. Other people can rise up individually in anger and try to murder us, or they may unite and attack us on a grand scale in warfare. But in addition to the human sphere of fear and danger, there's also the impersonal realm of nature, particularly in previous ages when people did not have the protection against the natural world that we enjoy in this world of modern technology. Though natural terrors still strike us with fear at times, in the past people were exposed in a greater way to storms, famines, and floods. When diseases such as cholera or the plague could wipe out entire populations, life seemed more fragile and nature seemed more threatening.

Today we perceive that science has the responsibility of somehow taming the unruly forces of nature such as hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, and fires. And in many ways, science has been successful in helping us prevent natural disasters from doing their worst and in helping us recover quickly after nature assaults us. But, Freud said, the ancient man's dilemma was how to deal with these things when their destructive impacts were much worse and harder to recover from. You can talk to a human attacker, sign a peace treaty with a foreign power, or otherwise negotiate your safety with people who might threaten you, but how do you bargain with disease, storms, or earthquakes? These forces of nature are impersonal. They don't have ears to hear. They don't have hearts to which we can appeal. They have no emotions.

(Continued from page 1)

So, Freud argued, religion emerged as humans personalized nature and made it something they could negotiate with. Human beings invented the idea that natural disasters were inhabited by personal spirits: a storm god, an earthquake god, a fire god, and gods related to various sicknesses. These gods wielded natural forces to cause disaster. Having personalized these dangers, human beings could apply the techniques that we use to negotiate with personal hostile forces to the impersonal forces of nature. We could, for example, plead with the storm god, pray to the storm god, make sacrifices to the storm god, repent before the storm god in order to remove the threat. Eventually, human beings consolidated all the gods into one single deity who was in control over all these forces of nature and then pleaded with him.

I'm fascinated by Freud's argument because it's a reasonable explanation for how people could become religious. It is possible, theoretically, that there could still be religion even if there were no God. We know that we are capable of imagining things that don't really exist. In fact, the Bible is replete with criticism of false religion that invents idols.

Yet there's a difference between possibility and actuality. That what Freud said is possible doesn't mean that it actually happened that way. The major hole in his theory is this: If Freud's theory is true, why, then, was the God of the Bible "invented"? This holy God, we see in Scripture, inspires far greater trauma in those whom He encounters than any natural disaster. We see, for example, how even righteous Isaiah was completely undone by meeting the God of Israel face-to-face (Isa. 6:1-7). Well-meaning Uzzah was struck dead when trying to steady the ark of this holy God (2 Sam. 6:5-10). Peter, James, and John at first saw the revelation of Christ's deity and their hearing of the Father's voice not as a blessing but as a terror (Matt. 17:1-8).

Why, to redeem us from the threat of trauma, would we invent a God whose character is infinitely more threatening than anything else we fear? I can see humanity inventing a benevolent god or even a bad god who is easily appeased. But would we invent a holy God? Where does that come from? For there is nothing in the universe more terrifying, more threatening to a person's sense of security and well-being than the holiness of God. What we see throughout the Scriptures is that God rules over all of the threatening forces that we fear. But this same God, in and of Himself, frightens us more than any of these other things. We understand that nothing poses a greater threat to our well-being than the holiness of God. Left to ourselves, none of us would invent the God of the Bible, the being who is a threat to our sense of security more primal and more fundamental than any act of nature.

Martin Luther and the other Reformers understood the holy character of this God. For them, the recovery of the gospel was such good news because they knew the trauma of holiness and that the only way to endure the presence of this holy God's judgment is to be covered in the holiness and righteousness of Christ. Five hundred years after the Protestant Reformation, the church desperately needs men and women who understand the trauma of God's holiness, for in understanding that holiness we see that the gospel is the only thing that can give us confidence that when we meet this God face-to-face, His holiness will embrace us and not cast us into eternal judgment. May God in His grace grant to all of us a renewed vision of His majestic holiness.

2nd Sunday Supper

Join us for 2nd Sunday Supper Sunday, February 11th, immediately following the evening worship service in the home of John and Rachel Brownlee.

Duty Deacon

2/4 Steven Holman

2/11 Robert Higginbotham

2/18 Roger Caperton

2/25 Kevin Hudson

The Missions Committee will meet Sunday, February 11th, at 4:00p.m., in the library.

2018 Church Directory update

It's that time of year again! We are now in the process of updating the church directory. If you have recently joined the church OR if any of your contact information has changed, please email the office at fpclouisville@msn.com

or

call 773-3146.

The Deacons
will meet
Sunday, Feb. 11th,
at 8:00a.m.

YOUTH HOSTS
2/4 Scott & Karin Phillips
2/11 Debbie Boyles
2/18 Sam & Lisa Suttle
2/25 Kevin & Wand Hudson

*We will be observing the
Sacrament of the
Lord's Supper
Sunday, February 25th,
during the morning service.*

The Session
will meet
Monday, Feb. 12th,
at 7:00p.m.

Church LIFE
Night Desserts
2/7 Nancy Peters & Bonnie Fair
2/14 Margaret Taylor, Debbie
Boyles, Cindy Nabers
2/21 Alice Wooten & Laura Brown
2/28 Elisabeth Byrd &
Marie Holman

Women in the Church News

WIC Circle will be
Monday, February 12th ,
12:00p.m., in the
Family Life Building.
Virginia Hathorn and Rebecca Giffin
are the hostesses.
Linda Wiggins is the lesson moderator

February 2018

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
4	5	6Men's Prayer B'fast 7:00a.m.	7Church LIFE Night 6:15p.m.	8	9	10
11Diaconate Meeting 8:00a.m. 2nd Sunday Supper	12WIC Circle 12:00p.m. Session Meeting 7:00p.m.	13Men's Prayer B'fast 7:00a.m.	14Church LIFE Night 6:15p.m.	15	16	17
18	19	20Men's Prayer B'fast 7:00a.m.	21Church LIFE Night 6:15p.m.	22	23	24
25The Lord's Supper Observed	26	27Men's Prayer B'fast 7:00a.m.	28Church LIFE Night 6:15p.m.			