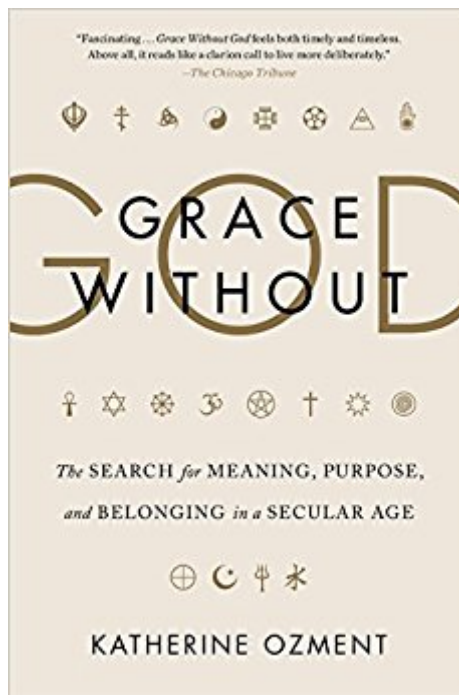




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Grace Without God: The Search For Meaning, Purpose, And Belonging In A Secular Age



Synopsis

Publishers Weekly's "Best Books of 2016" Spirituality & Health Magazine Best Book of 2016 Nautilus Gold Award Winner 2016: Religion and Spirituality of Other Traditions 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

“Combining the talent of a gifted story-teller, the erudition of a scholar, and the soft touch of a mother, Ozment takes her readers on an unforgettable examination of life’s deepest questions. Profound, moving, and uplifting, *Grace without God* is a gem and is destined to become a classic.” (Julien Musolino, Associate Professor of Psychology and Cognitive Science, Rutgers University, and author of *The Soul Fallacy: What Science Shows We Gain from Letting Go of Our Soul Beliefs*) “What an important book. I inhaled every word. Every person struggling to live a meaningful life will find wisdom and sustenance in *Grace Without God*.” (Mary Johnson, author of *An Unquenchable Thirst*) “We are in new and uncharted territory. The family and kinship ties that once insured religious adherence are unwinding. What has been lost? Where might this new freedom take us? In her deeply personal quest to answer these questions, Ozment has created an important book for our time.” (Ethan Watters, author of *Crazy Like Us*) “This well-crafted, accessible exploration of a pressing topic, full of hard questions and astute observations, can serve as a springboard for discussion by parents and others who wonder whether people need God to be good.” (Publishers Weekly, starred review) “In this beautifully written, exhaustively researched, and deeply personal book, Katherine Ozment explores the challenges facing parents who want to raise moral, community-minded children in the absence of formal religion. *Grace without God* fundamentally changed the way I will raise my children.” (Steve Levitt, bestselling author of *Freakonomics*) “An engagingly personal exploration of parenting without religion that’s clear and honest, thoughtful and deeply felt. This is a brilliant addition to the growing chorus of voices in nonreligious parenting. *Grace Without God* is just that good.” (Dale McGowan, author of *Parenting Beyond Belief* and *Raising Freethinkers*) Ozment is not out to bash religion or defend atheism. Quite the contrary: with insight and sensitivity, drawing from her own experiences, Ozment presents a compelling, informative, and inspirational account. Highly recommended for those who no longer believe or congregate, but yearn to live a meaningful life all the same.” (Phil Zuckerman, author of *Living the Secular Life*) “It’s not a spoiler to say that Ozment goes looking for grace only to discover she’s had it all along. From the first page, you’ll be struck by Ozment’s gracious curiosity, intelligence, optimism, and all-around secular loveliness. I felt proud to belong to her tribe—human and godless both.” (Catherine Newman, author of *Waiting for Birdy* and *Catastrophic*)

Happiness)“So many of us don’t call ourselves religious, and yet miss much of what religion offered our parents and grandparents—a sense of community, morality, and ritual. Whether you are atheist, spiritual, an occasional meditator, or a confused seeker, this beautifully-written book will help answer some of life’s big questions.” (Laura Fraser, best-selling author of *An Italian Affair*)“This book is perfect for those of us who have moved past religion but still crave community and sense of moral guidance. Ozment has interviewed dozens of seekers, academics and spiritual leaders, finding secular answers to the big questions: What’s the meaning of life? How do we deal with death? What is our purpose? A satisfying and deep read.” (Julie Scheeres, bestselling author of *Jesus Land*)“Grace Without God is a pilgrimage. Katherine Ozment is one of millions who have left traditional religion only to find that not only is something missing in their lives, but that they long to give their children the meaning, sense of belonging, and spiritual depth of religion. In *Grace Without God*, we are invited to travel with her as she searches religion, philosophy, and social science for tools to construct meaning in our time.” (Peter Morales, President, Unitarian Universalist Association)“Ozment offers her own version of do-it-yourself religion, encouraging everyone to wonder, to seek knowledge, and to connect to a larger purpose. *Grace Without God* is thoughtful and insightful.” (June Sawyers, Booklist)“An informative and relatable discussion on the changing landscape of religion, society, and identity.” (Library Journal)“An astute journalist, Ozment deftly explores whether meaningful ritual can offer an adequate substitute for organized religion. Her candor, open-mindedness, and reflection provide solace to the reader struggling with similar issues in their own lives, respectfully honoring the ghost of religion rather than writing it off.” (The Humanist)

A THOUGHT-PROVOKING EXPLORATION OF HOW TO LIVE A MEANINGFUL LIFE WITHOUT RELIGION. Meet the “Nones,” a rapidly growing group of religiously unaffiliated Americans (so-called because they check the box that reads, essentially, “none of the above” when asked about their faith). While many Americans are raised in a religious tradition, recent decades have seen large numbers of families drift from their churches and synagogues, temples and mosques, and abandon faith-based practices. But what is lost when we leave religion? Faith traditions give us a moral grounding and a sense of identity by connecting us to our past and creating tight communal bonds. But without the one-stop shop of religion, how do the nonreligious fill the need for ritual, story, community, and, above all, purpose and meaning? With a quarter of Americans identifying as religiously unaffiliated, these questions have never been more

urgent. Katherine Ozment – a writer, journalist, and mother of three – comes face-to-face with the fundamental issue of the Nones when her son asks her the simplest of questions: “What are we?” Unsettled by the only reply she can summon – “Nothing” – she sets out on a journey across the changing landscape of America to find a better answer. Insightful, surprising, and compelling, Ozment’s search is both a personal and critical exploration, inspiring readers of all backgrounds to find their own way forward to a meaningful life.

This book gives a very deep insight into the searching for the meaning of life. It’s so human! The book is wonderfully written in a very systematic way. At the end of the book there is a very valuable list of sources for further reading or inquiries on this topic. It was great pleasure to read this book.

I loved this book! It’s a gorgeously written, deeply reported look at a barely appreciated phenomenon that is transforming the Western world. As so many people, like me, give up on organized religion, we are left with lots of questions about how to plug the gaps that once were filled by churches and synagogues. Ozment frames these issues beautifully and illustrates them by profiling an amazing cast of characters, who are pioneers in this new world. This book speaks directly to people, like me, who have turned away from the dogmas of the past, but are less clear about the way forward.

This is a thoughtful book into what approach one should follow to help children develop into caring members of society outside the bounds of organized religion. The review of the historical development of societal relationships helps bring perspective and answers to those who believe that the only path to morality is through the Judaeo-Christian perspective.

I can’t stop telling people about this book. It really makes you think. The author holds your attention while reporting on her research that answers some fundamental questions about the role religion plays in our lives and the purpose it serves. The research she has done points to alternatives for community fulfillment. A great and timely piece of work.

An intelligent, clinical and thought-provoking assessment of the state of religion. *Grace Without God* is unique in its use of personal stories that make it come alive and provides a refreshing perspective that seems particularly apropos in an age of divisiveness and incivility. In addition, as someone who

is culturally Jewish but has chosen to remain (relatively) secular religiously the book serves as an affirmation around the notion of a tailored religious identity.

As a journalistic text, this book is fascinating. But it is also sad. Bad theology has so dominated the world that most people don't even realize that there is such a thing as good theology (good from a naturalistic standpoint). Theology is contested territory and religion is not defined by bad theology. People who are atheists are not logically excluded from religion. They have to contribute to the construction of religion so that religion will be relevant into the future. True, some religions might resist actual reasonableness in their theology but that is not true of all the major religions and most American denominations. In fact, in mainstream Christianity and Judaism there is every reason to believe that as many as half of the people sitting in the pews do not believe in a traditional version of God. This approach seems alien to Ozmet, and that is the sad part. Like many she seems to have just given religion over to the backwards people who think they can believe texts literally (an absurdity by definition as the texts were not written to be read literally). Theology is and needs to be contested and atheists can write theology too. OK, so what is theology? It is the examination of a religion's symbols, with the primary symbol being the word "God." God is a word that points to a feeling people have (I maintain) and just what that means is a question that every generation has to answer for itself. With "for itself" being the vital bit. Religion becomes unhelpful when reasonable people leave it to unreasonable people. Don't do that -- read and write theology yourself!

I feel like I've been looking for this book for my whole life. I grew up without religion, and promised myself I would give my children religion. But nothing felt honest or right, so they are also being raised without religion. I've struggled with that, although they are honest, kind, and compassionate kids. This book gave me a sense of peace and comfort, in my parenting, in myself and in the world.

Appreciate the honesty and openness of author as she shared her perspective on the current tendency of young people to shy away from church. The years of research she put into determining how best to raise her children, as shared in these pages; has given me a much greater respect for, and appreciation of, other religions as well as possible beliefs of non-religious people I encounter.

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