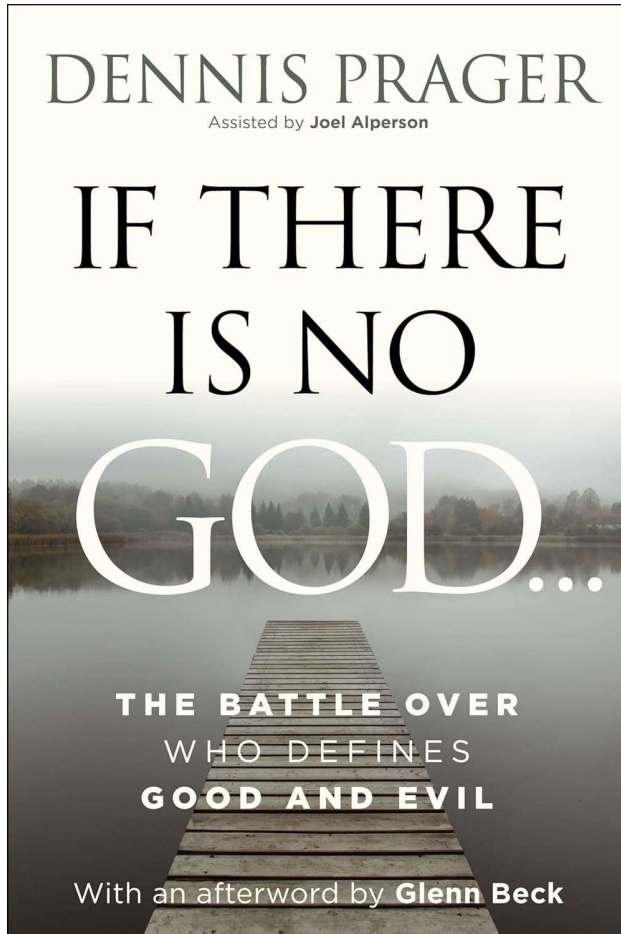


## ‘If There Is No God’ examines moral foundations without religion

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*“If There Is No God: The Battle Over Who Defines Good and Evil” by Dennis Prager. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2026, 256 pages, \$32.99 (hardcover).*



“This book addresses the most critical situation in Western civilization: the battle over values and feelings,” Joel Alpersen explains in the introduction to “If There Is No God: The Battle Over Who Defines Good and Evil,” Dennis Prager’s latest attempt to enlighten us about the role God should play in our personal lives as well as our political institutions. “Increasingly, parents, pastors, rabbis, and youth leaders are being challenged to explain the importance of God and the wisdom on the Bible. Not only does this book detail those challenges, but it also presents powerful responses.”

“While it’s impossible to know the religious choices each reader will make later in life, I do know that a compelling rational case is made here for God, religion, and holding values over feelings,” Alpersen continues. “We have done our best to retain original questions and their follow-ups. It was clear from some exchanges that minds were changed as participants asked sincere questions about how to apply what they learned and, specifically, how to lead a religious life.”

Full disclosure: When I received this book for potential review, I was somewhat hesitant. I know who Dennis Prager is through his media presence, so I was skeptical of what he might be promoting in his latest contribution to our collective dialog. But much to my surprise, I found much of his prose interesting and thought-provoking. The literary style is fluid and straightforward; most of the manuscript is presented in the form of an exchange between Prager and various Audience Members. Questions are typically asked by those in attendance at his lectures/sermons and his responses tend to dovetail with the nature of the inquiry. Much of the narrative reads like a monologue, with his answers taking the inquiries to deeper levels of elaboration and potential implications.

For example, consider the question posed to Prager on page 147: “Why don’t more people emphasize goodness like you do?”

His response: “A major reason for the lack of emphasis on goodness is that very few parents make that their priority. And there’s a good way to prove it, which I’ve done for twenty-five years on the radio. I’ve asked parents to ask their child a simple question, whether their child is five or fifty: ‘What do you think I most want you to be – happy, successful, smart, or good?’ Many parents are sure their child will answer ‘good,’ and are surprised to learn the child’s answer is usually one of the other three options.”

“Trophies are given for spelling bees and basketball championships, but they’re rarely given for excellence in goodness,” Prager continues a little further in his response. “If a parent displayed such an award, others would believe they had nothing else to boast about. From a very early age, children are raised to believe they will be honored most by their parents and by society for accomplishments unrelated to their character. That’s a pretty bad lesson.”

I could not help but conclude the author is on to something significant here.

After earning a B.A. in anthropology and history from Brooklyn College in 1970, Prager held a fellowship at the Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs from 1970 to 1972, while also taking courses at the University of Leeds. After he left graduate school, Prager left Modern Orthodoxy but maintained many traditional Jewish practices; he remains religious. He holds an honorary Doctor of Laws from Pepperdine University. The host of a nationally syndicated radio talk show “The Dennis Prager Show,” his previous books include “Happiness Is a Serious Problem: A Human Nature Repair Manual,” “Still the Best Hope: Why the World Needs American Values to Triumph,” and “The Rational Bible Series: Exodus (2018), Genesis (2019), Deuteronomy (2022).” Paralyzed below the shoulders due to a spinal cord injury he sustained in 2024, the author speaks English, French, Russian and Hebrew.

Another dimension of “If There Is No God” I found fascinating was how Prager intertwined the text with historical, cultural and philosophical references that serve to couch his assertions in a more comprehensive context. This is not “just” a primer for religious people who are trying to sort out where they stand on fundamental questions such as whether or not God exists.

One passage, in particular, reminded me of Scott Galloway’s “Notes on Being a Man,” which I reviewed a few weeks ago:

“I’ll give you a simple way to predict the amount of violent crime in a country: Find out how many young single men there are. The more young single men, the more murder, rape, assault, and burglary. That’s not to say girls are wonderful. If you’ve ever seen a clique of teenage girls picking on a girl outside their clique, you will concede that girls do their killing verbally, not physically.”

“This happens because goodness doesn’t come naturally. For one thing, it often takes courage to be good. It is the very rare boy or girl who stands up to an individual or a group bullying another kid, because it takes courage to do so. And courage is the rarest of all the good traits. There are many kind people, many generous people, many honest people, but there are very few courageous people.”

Although I do not agree with his perspective on a variety of biblical issues, I was nonetheless impressed by the scope and depth of Prager’s understanding of the subject matter at hand. If you are going to disagree with him, I suggest doing your homework before taking him to task.

As Richard K. Mason notes in his critique of the book on Amazon, “Mr. Prager seeks not to indoctrinate, but to have his audience exposed to ideas and concepts so they can think about them and form their own views. While I, as a Christian, do not share some of Mr. Prager’s theology, this dialogue, like virtually everything he has written, is well worth reading and meditating upon, no matter what one’s theology or philosophy is.”

I could not agree more. Highly recommended.

*Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, University Distinguished Professor, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, WKU.*