

Review

Sam D. Kim, *A Holy Haunting: Why Faith Isn't a Leap but a Series of Stagers from One Safe Place to Another*. New York: Morgan James Publishing, 2023. ISBN 978-1631959905

By Paul Chamberlain, PhD

Why are so many people who were raised in the Church leaving it? Why is the largest “religious affiliation” today in the Western world the so-called “Nones”? And why are so many people lonely and stressed in our technologically connected world? Many Christians are deeply perplexed and troubled by these questions. If you're asking them, you will want to pick up Sam D. Kim's recent book, *A Holy Haunting: Why Faith Isn't a Leap but a Series of Stagers from One Safe Place to Another*. These are the questions that motivated him to write it.

Kim's approach to tackling these questions is a creative one. He begins with the surprising claim that many Christians in the Western world have fundamentally misunderstood the Christian faith at its core, and the consequences have been dire. This book is an attempt to restate and give a richer picture of this misunderstanding than is commonly held by the Christian community today. In the process, Kim makes what well-known Christian author, Less Stroebel, calls “a compelling case for faith for a new generation.”

Where, exactly, is the misunderstanding of which Kim writes? He mentions a few factors but the most important, in his view, is a misconception of the nature of faith itself. Whereas many tend to see faith as a set of beliefs, Kim argues that a fuller picture should include the notion that faith is “who we are in the deepest ontological sense, i.e., beings forged in the corridors of eternity predating the . . . universe and the big bang.” He further explains that this includes an intrinsic “spiritual consciousness,” and “a desire to be in communion.”

That is a mouthful, but it leads Kim to claim that humans have always longed for something greater and to be in relationship with others. If you look for it, he says, you can see indicators of these basic human yearnings throughout history and popular culture. He cites such noteworthy figures as St. Augustine, C. S. Lewis, and even Bruce Springsteen, who has sung “Everybody has a hungry heart,” as examples.

The contemporary level of emptiness, loneliness, stress, mental health challenges, and even thoughts of suicide, says Kim, has reached epidemic proportions, and he cites studies to show it. These struggles currently pose a severe health risk to the general population. In this vein, he asks, “How can the most

technologically connected generation be the most socially disconnected in human history?”

Kim further notes that postmodernism has reshaped the thinking of our world and changed it forever. Truth is widely regarded as relative and there is a deep suspicion of those who offer objectively true overarching narratives. These are seen as nothing more than power grabs and attempts to manipulate others into their way of thinking.

The unfortunate result of the combination of these personal, social, and intellectual factors is that large numbers of people raised in the church have left and are now “spiritually displaced” persons in a self-imposed exile. This is a serious concern, says Kim, and it needs to be addressed. His call to Christians in this book is to welcome spiritually displaced persons back home and, when they come, to offer them a place where they can explore their doubts without repercussions or judgment.

Christians must begin, says Kim, by correcting their understanding of faith, themselves, and a few other things too. Beyond that, they should recognize that loneliness is an important signpost. It points beyond itself to the fact that all persons desire to be in communion. This, in turn, shows that they were created from community (the Trinitarian God) and for community.

Kim then makes the thought-provoking move of arguing that spiritual consciousness in humans should be viewed as another step in their evolutionary development, occurring alongside their biological and psychological development. In this section, he builds upon the work of Robert Kegan, renowned developmental psychologist at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Kegan’s theory of human development, Kim believes, is helpful but not adequate to satisfy the growing demands of modern life since some of the toughest problems humans face are spiritual, not only biological or psychological. Christians need a new and more holistic map of the evolution of consciousness that converges on the spirit in tandem with the body (biology) and soul (psychology), and Kim offers one in this book. He calls it “a revised theory of the evolution of human consciousness,” since it includes a spiritual component in human development, and thus reflects the totality of human experience.

This revision, Kim believes, possesses a number of advantages including bridging the gap between the secular and sacred, fostering collaboration between faith and science, and building a bridge between the disciplines of psychology, biology, and theology. It is part of a fuller picture of faith which Christians can hold

and communicate to those who have left as they welcome the spiritually exiled back home to carry out their own personal search and discovery.

In his final section, Kim turns to four questions concerning Christian faith which he believes present stumbling blocks to many: did God create the world, did Jesus of Nazareth really exist, are the gospels reliable, and does God still speak today.

His responses to each are brief and readable, and readers who wish to dig deeper would be advised to search out other works which provide more complete responses. A good first step would be to consult the sources Kim has cited. Kim's response to the question of creation will delight some and disenchant others. He argues that a completely literal interpretation of the Genesis creation account is not only unnecessary, it is misguided. Among other supporting reasons for this view, Kim mentions that Moses, the widely-agreed author of Genesis, was not there when creation occurred so it cannot be a literal step-by-step account of what took place. The word, "cannot" is probably too strong since nothing would logically prevent God from revealing a literal account to Moses if he chose to. Still, the point is well taken. Kim's primary contention here is that the creation account should be read as a literary representation which teaches two primary truths: the preeminence of God and His creation of the universe. Theology can tell us *why* we exist, says Kim, but it is left to science to provide information on *how* it happened. He draws heavily upon the work of Francis Collins, former director of the National Institute of Health, and founder of Biologos, a Christian scientific think tank with headquarters in Grand Rapids, Michigan, to set out a number of details included in Collins' view called, *Evolutionary Creationism*.

In responding to the second question, concerning the existence of Jesus of Nazareth, Kim notes that, ironically, the view that he never existed as a historical person, known as *Mythicism*, has been most effectively rebutted by two atheist scholars, Bart Ehrman and Maurice Casey, and that virtually no biblical scholars or historians of ancient antiquity and the Mediterranean accept the mythicist position. There are too many references to Jesus in early Jewish literature, a few of which are cited by Kim.

Readers may wonder why Kim has not included the question of Jesus' resurrection in his list of stumbling blocks since it involves questions of miracles, naturalism, and the call to accept a highly unusual claim. As professor Gary Habermas, who has delved deeply into this question for many years, has noted, if the resurrection of Jesus happened, the rest of Christianity follows. The flipside is also true.

This book is highly readable, partly due to Kim’s easy writing style and also because of his many illustrations and anecdotes which make his arguments digestible. Many of these are drawn from Kim’s personal experiences and interactions. Some will make readers laugh while others are sobering.

If you’re looking for a book which explores and suggests reasons for the widespread defections from the Christian community, this would be a good choice. It does not shrink from controversy, and most readers will appreciate the care and pastoral heart with which points of disagreement are addressed. Its greatest value, however, lies in the positive steps it sets out to staunch the hemorrhaging and welcome “displaced persons” back home.

Paul Chamberlain, PhD, is Professor of Leadership, Ethics, and Christian Apologetics and Director of the Institute for Christian Apologetics at Trinity Western University. He also has worked with Ravi Zacharias International Ministries. He is the author of five books on apologetics and numerous articles addressing current social and moral issues. His most recent book, coedited with Chris Price, is *Everyday Apologetics* (2020). Dr. Chamberlain has appeared on numerous radio and television talk shows, debated on university campuses, and is a frequent guest speaker at public functions.

Author Copyright.

Paul Chamberlain, review of *A Holy Haunting: Why Faith Isn’t a Leap but a Series of Staggers from One Safe Place to Another*, Northwest Institute for Ministry Education Research, www.nimer.ca, (May 2024).