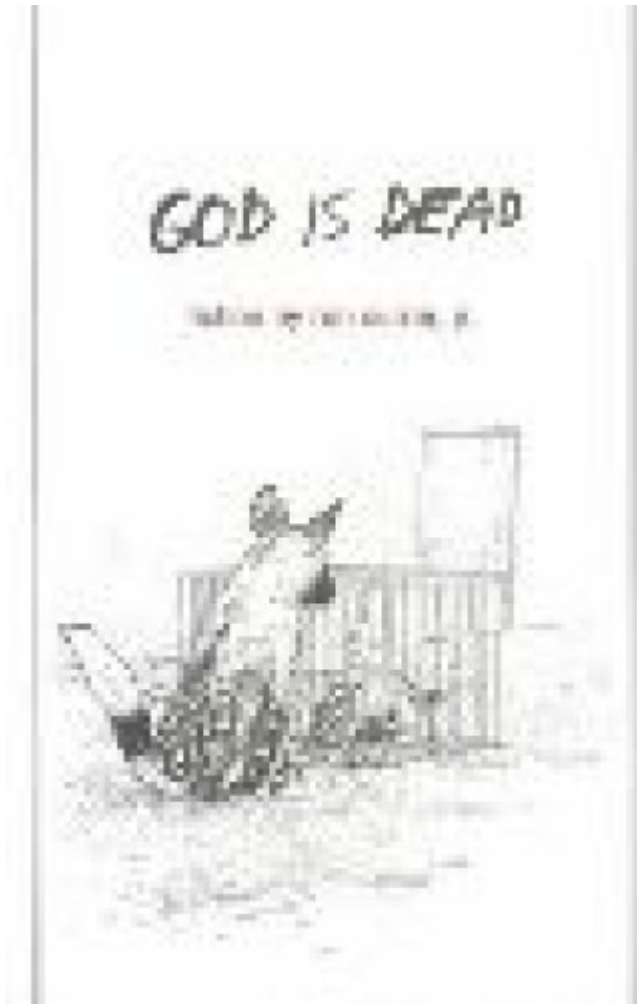


God Is Dead

reviewed by [Mark Ralls](#) in the [April 8, 2008](#) issue

In Review



God Is Dead

Ron Currie Jr.
Viking

Ever since Nietzsche made his famous pronouncement, theologians have wrung their hands over the metaphorical death of God. Yet what if God's death were no

metaphor? What if it were a documented event headlining every newspaper and covered incessantly by every television news channel in the world? What would happen to our world? To us? This is the question that Ron Currie Jr. asks in a provocative and often outrageous literary debut. As news begins to spread of God's demise in the Darfur desert, Currie imagines a new world coming into being, a world that is very different from—and yet somehow quite familiar to—our own.

Echoing John's Gospel, Currie begins his story with God incarnate. God has come to earth as a beautiful Dinka woman with an ugly wound on her calf. Apart from her infinite compassion and an endless bag of sorghum to share, God is powerless. This is why she is here. God has come in search of an enslaved boy whose desperate prayers have gone unanswered. God hopes to apologize to him personally for the evil that has occurred in God's name.

The first of many disturbing images in this book is God's wound: "a jagged, festering gash upon which fed wriggling clumps of maggots." Few theological treatises have captured so poignantly the scandal of the incarnation: God's submission to corruption both of the flesh and of the social order. When we witness the death of God—with the glaring desert sun, the marauding Janjaweed militia and a pack of wild dogs all closing in—we are shocked but not surprised. With a single snapshot of the bloody calf, Currie has already initiated us into the scandalous mystery of the God who becomes flesh and lives among us.

The rest of the book is a bleak album of such snapshots—nine short stories that are both abrasive and disarmingly wise. Each story takes us farther along the path of disintegration. The first features a well-adjusted high school girl unfazed by the news of God's death until she witnesses the suicide of a priest and follows his sightless gaze into an empty sky. She looks up plaintively and sees "nothing but blue"—a vacuous harbinger of the nightmarish world to come. The next story follows a group of college students who—distraught over a world now crumbling into chaos—enter into a grisly suicide pact. Finally, as a brutal new world emerges, the proponents of two secular philosophies, postmodern anthropology and evolutionary psychology, stage a ridiculous war in defense of rival academic positions.

Throughout *God Is Dead*, Currie pokes fun at the twisted mutations of life after God. His glib sense of irony fits the nihilism of a world where the center no longer holds. "There were ten of us," deadpans a 20-year-old in the suicide pact, "eight if you didn't count the two in the middle of the living room holding pistols to each other's

heads.” One story seems to be an extended punch line itself: Parents try to fill the spiritual vacuum in their lives by worshiping their children. In response, a new therapeutic specialty is established to assist them: child adulation prevention psychologists’ sole purpose is to persuade parents that their children are “nothing special.” Currie summarizes the new spiritual state of affairs: “God, hamstrung by a spotty track record, and dead besides, was out; kids, tangible, blameless, and cute as hell, were in.” Teenagers find their own spiritual outlet. They begin to worship one another. The mutual admiration in their text messages echoes the Hebrew psalmist. “Divine Amanda,” keys a fawning 16-year-old, “open my lips and my mouth will proclaim your praise.”

The longer one resides in Currie’s post-God world, the more familiar it begins to feel. Parents obsessively idolize their children. Youth are capable of neither caring about the past nor imagining the future. The enlightened prove not to be immune to their own brands of fundamentalism. The satire poses important questions for us: What happens to worship when we have no point of reference beyond ourselves? What sustains morality when there is no recognizable goal beyond individual flourishing?

Perhaps the most devastating questions are expressed by Currie’s most ridiculous character—a feral dog that feasted on God’s corpse and as a result acquired preternatural powers of understanding. “You’re . . . naked and alone in this world,” the dog counsels a supplicant. “And so now the question becomes: Can you abide by this knowledge? Or will it destroy you, empty you out, make you a husk among husks?”

In Ron Currie’s imagination, the world without God is a cipher, a perpetual fall without redemption, a black hole that empties us of the resources that give our lives meaning. His often irreverent book thus implies at least the coherence of Christian hope. It suggests the necessity of a divine center that holds—and that ultimately resurrects all that our world has allowed to die.