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## **“Good Without God”: the agnostic creed of Harvard's atheist chaplain. Does modern man truly believe that Jesus Christ has nothing to say to him?**

“We don't look to a god for answers. We are each other's answers.” With this statement to the Times, 44-year-old Greg Epstein, a self-avowed atheist, outlined his programme as new chief chaplain of Harvard University, which had adopted the motto “Truth for Christ and the Church”, and whose mission was the training of clergy to serve the first Puritan colonists who settled in New England. *Epstein was unanimously elected by the university chaplains* who lead the Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist and other religious communities on campus. The peculiarity is that his atheism is known to all, corroborated in his published works, first and foremost “Good without God: what a billion non-religious people do believe.” *The heart of his message is "Good without God"*. Notwithstanding the predictable reactions of some of the more conservative Catholic environments, Epstein was championed by the Christian chaplains who elected him. The chaplains share the same underlying awareness that atheism and Gnosticism are spreading among the new generations - especially among young university students destined to become the United States' future ruling class. In fact, *according to a Harvard survey conducted in 2020, over 40% of students described themselves as atheist or agnostic*. Freshmen in particular were twice as likely to profess to be atheist or agnostic compared to their American peers. In any event, irrespective of the appropriateness of appointing an atheist who describes himself as a “humanist chaplain” and who has worked in that capacity as a teacher in Massachusetts schools, the crux of his creed remains: “Good without God”. “There is a rising group of people who no longer identify with any religious tradition but still experience a real need for conversation and support around what it means to be a good human and live an ethical life”, Mr Epstein remarked. This is an honest ground for intellectual debate. *But that "good without God" rings like the anthropological denial of the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger's - later elected Benedict XVI - celebrated expression "etsi Deus daretur"*. As known, Ratzinger proposed to the laity to reverse the axiom of the Enlightenment “*etsi Deus non daretur*”, a veritable icon of modernity, and say: Even the one who does not succeed in finding the path to accepting the existence of God ought nevertheless to try to live and to direct his life *veluti si Deus daretur*, as if God did indeed exist. But Epstein dismisses this perspective of life, suggesting that people should recognise their atheistic status and seek a good way of life that excludes the spiritual dimension. In other words, a good life but without God, the life of a human being with no need for transcendence who must seek what is good in life every single day only by mirroring himself in his neighbour, in the person other than him/herself, whence should flow - according to Epstein's doctrine - the right answers. What all believers (especially the faithful of the three monotheistic religions) should be asking themselves is whether we should start reflecting seriously on the spread of atheism and agnosticism in the hearts and minds of the younger generations. And whether the answer can truly consist in accepting the apparent decline in the search for religious meaning.

**That is, whether modern man believes that Jesus Christ has nothing more to say to individual consciences about what Christianity means by ‘good life’.**

And whether, from that perspective, we ought to radically rethink the way of evangelising modern man. Admittedly, a serious cultural conflict could be waged, but clearly that is not enough. The paradox is too alarming : a ruthless theocracy has come to power in Afghanistan after the defeat of multicultural America both in military and sentimental terms. However, in the United States, home to modern democracy and religious freedom, which is its cornerstone, atheism is growing especially among the young - educated generations destined to lead their country in the second half of the 21st century. *Thus, however seemingly reassuring, "good without God" atheism would appear to contain a*

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*seed of anthropological weakness that could culminate in practical indifference and personal irresponsibility, as well as into intolerance of religious faiths.* Atheism will undoubtedly develop a geo-political character in the years to come, something that has only been touched on today. Suffice it to mention the rapid spread of agnosticism in Europe and, above all, the fact that 67% of the Chinese population claims to be atheist. *The realisation that more than a third of the world's population is already without God should prompt Christians to engage in a process of reflection on themselves and their place in the world.* It should inspire them to adopt a doctrine on atheism and Gnosticism that meets the challenges of the hard times ahead.

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