

Nothing Without God

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God is absent from
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In the illusion of having everything, have we become "nothing without God?"

"Who is most respected in Romania?" I asked my colleague, Dr. Augustin Batis, one day on my recent trip. I remembered American pollsters identifying federal judges as the most esteemed in our culture. His answer was simple and tragic. "No one," he replied. "Not even judges?" I asked. "Oh no. They're the worst," he said without hesitation. Our mutual silence mourned the loss of trust, the loss of credibility that has come to this country as the result of Godless leadership. Nothing – no one – is respected when God is absent from the hearts of men.

We also visited an exquisite monastery near Pitesti. It is a five-hundred-year-old monument to Romanian history and architecture, and a symbol of the unchanging Orthodox traditions. We happened to catch a male chorus as they chanted the mass with a highly decorated priest. The enchanting tones drew us in as the chambers echoed with majestic music. It would have been easy to just sit and rest a while – to take it in as though time stood still – a taste of heaven.

This was no ordinary church. This was the final resting place of two generations of royalty. The tombs of two kings and two queens graced the wings near the massive doors. King Karol had been the first of four generations to rule Romania in the golden era before Communism. His nephew, King Ferdinand had carried on the renewal of these extraordinary people into the twentieth century. And their royal theme? *Nihil Sine Deo*. "Nothing Without God."

But the alluring richness seemed an illusion. The mass concluded with each chanter nonchalantly kissing the hand of the priest on his way out. The ritual over, the priest entered his special chamber, presumably to change his clothes and go home, like everyone else at the end of their shift. I couldn't help but wonder who was the object of worship. Was it the dominant statue of Mary, the mother of Jesus? Was it the priest? Was it the centuries-old architecture, the powerful pride of history, or perhaps the memory of the beloved royalty? Had this place of worship, this stalwart tradition become "nothing without God" in the most tragic meaning of the phrase?

My ponderings continued as I returned home to the U.S., to the land of plenty – the land of every opportunity and privilege known to man. I reflected on our traditions of freedom, our national pride, the faith of our founding fathers. I also remembered with deepest sadness the anniversaries of Waco, the Oklahoma City bombing, and Columbine High School.

In the illusion of having everything, have we become "nothing without God?"

But we keep a perpetual Easter – a timeless celebration of God becoming man while retaining his divine power. By bridging heaven and earth, He made a way for us to become *something*. The miraculous work of the Luke Society in Romania is proof enough that God can use ordinary people for extraordinary purposes. The 15,000 square-foot Dr. Luca Medical Clinic was erected in just three years in a land that takes 5-10 years to build a simple house. 600 patients showed up in the first month, willingly paying from their meager resources to receive care from people that respect them. The volume tripled by the third month, simply by word-of-mouth anecdotes. By the end of the first year, the medical ministry had become the new standard for both medical and business practices in a city of 350,000.

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It is I also saw it in the face of a poor man in the underground train station in Bucharest. He was sitting on the steps leading to the sunlight, playing a violin beautifully. His case was open to receive the kindnesses of passers-by. But his technique caught my eye. He held the bow in his right hand, but his right hand did not move. It was paralyzed, but he still managed to play soothing and heart-touching melodies by moving the violin across the bow with his left hand, the same hand that expertly fingered the strings. I placed a few small bills in his case, and he pointed upward, smiled and said "God." Then I saw the Bible at his side, and I knew I had met a brother. I took his picture, and the sunlight streamed in to highlight his features.