



Killing God

Richard Blakely

The problem with God

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Dawn Bundy is a fifteen-year-old English girl. She is not especially attractive, and she doesn't really fit in. Her best friends are her two dogs, Jesus and Mary. Her favourite, and only, band is *The Jesus and Mary Chain*, and she listens to them constantly. And when she isn't listening to them, she has their songs running through her mind.

The story is written in the present tense in the first person. It gives it a sense of being inside Dawn's head and experiencing her life as she does. Lines from various songs by *The Jesus and Mary Chain* form the soundtrack from her life, and provide titles for each chapter. As the story progresses, we learn more and more about who Dawn Bundy is and why she behaves the way she does.

Dawn lives with her mother, Sara, who has sunk into a life of depression and alcoholism. It has been this way since Dawn's father, John, left two years ago. John used to be a lovable, though alcoholic, father. He would take his family on spontaneous trips, just for fun. But he was mixed up with the wrong sorts of people. He was a

drug dealer, and this provided him with the income to take care of his family, as well as supporting his own addiction.

When John found God, he changed. It was as though he became someone else entirely. But it was not a change for the better. Though he sobered up for a while, he was soon drinking again, and this time he mixed his alcohol with God, '*like some kind of abominable cocktail*' (p. 52). It was a very difficult time for Dawn: the man who lived with them was now someone she barely knew. And then, two years ago, John Bundy walked out the door and out of their lives. She blames God for the pain in her life that began when her father became a Christian. And so she has decided to kill God. But in order for that to happen she needs to know her enemy. So she buys some Bibles to find out about him.

Two other characters central to the plot of the novel are Mel Monroe and Taylor Harding. They are two girls from school who are at the top of the social ladder. For some reason they suddenly start spending time with Dawn. At first she is apprehensive of their attentions, but before long she starts to enjoy their company. But everyone has secrets.

Kevin Brooks, author of *Killing God*, explains, '*I wanted to explore what happens when a fundamentally good person does something unforgiveable.*' He also addresses the question of religion – '*what is it for, what does it do, how does it change people.*' It also deals with trying to discover who or what God is. Dawn faces a problem in her attempt to kill God because she doesn't believe in his existence. And how do you kill someone who doesn't exist?

Dawn was happy in her life before God came along. She knew what to expect and knew her role in life. But her father's sudden change to his basic self knocked her familiar life off balance, and she was never able to recover. Despite the title, the novel is more about the journey of one girl as she struggles to come to terms with her father's actions two years previously. At some point during that time, a part of her retreated into a cave in her head, from which her terrified thirteen-year-old self expresses itself in the here and now.

Every action has a consequence. Unwittingly,

when he left his family, John Bundy put them in grave danger. Other choices he made result in terrible consequences for those he loves. Dawn struggles to forgive her father for the wrongs he did in the past, and through this, the novel brings up the question of whether there is anything that is so bad that it cannot be forgiven. In the end, she decides that she can forgive him, and her love for him overcomes her hatred for his mistakes.

Another question the novel raises is, what effects does religion have on an individual and on a family? There seems to be no positive aspect to religion, at least from Dawn's perspective. The book only examines one religion – Christianity. It portrays Christians in a very bad light, but in a way that is sadly true of some. Dawn's neighbours, Mr. and Mrs. Garth, were Christians, but they were horrible to the Bundys and ignored them. This was part of the reason she named her dogs Jesus and Mary – because she knew it would bother the Garths no end. Mel admits that her brother committed suicide because of the shame of a relationship with a priest. And then there are the Christians who would come to the Bundy's door to talk to them about God. Those are the people who were responsible for John's sudden change, and Dawn hates them.

There is a huge difference between being identified as a Christian and having a real relationship with God. Atrocious things have been done in the name of Christianity which are a far cry from the heart of the gospel message. There are many people who claim to be Christians and yet have not grasped what the Bible is all about. I think that John Bundy falls into this category. He has the head knowledge of what Christianity is about briefly explained to him. But he responds to it in the wrong way. It becomes a new addiction for him. Just as he used alcohol to wean himself off heroin, so he tried using God to wean himself off alcohol. It wasn't enough, and he was soon back to the alcohol, although he did not revert to the happy person he was before God. Finding God, explains Dawn, *'seemed to suck all the Dadness out of him. It sucked everything out of him – his mind, his soul, his life, his love ...'* (p. 52). That is not the way a relationship with God is supposed to be. John didn't truly find God, but merely the interpretation of the door-to-door God-sellers. Dawn never mentions them returning to check up on him, which would imply that they

were just trying to fill a quota and didn't really care about the people they've converted. Only one Christian character in the book, a vicar whom Dawn talks to in the middle, is painted in any positive light. She goes to him in her quest to learn about who God is, and he is willing to talk to her and answer her questions, although she can see that he is eager to get away to his work.

Ideally, everyone who claimed to be a Christian would follow the teachings found in the Bible. Mahatma Gandhi once stated, *'I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.'* Unfortunately, this is often true; for one reason or another, many Christians fail to grasp the message within the Bible, and their behaviour reflects badly on the one whose name they are identified with. But the inability of some Christians to adequately convey the love and acceptance of Christ does not invalidate the truth of what the gospel proclaims. There are many Christians who do really live out their faith, though very often it is those who behave contrary to the Bible whose actions are publicised. Even the best Christians still make mistakes, but they do demonstrate that living a Bible-centred life is the best way to live. This doesn't mean that all problems suddenly disappear, nor that perfection is an immediate consequence of accepting Christ. It can never be achieved in the sinful world in which we live. But the good news of the Christian faith is that we can be forgiven, and real change is guaranteed in the lives of those who genuinely understand and respond to that message by trusting in Jesus. The wonderful thing is that this promise is available to everyone. Jesus said that he had come to call those who knew they were guilty of sin, rather than those who thought themselves righteous (Mark 2:17).

The novel asks a lot of questions but doesn't answer them, thus leaving them open for people to explore for themselves. There is a very clear angle to some of Dawn's own explorations, coloured by her own experiences with Christianity in the past. And she firmly believes in the non-existence of God, realising by the end of the novel that her killing God exercise was entirely futile. She reasons that you can't kill someone who doesn't exist, but Christians believe that he not only exists but is infinitely bigger and more powerful and intelligent than we could ever imagine. But despite his size and power and intelligence, God desires a

relationship with each of us. He isn't seeking to sap the life out of a person, but to give them a rich and satisfying life (John 10:10), and it is only in a right relationship with him that we can find true satisfaction.

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