



Clarion Review

Spiritual

John's Assignment: A Satire on the Human Condition

Mark L. Samuel

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Two Stars (out of Five)

The world will end unless mankind changes its ways; what would you do?

How would humans react if an angel came to Earth to offer them a choice? They can change some of their most cherished thoughts, beliefs, and customs to align with what God actually desires or face judgment and destruction. This is the choice explored in *John's Assignment*, a thought-provoking satire on the human condition, by Mark L. Samuel (a pseudonym).

The angel John is assigned to go to Earth and point out to eighteen of the world's national and religious leaders that God is upset and expects changes. John is to tell them that the future of the planet and its inhabitants hangs on their acceptance of God's demands. Samuel explores concepts that include free will, class structure in human society, the role of leaders, whether or not religious dogma has meaning, and the relationship between God and man. And he does so from God's perspective, from whose viewpoint it appears that making the necessary changes will require quite a turnaround for humanity.

God, it turns out, is a respecter of human individuality who wants people to know Him and come to Him of their own free will, not through the demands of a religion or a state. He wants leaders to understand that their power comes from the people governed. Rather than exalting themselves, he wants leaders to guarantee their people the ability to provide for themselves, to have access to education, and to live together without hatred and bigotry in the knowledge that no one religion is better than another. The Father also wants humans to know that they are not "born in sin," and that forgiveness is readily obtainable if sought.

John's task, as he meets with the leaders of the United States, China, India, Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia, as well as with Pope Francis and the Pope Emeritus, is complicated by

humanity's need to cling to its most cherished thoughts, beliefs, and customs—even when shown by God to be inaccurate and harmful—even if the existence of the planet hangs in the balance.

The author provides factual background information on the religious and national leaders with whom John must meet, but he reminds readers that his book is a work of fiction and should not be construed as an accurate portrayal of what those leaders might say or do in the situation he describes.

While Samuel has come up with an interesting concept, the repetition of God's demands at each of John's encounters slows the book's pacing tremendously and may cause readers to lose interest. And even though John is visiting the palaces and playgrounds of the world's leaders, the book lacks sumptuous visual descriptions of those places. Also lacking is emotional depth and intensity, as it appears that the author has chosen to keep his story centered in the head, not the heart.

The book has errors in word usage, as in the use of "sew" where "sow" is intended, "interrupted" where "interpreted" is meant, and typos such as "scared text" when "sacred text" is correct. Illustration credits and a more informative author biography (beyond his having spent twenty-two years in the military) would be helpful.

Samuel's work could easily serve as a discussion starter for thoughtful readers who enjoy contemplating life's perennial questions and who seek solutions to the age-old problems that continue to plague humankind—when the existence of all that lives hangs in the balance.

Kristine Morris