

There is no father
 “Squid Game” (2021)

Absence of Father – Absence of God

There is a common thread among the main characters in Squid Game. They have no fathers. Both Seong Gi-Hun and Cho Sang-Woo were raised by a single mother. Kang Sae-Byeok is an orphan. Her father was shot and killed on the border between North Korea and China. Ji-yeong’s father abused her and her mother and she killed him. Moreover, other characters do not mention their fathers at all.

Absence of father in the symbolic world suggests the absence of God and reveals both the absence of order and rule and the presence of chaos and death. There is no God in the Squid game. In the world in which God is absent, there is only one rule—battle for survival and desire. Drama alludes to a reality of 2008 upon which its story is written. Due to the strike and crisis of Ssangyong Motor Company, many workers suffered and a lot of families fell apart. North Korean refugees escaped by dodging bullets to cross the border. A husband beat his wife to death and children were abused. A poor elderly with Alzheimer’s was abandoned without care. The global financial crisis revealed what is at the core of capitalism—the law of the jungle—and turned many into its prey. But God was not there.

The reality was brutal and cruel. People were forced to make choices, but nothing guaranteed their survival. Although those who fell short in competition and made mistakes in their choice continually died, nobody grieved them. The mockery of God evident throughout the story is a lament for the world in which they live. The cross is present in places but God is absent. There are many Christians but they do nothing to fix the problem. Ji-yeong’s last word applies to everyone in this world—“I have nowhere to go.”

Oh Il-nam’s World – Oh Il-nam’s Question

Il-nam reconstructed such a world by creating Squid Game. It has a simple rule—choose between desire and death while removing the causes that justify their actions and the social safety net that protect their lives. He thought this is the essence of the world—the true reality in which God is absent. He confesses that he created this game for fun. He understands the world to be a game designed for fun. He declares, “There is no God. If there is, God created the world just for fun.” Il-nam wanted to ridicule God by creating Squid Game. In other words, Squid Game was his question for God.

Il-nam’s questions throughout his world were precise. He brought to the fore how fragile and feeble our values, which we held so dear, are. His game debunked the vanity of God and the ethics which was established upon God’s presence. A person turns someone else’s help into God’s help. His prayer uncovered that God is a mere means by which one covers his desire. A person fought against the person he loved most, killed her, and took his life as well. The love in which he sincerely believed became a seed of tragedy. Out of sympathy a person chose another person to be in the same team but betrayed him to save his own life and showed how shallow and futile sympathy can be. The contract based on love and sex easily fell apart as well. This proved the futility of promises we made to one another.

Il-nam does not stop. He goes further and now imitates the God of Christianity. He enters into the world he created. Later, he also confesses that he did so for fun. He is laughing at one of

the noblest creeds that humanity upholds—incarnation. Mockery is stronger than objection. He asks, “If this is the world, isn’t God of Christianity absent or evil? If the world is as it is even after Christ came to the world, didn’t he also come for greater fun?” Il-nam asks with his entire being if there is anything trustworthy or if the truth really exists.

Seong Gi-Hun’s challenge – Seong Gi-Hun’s Despair

There is one man struggling for survival in the real world and the Squid Game that Il-nam created. It is Gi-Hun. He wanted to be a father in a world in which there was no father. He wanted to care for his daughter even by staking his life. Even though everything was luck and chaos and he had to struggle between life and death, he took courage and continued. He established his own principles and strived to keep them. He tried to care for the weak and protect the lives of people. He refused to accept the order of this world until the last moment. At the end of Squid Game, he refused desire but chooses the order that he established and strived to maintain.

Il-nam tries his best to crush the order that Gi-Hun created. So far, the world that Il-nam created was powerful. The fact that the former winner of Squid Game became the manager of Squid Game suggests this world defeated everyone. Il-nam has always won his battle with God. Therefore, destroying Gi-Hun’s order was not just defeating Gi-Hun but defeating God. The one-to-one duels between Il-nam and Gi-Hun was the height of this battle on the values upon which the world should be established.

What Gi-Hun experiences in this battle is despair. Il-nam pretends to have Alzheimer’s and appeals to his conscience. In the end, Gi-Hun lies to the elderly man. He had to embrace despair—the despair of his ethics demolished, his friend dying, and his self disintegrated. Even after winning the title, he spent no cash prize. He became a winner but could not become a father.

A surprising reversal takes place, however. Gi-Hun’s despair is different than the one his predecessors had because he did not buy in the game though he won the game. He did not give up staying in despair. He disagreed with Squid Game by holding onto despair until the end. Staying in despair meant he still had hope. Although he was disappointed by himself, he did not give up the image of the father he wants to be. That was the sign that he could be a father.

Staying in Despair: Confessing God

By surprise, despair made a crack in Il-nam’s idea. Il-nam’s speech to Gi-Hun is significant. “I made the world for fun. In other words, searching for the order and rule in the world and its purpose is impossible from the start.” But, Il-nam continues, “That money is a reward for your luck and effort. You deserve spending it.”

Il-nam finds a person becoming a father in a world in which there is no father. He discovers through Gi-Hun that we do not need to be perfect to be a father but need to embrace our condition that we are thrown into the world. Il-nam sees a possibility in Gi-Hun. We should accept ourselves and live our own life even though we cannot trust the world and we ourselves are not trustworthy. The new way is only possible for those who recognize and can stay in this deep despair.

Il-nam suggests another game for him, shows a sign of hope and gives his life. He decided to make Gi-Hun a father. For this purpose, he gave his all. Il-nam chooses an answer to his lifelong question at the last moment in his last game.

Gi-Hun finally became a father. He changed his hair color to the color of those who governed the world so far. He decided to make a new order. He goes to Se-byeok’s brother and

takes care of him. He tells his daughter, "I love you." He became a father and he returns to the world with courage.

Conclusion – In the Face of the Absence of God

It became a daunting task to find God after the dawn of modernity. Many (especially in the West) neither try to prove nor confess God. Even in the world in which God is absent, we should still long for God because only desire remains in the world where there is no ideal we aspire to achieve. What does longing for God mean? I think we can learn something from Jesus, Paul, and Gi-Hun. That is to stay in despair. Those unaware of God's absence are foolish. Those trying to prove God's absence are arrogant. Only those who stay in despair in the face of God's absence begin imitating God. I believe we should ponder upon this irony.

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