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September 24, 2009: The Death of the Death of God

Bruce Ledewitz

Duquesne University, ledewitz@duq.edu

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Title: The Death of the Death of God

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9/24/2009—Steve Rabey, writing in the blog Get Religion, opened a recent post as follows: “John T. Elson died on Sept. 7. John who, you ask? The New York Times’ obit explains that Elson was the Time religion editor who wrote the magazine’s famous 1966 cover story asking: ‘Is God dead?’” Notice the date of that famous Time story, 1966. In 1966, a popular magazine took note that some Christian theologians were wrestling seriously with a notion like Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s “religionless Christianity” and reinterpreting the meaning of and possibility of belief in God. Yet, when I suggest that references to the word God in the public square can be reinterpreted along secular lines, I get the tired response that “God means God”. And from secularists, yet, Elson’s death should remind us that the statement “I don’t believe in God” is not only ambiguous but incomplete. First, what God do you not believe in? Second, and most important, what comes next? For these Christian theologians, the absence of God did not mean the absence of meaningful, and necessarily secular, faith.