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### January 8, 2013: More On Taking Nihilism Seriously, Part 3

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Title: More On Taking Nihilism Seriously, Part 3

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1/8/2013--3. Nihilism is just as much a crisis for the world as for the Church. What does it mean to say, as Nietzsche announced in 1882, through the madman in *The Gay Science*, that God is dead? Martin Heidegger tells us in an essay about Nietzsche, that for Nietzsche, the word God is used to designate the suprasensory world in general—the metaphysical world of ideals. The pronouncement God is dead means that this “suprasensory world is without effective power. It bestows no life. Metaphysics... is at an end. ...[It] has suffered the loss of its obligatory and above all its vitalizing and upbuilding power. ... [So there is nothing—the nihil—] “to which man can cling and by which he can orient himself.” And this is just as true of Reason as of God.

--That is why nihilism is not a crisis just for Christians but for nonbelievers too. Nonbelievers insist that human beings rely on Reason instead of relying on revelation. But their comportment toward Reason is just as unreal today as is the invocation of the God of the Bible. Neither invocation can arrest the darkening of the world. Neither can arrest the human movement toward ever greater inauthenticity. Both claims, God and Reason, stand unmasked as a means to power.

--Now here I think those in this room may want to demur. You may say, We are Christians, not nihilists. Of course you are not nihilists. Nietzsche did not deny that there were men and women who still called on God in trust. He was announcing the destiny of the West. He was seeing that Christian proclamation now lacks authenticity. Let me show you that Nietzsche is right. Let me point out what happens to Christian proclamation in the world of nihilism.

Nihilism and its devaluation of Christian proclamation were on display in the response to the shootings of school children and others last month at Newtown Connecticut. I read President Obama’s moving address at the Prayer vigil. He said at the end of his talk that “God ha[d] called these children home.”

Well that must be true. God is the Lord of history is he not? But you know this is not true. God did not call these children home. These children were senselessly murdered. If God had called them home then God would have willed their deaths. No one dares to assert that God willed the deaths of these children.

Now let’s contrast our nihilism with President Lincoln’s theism. Lincoln lived at a time in which God still seemed to be alive. Lincoln ended his Second Inaugural Address by naming God’s will as the driving force behind the Civil War—you know the words:

Fondly do we hope--fervently do we pray--that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue,...until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether."

Lincoln did not shrink from the implications of his naming God and he did not do it lightly, but in all seriousness. Slavery was a national sin directly related to the war it brought about. Pointing to God’s will for Lincoln was akin to karma. It was a narrative that made sense in his culture.

In contrast, President Obama could not possibly say that the deaths of these children were God’s judgment for our national sin of gun madness, or our love of violence, or our failure to care for our children. Everyone would have seen a claim of that type as monstrous. We could not take any such claim seriously. But why? Because of our nihilism.

In Newtown, we see something very different from Lincoln’s narrative about the will of God: we see the random

violence of modern life. It is not God's will. It is a world without God. Meaningless violence is what happens to man without God. But if God is no longer believable, then what?