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12-24-2014

December 24, 2014: Christmas Mourning, 2014

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Ledewitz, B. (2014). December 24, 2014: Christmas Mourning, 2014. Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/ledewitz-hallowedsecularism/894>

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Title: Christmas Mourning, 2014

Date: 2014-12-24T05:30:00.000-05:00

12/24/2014—It's Christmas Eve Day. What is the best way today to commune with the Christ child? In my neighborhood, the holiday season is marked by parties and comraderie, but by little else. There is no resonance with the holy story itself. And there is no sense of the new hope that the birth of the savior of the world used to bring—the sense of new possibility. In his lectures on the poet Holderlin around 1935, Martin Heidegger attributes this description of the religious moment to Holderlin: it is a time of holy mourning, in which the only way to show respect for the old gods, who have fled and are absent, is to refuse to call upon them. I used to feel in synagogue that it was not possible to show reverence for God that way—that all the rites had become false. And of course I said I did not believe in God. But maybe that just meant that God had fled. In this lecture, Heidegger associates the mood of holy mourning with Nietzsche, as well as with Holderlin. He is speaking of all those who know the gods have fled and are willing to live forthrightly with that knowledge—awaiting a return of divinity. Now you may want to change terms—using meaning for divinity, for example. I won't quibble and neither should you. There are many invisible forces that human beings do not control. We don't control our own moods, nor that of our age. We don't control the sense of the darkening of the world. We don't control the trivialization of technology, in which shopping and playing computer games is somehow viewed as worthwhile activity. So, what is hallowed secularism but holy mourning? Well, I admit that I'm not sure the gods have fled. Maybe we just pushed them away.