

The Forsaken Jesus and the Black Sun of Atheism

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Abstract: *This article begins with a presentation of the thought of French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, who characterizes contemporary thinking as a gravitational movement around the “black sun” of atheism. Although he is an atheist himself, his project is to find an opening from within atheism that will allow contemporary thought to break free of the gravitational force of unbelief that keeps us locked into a post-Enlightenment nihilistic worldview. The article presents Nancy’s turn to Christianity and his intuition that the deconstruction of Christian realities such as “creation,” “faith,” and “prayer” can provide a way out of our current dilemma. In the second part of the article, the author suggests that the figure of the forsaken Jesus may contain the very escape from nihilistic darkness that Nancy is searching for. A variety of texts from authors such as Albert Camus, G. K. Chesterton, and Samuel*

Beckett, poems by William Cowper and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and the writings of Chiara Lubich are presented to illustrate how the forsaken Jesus can be seen as underlying different symbolic expressions of the depth of human suffering, the sense of the absence of God, and the hope that emanates from crucified love.

The Black Sun

In his essay “Atheism and Monotheism,” Jean-Luc Nancy uses the metaphor of the “black sun” to describe atheism. “The day will perhaps come,” Nancy writes, “and perhaps it is not even so far away, when we shall characterize all contemporary thinking as a slow and heavy gravitational movement around the black sun of atheism.”¹ Nancy is writing in the context of the Western experience of nihilism best expressed in Nietzsche’s “God is dead.” If in the West, humanism was the project par excellence of the Enlightenment, Nancy has bad news: “It so happens that today the so-called civilization of humanism is bankrupt or in its death throes, as we are wont to say, the second term being the more preferable, no doubt.”² Nancy affirms that the core of humanism is atheism. He writes, “Humanism was atheism. It was its truth, its breath, its expression, and its function. . . . It turned the essence of god into the essence of man.”³ One of the essential characteristics of Nancy as a writer is that he speaks from within the Western experience of nihilism. He is an atheist, and he is fully aware of his thinking from within his

1. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 18.

2. *Ibid.*, 2.

3. *Ibid.*, 19.

own atheism. His struggle therefore is to find an opening from within. Like it or not, we are children of Nietzsche and this is our starting point. The West cannot escape the consequences of having, in Nietzsche's terms, "murdered God." Modernity played the game of the child who enjoys the thrill of seeing how far he can distance himself from his father and still be able to come back to him, only to find that he has taken a step too far and now is lost in the woods. The game is over and night is fast approaching. It is at this point that Nancy's stature as an authentic seeker of a way out emerges. He is willing to consider any available means, even if that means engaging with religion, in particular with Christianity. He recognizes, however, that the struggle must be undertaken within the limits of reality. He rejects the totalitarian ideologies of the twentieth century, just as he rejects the "salvation" peddled by religious fundamentalists. Nancy's fear is that if we don't find an "opening," the destruction we have witnessed in the last century will pale in comparison to what's in store for us. He writes, "Conditions are in place for a delirium that would propagate itself in proportion to the wasteland of sense and truth that we have created or allowed to grow." He further warns:

What up to now the Enlightenment could not enlighten, what it was unable to illumine in itself, is waiting to go up in flames in a messianic, mystical, prophetic, divinatory, and vaticinatory mode . . . whose incendiary effects may well prove more impressive than those of fascist, revolutionary, surrealist, avant-gardist, or mystical exaltations of all types.⁴

4. Ibid., 4.

The paradoxical question that Nancy asks himself is this: as an atheist, how can I escape from atheism? Is there anything within atheism that contains the seeds of its own reversal? He writes:

Atheism *is* nihilism, and if nihilism indicates at the same time that it is through nihilism, on the basis of it, and almost as if in nihilism, that any question of "getting out" (if this term is appropriate) can arise, then it has nevertheless not surpassed up to now its own pointing towards something else, except to the point towards a repetition of its own *nihil*.⁵

In other words, nihilism has not been an antidote to nihilism. On the contrary, wherever it has been tried, "it has given us nothing less than exterminating horror, in so many forms—combined with humanistic impotence, it too in so many forms."⁶

Nancy considers the possibility that man needs to be more than man, with a reference to Pascal's "man infinitely passes man." But what could that mean?

Surpassing? Overcoming? Exceeding? Transporting?
Transfiguring? Divinizing? Naturalizing? Technicizing?
Exposing to the abyss? Annihilating? And still further,
Dehumanizing? Inhumanizing? Overhumanizing?⁷

Over the past two centuries, he says, we have tried all of this and have been left "exhausted, nauseated."⁸

5. Ibid., 18–19.

6. Ibid., 18–19.

7. Ibid., 19.

8. Ibid.

An essential part of Nancy's method of seeking is the act of deconstruction. He sees deconstruction as the last act of the modern tradition. It is the fruit of nihilism while at the same time perhaps the only way out of nihilism. Concretely, he writes, "To deconstruct means to take apart, to disassemble, to loosen the assembled structure in order to give some play to the possibility from which it emerged but which, qua assembled structure, it hides."⁹ And its origins lie within Christianity: "Deconstruction belongs to a tradition, to *our* modern tradition, and I am entirely ready to admit that the operation of deconstruction is part of the tradition just as legitimately as the rest; consequently, it is itself shot through with Christianity."¹⁰ And again, "My hypothesis is that the gesture of deconstruction . . . is only possible within Christianity."¹¹ Nancy admits that it might appear "provocative" for an "atheist" to set about deconstructing Christianity. For the pious believer, it may seem that, following on the likes of Comte, Feuerbach, Marx, Darwin, Nietzsche, Freud, and Sartre, he wants to be the one who puts the final nail in the coffin of Christianity. On the other hand, the secular rationalist who adheres to the narrative that at best Christianity is childish nonsense (and somewhat closer to its worst, a bigoted and dangerous creed) would perhaps find it perplexing that any self-respecting, reason-loving philosopher would even bother to take Christianity with any degree of seriousness. Regarding the former, he assures us that it is certainly not his intention to bury Christianity. In fact, and this is a sort of rebuttal to the latter, he affirms that "the only thing that can be actual is an atheism that contemplates the reality of its Christian origins."¹²

9. Ibid., 148.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., 140.

When Nancy turns to Christianity, he is trying to find there a type of nihilism that is at the same time an escape from nihilism. We can take as an example his attempt to deconstruct the biblical notion of "creation." He begins by noting that between a premise and its consequences there is identity and necessity. For Nancy, "identity" and "necessity" signify closure, the end of the road, the orbit from which one cannot escape. However, he writes, "by contrast, creation entails a relation of alterity and contingency (if 'God' then there is *no reason* why he creates)."¹³ The fact that the creator-created relationship involves "alterity" and "no reason" is enough to attract the attention of Nancy, always on the lookout for anything that can get us out of being trapped by the logic of the factory, which produces, fabricates, but never comes up with anything new. He latches on to the traditional notion of *creatio ex nihilo* and immediately makes the connection with nihilism. He comments,

Perhaps this is the only way seriously to get out of nihilism. "Nihilism" means in effect: making a premise of nothing. But *ex nihilo* means: undoing any premise, including that of nothing. That means to empty *nothing* of any quality as principle. That is creation.¹⁴ (emphasis in original)

"Faith" is another category that Nancy engages with in his quest for an exit from the situation in which we find ourselves. Here's what he has to say:

Faith is not weak, hypothetical, or subjective knowledge. It is neither unverifiable nor received through submission, nor even

13. Ibid., 24.

14. Ibid., 24–25.

through reason. It is not a belief in the ordinary sense of the term. On the contrary, it is the act of the reason that relates, itself, to that which, in it, passes *it* infinitely: faith stands precisely at the point of an altogether consequent atheism.¹⁵

Once again, we note in Nancy this surprise of the end point becoming the starting point. Atheism, which is the end of the road for modernity, opens up into faith. But not necessarily. We can all too easily remain within the nihilism that reason builds for itself when it refuses to admit that it is not sufficient unto itself. In a Kantian sense, it is a reason that is not ready to put itself aside to make room for faith.

In an essay characteristic of his method, Nancy undertakes a reading of the Letter of St. James and finds material that illuminates some of the characteristics of faith. Thus, faith exists only in the act of faith. It is essentially different from belief in some religious dogma, which for Nancy is a retreat into closure from the openness of uncertainty. Uncertainty is the life blood of faith. It is the act by which one jumps into the unknown. And yet it is not irrational. It is simply beyond reason. The faith of Abraham consists in the act of offering up Isaac. Nancy seems to speak to the Christian who hasn't understood Christianity when he says:

It is false to the point of absurdity to see in a “belief,” for example, in the belief in redemption by the Christ, that which characterizes the Christian; only Christian *practice* is Christian, a life like that *lived* by him who died on the cross—a declaration that we could read in Nietzsche.¹⁶

Again, in his quest for “dis-enclosure,” Nancy turns to another religious category, that of prayer. However, true to his method, he wants to strip prayer of everything that characterizes it in a conventional sense as prayer, namely, the idea of a powerful being whom we supplicate to come to our aid, or, in his words, “the mythical and imaginary content of religion.”¹⁷ What is left? Is anything left? In terms of pure language, prayer is a “saying” and not a “said.” When something is “said,” it is over and done with; the last word has been spoken. Instead, prayer is the “saying” that has not come to a conclusion. It is perpetual saying. If the saying becomes a said, it means that the praying has stopped. Because it is a saying, it is also an address, not to an idol but to a “letting be” of the real. Nancy goes as far as affirming, “it *adores* this letting be.”¹⁸ Once again, as an “atheist,” he gives us a remarkable insight into the essence of prayer:

This is why adoration, prayer in its essence, is not primarily a request made in order to receive a response, retribution, or reparation. Prayer is not primordially involved in the religious trafficking in lies about the real (about life/death, the world/nothingness, earth/heaven, etc.), nor in the related one of indulgences capitalized in the form of salvation credits. Prayer is primarily adoration: address, homage, recognition of the fact that its saying is deleted in going toward what it says (will never say). Homage, veneration, that is, simply the movement of transcendence . . . constitutes the task of saying.¹⁹

17. Ibid., 135.

18. Ibid., 136.

19. Ibid.

15. Ibid., 25.

16. Ibid., 52.

Prayer is a “lifting up,” but the one who prays must avoid the temptation of attempting to be lifted up along with the praying, to be “hoisted up above his or her condition” in some form of rapturous communion with the object of adoration. This type of worship is easily co-opted by fascism in all its forms, religious, military, or political, with the body of worshippers being transported, carried away into some glorious future where they escape from reality by merging with whatever transcendent reality they are “adoring,” Nancy writes, “Fanaticism is nothing but the abolition of the intractable distance of the real, and consequently also the extinction of prayer, of all speech, in favor of effusive outpourings, eructation, and vociferation.”²⁰

The Forsaken Jesus

The second part of this essay begins with a question: Could it be that the nihilism that is an escape from nihilism, the nihilism that is *ex nihilo*, that Nancy is searching for, is to be found in the forsaken Jesus? I will not try to give a definitive answer, not even a comprehensive answer, to this question in the course of this essay. I will, however, try to place before our eyes some “clues” that seem to point in this direction. Let’s begin with a comment that Camus makes in *The Rebel*:

The night on Golgotha is so important in the history of man only because, in its shadow, the divinity abandoned its traditional privileges and drank to the last drop, despair included,

20. Ibid., 137. Here we can note a point of contact with Voegelin’s diagnosis of the various attempts within the Western experience to revolt against reality, culminating in the fanaticism of the totalitarian ideologies.

the agony of death. This is the explanation of the *lama sabachthani* and the heartrending doubt of Christ in agony. The agony would have been mild if it had been alleviated by hopes of eternity. For God to be a man, he must despair.²¹

Several points can be noted in what Camus is saying. The first point is that Camus, like Nancy, is speaking from within the Western experience of nihilism. For him, “despair” is not a concept to be analyzed by instrumental reason; it is the cry of someone lost in the night that is nihilism. Camus is an existential philosopher in the true sense of the term. All the old certainties of true and false, of right and wrong, have sunk below the horizon, leaving the world desolate of sense and purpose. It is from within this participatory experience of absurdity and hopelessness that he sees in the forsaken Jesus a God who comes down from on high to drink to the last drop the cup of despair, including the agony of death. If someone like Camus with his degree of authenticity suggests that in the figure of the forsaken Jesus, God also despaired, as if for God too the world seemed desolate of sense and purpose, then we have reason enough to suspect that the forsaken Jesus has a particular relevance for the Western experience of nihilism.

Coming from another place, from another experience, we have G. K. Chesterton, who makes this comment in *Orthodoxy*:

When the world shook and the sun was wiped out of heaven, it was not at the crucifixion, but at the cry from the cross: the cry which confessed that God was forsaken of God. And

21. Thanks to Brendan Purcell for drawing my attention to this comment by Camus. See Brendan Purcell, *Where Is God in Suffering* (Dublin: Veritas, 2016), 121.

now let the revolutionists choose a creed from all the creeds and god from all the gods of the world, carefully weighing all the gods of the world, carefully weighing all the gods of inevitable recurrence and of unalterable power. They will not find another god who has himself been in revolt. Nay (the matter grows too difficult for human speech), but let the atheists themselves choose a god. They will find only one divinity who ever uttered their isolation; only one religion in which God seemed himself for an instant to be an atheist.²²

Chesterton was not an atheist. He had no direct experience from within of the night of nihilism that descended on the West during his lifetime (even though he didn't absent himself from it). But he is enough of a Christian to be almost shocked at the fact that in the forsaken Jesus, God felt forsaken by God, to the point where for an instant God seems to be an atheist. As he says, "the matter grows too difficult for human speech." The important point is that Chesterton doesn't make a dogmatic statement that it is impossible for God to be forsaken by God. With his innate sense of scripture as an existential drama, Chesterton gives full value and weight to the fact that Jesus is actually crying out to the Father, asking why he has forsaken him. Chesterton's reaction to the cry of Jesus also shows us his particular genius for relating the events of the Gospel to the cultural milieu of his day. Nowhere is this more evident than in his identifying the forsaken Jesus as the "god" of atheists.

So far, I have brought in Nancy, Camus, and Chesterton as worthy participants in a conversation about the forsaken Jesus. Samuel Beckett can also be called upon. First, like Nancy, the

symbols Beckett articulates are a fruit of his participation from within the Western crisis of sense and purpose. Second, Beckett's symbolism seems to express a cry, a question, a void, a silence, a hopeless hope. Here is the ending of *The Unnamable*:

You must go on, that's all I know.

They're going to stop, I know that well: I can feel it. They're going to abandon me. It will be the silence, for a moment (a good few moments). Or it will be mine? The lasting one, that didn't last, that still lasts? It will be I?

You must go on.

I can't go on.

You must go on.

I'll go on. You must say words, as long as there are any—until they find me, until they say me. (Strange pain, strange sin!) You must go on. Perhaps it's done already. Perhaps they have said me already. Perhaps they have carried me to the threshold of my story, before the door that opens on my story. (That would surprise me, if it opens.)

It will be I? It will be the silence, where I am? I don't know, I'll never know: in the silence you don't know.

You must go on.

I can't go on.

I'll go on.²³

If with a stretch of the imagination we place these words on the lips of the forsaken Christ, we may be surprised at how well they

22. *Orthodoxy*, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/chesterton/orthodoxy.pdf>, 96.

23. Samuel Beckett, *Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (New York: Grove, 2009), 407.

seem to express the experience of one who is lost, confused, inarticulate, condemned, silent, one who is brought to the “threshold” and yet with the possibility that the “door” may “open.” Could the open door be a way out of nihilism? Could the “I’ll go on” be the heroic gesture of the forsaken Jesus who willingly embraced his experience of divine powerlessness on the cross?

What we need to keep in mind is that we are searching for symbols that articulate a possible escape from the dark cave of nihilism. We are being selective in our search because we are willing to listen only to those who have accepted to embrace the reality that we find ourselves in, those who are struggling with the emptiness, the absurdity, the crisis of sense that surrounds us. Let’s listen to St. Therese of Lisieux as she struggled with her own dark night of atheism.

[God] allowed my soul to be overwhelmed with darkness, and the thought of Heaven, which had consoled me from my earliest childhood, now became a subject of conflict and torture. This trial did not last merely for days or weeks; I have been suffering for months, and I still await deliverance. I wish I could express what I feel, but it is beyond me. One must have passed through this dark tunnel to understand its blackness.

...

When my heart, weary of the surrounding darkness, tries to find some rest in the thought of a life to come, my anguish increases. It seems to me that out of the darkness I hear the mocking voice of the unbeliever: “You dream of a land of light and fragrance, you dream that the Creator of these wonders will be yours for ever, you think one day to escape from these mists where you now languish. Nay, rejoice in

death, which will give you, not what you hope for, but a night darker still, the night of utter nothingness!”

...

When I sing of the happiness of Heaven and the eternal possession of God, I do not feel any joy therein, for I sing only of what I wish to believe. Sometimes, I confess, a little ray of sunshine illumines my dark night, and I enjoy peace for an instant, but later, the remembrance of this ray of light, instead of consoling me, makes the blackness thicker still.²⁴

When we deal with the writings of those who are generally accepted to be “mystics,” we have to take seriously that they are articulating an experience of participating in the divine reality, which for St. Therese in a particular way meant a participation in the passion and death of Jesus on the cross. Could it be that her sense of “anguish” of “blackness” stems from her participation in the cry of the forsaken Jesus? We can note the coincidence that Therese lived and died during the same period that Nietzsche was articulating his philosophy of nihilism.

In this brief review of individuals who articulate in their writings something of the drama, the struggle, the pain of existence that in one way or another seems to mirror the cry of the forsaken Jesus, we can also mention the English poet William Cowper, who lived his own dark night. As a young boy, he was grief-stricken by the death of his mother. During his lifetime, he experienced bouts of insanity, which included three attempts at suicide. He was gently led back to sanity by the exquisite love and care of a

24. http://biblehub.com/library/martin/the_story_of_a_soul/chapter_ix_the_night_of.htm, accessed February 20, 2019.

widow, Mary Unwin. When Mary died in 1796, four years before Cowper's death, he was plunged into gloom again, from which he never fully recovered. It was during this time that he composed *The Castaway*, one of his most famous poems. It is inspired by the event of a sailor who was swept off his ship during a violent storm. The other sailors were able to see him but could do nothing to save him as he sank beneath the waves. Cowper sees in this incident something of his own situation, one who has been abandoned and sees no other fate than that of being engulfed by the depths. In the last verse of the poem, he writes:

No voice divine the storm allay'd,
No light propitious shone;
When, snatch'd from all effectual aid,
We perish'd, each alone:
But I beneath a rougher sea,
And whelm'd in deeper gulfs than he.

There is no divine intervention, no light, as both the sailor and Cowper perish "each alone." But Cowper's sea is "rougher," the gulfs "deeper." The sailor's death is physical. Cowper seems to be experiencing some form of spiritual drowning. It would take another poet, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, to catch the spiritual depths of Cowper's grief, perhaps because she too knew not a little suffering in her life, both physical and spiritual. She is clear in her perception of the poet's calling to articulate the passion of the cross: "We want the sense of the saturation of Christ's blood upon the souls of our poets, that it may cry through them in answer to the ceaseless wail of the Sphinx of our humanity, expounding agony into renovation."²⁵

25. <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/ebb/cornhill.html>.

In the following lines, she articulates the luminosity of experiencing that suffering is love.

I saw, in gradual vision through my tears,
The sweet, sad years, the melancholy years,
Those of my own life, who by turns had flung
A shadow across me. Straightway I was 'ware,
So weeping, how a mystic Shape, did move
Behind me, and drew me backward by the hair;
And a voice said in mastery, while I strove: —
"Guess now who holds thee?" "Death," I said. But there,
The silver answer rang, "Not Death, but Love!"²⁶

What appeared to be the shadow of death turned out to be "Not Death, but Love." One of her most well-known poems was written while contemplating the grave of William Cowper, whom she greatly admired. When considering the redemptive grace at work in Cowper's life, she reflects on how the forsaken Jesus cried out in his abandonment so as to take away the desolation of all the world:

Deserted! Who hath dreamt that when the cross in darkness
rested,
Upon the Victim's hidden face no love was manifested?
What frantic hands outstretched have e'er the atoning drops
averted?
What tears have washed them from the soul, that one
should be deserted?

26. <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/ebb/cornhill.html>.

Deserted! God could separate from His own essence rather;
And Adam's sins have swept between the righteous Son and
Father:
Yea, once, Immanuel's orphaned cry His universe hath
shaken—
It went up single, echoless, "My God, I am forsaken!"

It went up from the Holy's lips amid His lost creation,
That, of the lost, no son should use those words of desolation!
That earth's worst phrenzies, marring hope, should mar not
hope's fruition,
And I, on Cowper's grave, should see his rapture in a vision.²⁷

Both Cowper and Barrett Browning show us that we do well to search wide and large for individuals who are articulating the experience of being forsaken, whether or not they refer explicitly to the figure of the forsaken Jesus.

In this context, we can introduce the Italian author Chiara Lubich (1920–2008). In her case, we see both a mystical participation in the experience of the forsaken Jesus and a philosophical and theological reflection on its significance. After an intense spiritual experience in 1949, she wrote:

I have only one spouse on earth: Jesus forsaken.
I have no other God but him.
In him there is the whole of paradise with the Trinity
And the whole of the earth with humanity.
Therefore what is *his* is mine and nothing else.

. . .

So it will be for the years I have left: a thirst for suffering,
Anguish, despair, separation, exile, forsakenness, torment—
for all that is him,
and he is sin, hell.²⁸

On another occasion she wrote, "I wish to bear witness before the world that Jesus forsaken has filled every void, illuminated every darkness, accompanied every solitude, annulled every suffering, cancelled every sin."²⁹ When reflecting theologically on the forsaken Jesus, Lubich goes beneath the words of his cry and focuses on the "event" that is taking place. She places it alongside the other two great events in the Gospel: the incarnation and the resurrection. However, with these two events, while remaining unfathomable at the divine level, we can understand what is going on by using simple concepts: Jesus was conceived in the womb of the Virgin by the power of the Holy Spirit; Jesus rose from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. These simple concepts do not contradict what we can understand as a manifestation of the power of God. But in what way does the forsaken Jesus manifest God? What sort of divine event is going on? Lubich suggests that if we couple it with the words reported in Luke's gospel, "Into your hands I commend my spirit" (Lk 23:46), we are witnessing the intra-Trinitarian relationship of absolute love between the Father and the Son, in the Holy Spirit, expressed visibly in the Person of the God-Man Jesus. The Son becomes "nothing" in front of the Father—a nothingness of love. Thus the cry of the forsaken Jesus is a cry of infinite love

28. Chiara Lubich, *Essential Writings* (New York: New City, 2007), 95.

29. *Ibid.*, 97.

27. <http://www.bartleby.com/293/79.html>.

in his divinity and infinite pain in his humanity. But why should this cry of love cause so much pain in the humanity of Jesus? Here we can only assemble the elements involved. Jesus came down to earth to become one with sinful humanity and to reunite us with the Father. However, this had to be done in the form of an “event,” that is a once-off, visible action. It had to be clear so that the words “it is accomplished” could be said. Mere physical death was not enough; it had to be an act of divine love. Within the Trinity there is perennial love between the three divine Persons. But in this one case, Jesus had to love the Father with the same degree of divine love while at the same time being one with sinful humanity. In logical terms, it was impossible. But love made it possible, though with a price: the price of experiencing separation from the Father.

For Lubich, the event of the forsaken Jesus is the supreme revelation of divine love on earth. She speaks of the forsaken Jesus as a kind of “window” or “pupil” in the eye through which God sees humanity and humanity sees God. She writes:

Jesus is Jesus forsaken. Because Jesus is the Saviour, the Redeemer. And he redeems when he pours out the divine upon humanity through the wound of his forsakenness which is the *pupil* of God’s eye upon the world: an infinite void through which God looks at us: the window of God opened upon the world, and the window of humanity through which we see God.³⁰

In a more philosophical vein, she says, “Jesus forsaken thus enlightens being, revealing it as love. And with this he reveals to us

that the Absolute Being is itself love.” She continues, “In the light of the Trinity, being reveals itself, if we can say this, as guarding deep within itself the non-being that is gift of self: not the non-being that negates being, rather the non-being that reveals being as love: *being that is the three divine Persons*.”³¹

Conclusion

I started with a reflection on Nancy’s metaphor of the “black sun of atheism” and of his desire to find an opening within nihilism. In the last part of the essay I touched upon the writings of individuals who have articulated something of the pain, anguish, and desolation that seems to find a voice in the forsaken Jesus. There is a unity in all of this that is grounded in locating atheism in the authenticity of human experience. If there is no drama involved in doubting the existence of God, if it is proclaimed as if it were a mere logical syllogism of the type, “only matter exists, God is not matter, therefore God does not exist,” then we can perhaps rightly suggest that the only thing being denied is the mystery of the human person who experiences within a faith that is open to the paradox that an end can be a beginning, that the darkness can contain light. Nancy’s metaphor of the “black sun” is itself a paradox. However, a paradox is not a contradiction. Every paradox has an opening leading to some higher truth yet to be discovered. Approximately five thousand years ago, the inhabitants of Ireland built the passage tomb of Newgrange. Its alignment is such that on December 21 each year, sunlight shines through a “roofbox” and floods the inner chamber. Paradoxically, when the sun is at its lowest point, it is then that it lights up that which is the abode

30. Chiara Lubich, *The Cry* (New York: New City, 2001), 136.

31. Lubich, *Essential Writings*, 212

of the dead. Perhaps it will be the “faith” of “atheists” like Nancy that will be the source of light for those who are entombed by the nihilism of our times. And, after all, the forsaken Jesus also rose from a tomb.

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