

Notorious Nietzsche and Religion

Lecture 1: The God Killer

Lecture 2: The Christ Denier

Lecture 3: The Life Affirmer

The series *Notorious Nietzsche and Religion* seeks to:

- A. introduce Nietzsche in a fresh way to those readers familiar with his writings, those new to them but wanting to know more, and to scholars curious about a different way of reading him
- B. dispel the misconceptions which perpetuate the myth
- C. provide through his theology of suspicion, exciting ways of approaching religion and life into an AI dominated 21st and 22nd century

Introductory Remarks

Last lecture for those joining us for the first time, in alignment with our aims to introduce Nietzsche in a fresh way I am conscious of my audience, my readers:

- those familiar with Nietzsche's writings,
- those new to them but wanting to know more
- and scholars/academics curious about a different way of reading Nietzsche

My purpose all along will continue to be to dispel misconceptions about Nietzsche's attitude to God, to Christ and to life. Popularly he is thought

of as saying and wanting us to believe, that God is dead and more that modernity is responsible for killing off God altogether.

In the last lecture we saw in some detail that this was not the case. Rather it was *the madman* in Nietzsche's parable in his book *The Gay Science* and not Nietzsche who declared not only that God was dead, but that those in the marketplace who scorned where the absent God might have gone, and why he was so invisible most if not all of the time, had murdered him – and *not* just them but *all of us* as complicit murderers.

When we ask what Nietzsche actually thought about the God question his answer betrays not just a sense that belief in the Christian God had become unbelievable, but that a deep darkness of doubt had already begun to descend over the world beginning with his beloved cosmopolitan Europe:

the belief in the Christian God has become unbelievable – is already starting to cast its first shadow over Europe [...] **some kind of a sun seems to have set**; some old deep trust [has] turned into doubt: [...] [the] world [has become] ... autumnal, more mistrustful, stranger, 'older.'

Paradoxically this sense of impending doom is balanced by a hope from which great expectations may yet be born:

Indeed, at hearing the news that 'the old god is dead,' **we philosophers and 'free spirits' feel illuminated by a new dawn; our heart overflows with gratitude, amazement**... – finally, the horizon seems clear again, even if not bright; *finally*, our ships may set out again, set out to face any danger... **the sea our sea lies open again; maybe there has never been such an 'open sea.'**

More than an inference, Nietzsche is saying that the old gods who have died were *ipso facto*, by their very nature dead from the beginning, and more, that the whole idea of a dead or murdered God is a *non sequitur*, a nonsense – because God, if there *is* a God, could never die, and, of necessity, could never be killed.

It is here that Nietzsche's madman has the last laugh on those academics who spill litres of ink reading Nietzsche literally. Unerringly guided by *reductionist, fundamentalist* and ultimately *simplistic, cherry-picking* such an approach misses the playfulness and the irony of the Roman and Greek satirical style which Nietzsche deploys.

Uncertain about how to react to the satire's hyperbole,

- those with Christian presuppositions are mostly offended
- and those disinterested in religion, deliberately ignore or misunderstand Nietzsche's deep interest in Greek Tragedy, Dionysos and the Crucified and their connotations, *still* convinced that his perceived *atheism* precludes any such religious discussion.

In sum, I introduced you to a Nietzsche quite different from the one paraded by many as *indifferent to religion, indifferent to our feelings – hell-bent on sabotaging people's faith.*

What we see from his correspondences is a person sensitive to his friends' discomfiture but nevertheless possessed of a strong commitment to what is real and what is true:

I see and feel [my] friends' distress, which mirror my own. My 'time... to recall and reflect on myself, was terrifying in a way

I saw myself utterly emaciated, utterly starved. [My] science hitherto had excluded my *realities*, and my “[true aspirations].” I realise that ‘soon [I shall] have to express ideas which people *regard as disgraceful*... even my friends and relations will become shy and frightened.

[Yet] I must pass through that fire.'

Thus Nietzsche comes across as a person honouring friendship but also feels compelled to **honour life as it is, rather than an imagined or idealised one** — he writes:

I am quietly waiting for the waves in which my poor friends are floundering to die down: if I pushed them into these waves—*life* is not in danger, I know that from experience; and if, here and there, *friendship* might be in *danger*—then we will serve the truth, and say: “as yet, we have loved only a cloud of one another.

In other words, he was *not* a Schopenhauerian nihilist, as some have argued, but a person who savours each moment of life inspired by visions of mountains, the moon, the sea – the season of Spring and of love, determined to acknowledge them *all*, valorise, embrace them as they are. Not suppressing the moment, but living each day to the full:

Life consists of rare individual moments of the highest significance [...] they all speak truly to our heart only once: if they ever do truly find speech.

For many people never experience these moments at all but are themselves [only] intervals and pauses in the symphony of real life.

Nor did we find cynicism in Nietzsche:

On this perfect day, when everything is ripening and not only the grape turns brown... the eye of the sun just fell upon my life: I look forward, I looked backward, and never saw so many good things at once [...] I do not want to wage war against what is ugly. I do not want

to accuse those who accuse. Looking away shall be my only negation...
someday, I wish to be only a Yes-sayer.

Yes, one who far from deriding faith and values, urges us to carefully consider the implications of what we have done when we set truth and faith aside:

What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun?
Where is it moving to?
Where are we moving to?
Away from *[all]* suns?

Drawing attention here as he does, to **the vacuum, the disorientation which the ditching of all faith has created:**

[are we] *[continually]* falling?
... backwards, sideways, forwards [...] in all directions?
Is there *[still]* an up and down?
Aren't we straying as [if] through an *[infinite]* nothing?
Isn't empty space *breathing* at us?

And further, in *So Spoke Zarathustra* **Nietzsche refuses to admit defeat**, regardless of the odds that seem to be stacked against us:

It is strange, then, that in the face of ... inevitable mutual defeat – the irreparable and ultimate defeat of understanding, which life will never allow to tame and for which life will always remain insurmountable, alien; and the inevitable defeat of action which will never succeed in ordering the world which would pacify the longing for order, for structure, for stability inscribed in every action – is it strange that tasting the bitterness of the defeat on their lips, [Life and Zarathustra] should look at each other and gaze on the green meadow over which the cool evening is running just then and ... weep together? Is it strange then, that [exactly *then*] life was dearer to me than all my wisdom ever was?

And, finally, you'll remember, we finished the evening with a brief introduction to what we shall now devote the rest of our time – **this**

extraordinary admission on Nietzsche's part of a profound identification with the Christ.

I gave it first in German which I then followed by a paraphrase...

"Dieser homo bin ich nämlich selbst, eingerechnet, das ecce; der Versuch mich ein wenig Licht und Schrecken zu verbreiten, scheint mir fast zu gut gelungen."¹

Ecce "homo" is who I am – I am the man. My title aims to make that point. I am identified with Christ on Pilate's judgement day. And when you behold me, in the persona of the Christ, I am asking you to cast a long lingering look, not a passing glance, but make of it a considered, rational intelligent observation borne of curiosity as to why I am so identified. The whole exercise of this book... intended to enlighten and to startle I suspect is going to be [all] too successful.

Tonight I intend to confront the charge with which Nietzsche is often labelled that he is an apostate *because* he denies Christ. The charge takes me back to the core business of my PhD, whose title was



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THESIS

GIRARD CONTESTS NIETZSCHE:

A Case of Misplaced Resentment – Dionysos and the Crucified

¹ KSB 8, Nr.1144, S.471, Z.12-15). "This "man" *homo* I myself am and calculated is the *ecce* [meaning 'behold'/'betrachte" (imperative)], look carefully, 'weigh up'/think about what you're looking at = den Blick längere Zeit auf jemanden richten, etwas neugierig... literally, be curious enough to cast a lingering look at someone, be prepared as you look at [me] that it be an [intelligent] 'considered,' judgement.

Notorious Nietzsche

Lecture 2: The Christ Denier

I take you, then, to the central explanation which Nietzsche offers as to the *significance of Christ's dying on the cross* in his even more provocative book as with *Ecce Homo* also published after his death, entitled *Der Antichrist, a revaluation of all values*.²

This "bringer of glad tidings" died as he had taught – not to "redeem men" but to show how one must live. This practice is his legacy to mankind: his behavior before the judges... before the accusers and all kinds of slander and scorn – his behavior on the cross. He does not resist, he does not defend his right, he takes no step to ward off the worst; on the contrary, he provokes it. And he begs, he suffers, he loves with those, in those who do him evil. Not to resist, not to be angry, not to hold responsible but to resist not even the evil one – to love him.

What we find here is Nietzsche's resolve not to offer false hope – a **resurrected body which none of us can produce** – but rather, *a legacy* which epitomises the value of authenticity.

For it is this ethical value whereby Nietzsche's *definitive* statement highlights Jesus of Nazareth's integrity, 'he died as he had taught,' rather than any kind of *dogma* or *belief system* – but rather a facing of death, to 'show how one must live.'

Here also **Jesus' exemplary behaviour not some kind of sacrifice**

² *Der Antichrist*, 35. November 26, 1888, Nietzsche writes to Paul Deussen, "Meine Umwerthung aller Werthe mit dem Hauptitel 'Der Antichrist' ist fertig." "My Revaluation of Values under the main title 'The Antichrist' is finished." (KSB 8, 492).

to appease an angry God, is emphasised.

An offering utterly devoid of resentment even in the midst of an appalling miscarriage of justice.

What we discover is the *Jesus* Nietzsche believes in:

- Jesus of Nazareth's absolute refusal to justify himself
- Jesus' determination to ignore his accusers' slander and scorn
- Jesus' implacable resolve to discount any physical resistance
- Jesus' active, not *passive* acceptance of the suffering to come

And finally, and notably... Jesus' compassion

he begs, he suffers, he loves with those, in those who do him evil. Not to resist, not to be angry, not to hold responsible but to resist not even the evil one – to love him.

- a "Mitleid" (literally the sharing of a sadness/sorrow) which avoids the trap of its fatal weakness so beautifully and artfully captured by Kafka's *Metamorphosis*.

On this last observation, some Christian commentators argue that Nietzsche's plunge into madness in the Italian town of Turin when he attempted to intervene to prevent the beating of a horse, was partly to do with his suppression of the *compassion* of Christ, but actually the fitting punishment his apostasy deserved.

Frantz Kafka, a Jewish writer, who I believe was influenced by Nietzsche's writings, exposes the kind of compassion "Mitleid" Nietzsche urges us to avoid, where in the novella *Metamorphosis* Kafka reveals to us a man, Gregor Samsa, so given over to his family and the

corporation which he serves as a salesman, that he ceases to have a life of his own.

It is an altruism, a compassion not just gone feral, shamelessly exploited which entraps Gregor – an entrapment embodied in the brilliant extended metaphor of the cockroach which Kafka deploys so effectively.

I now outline the following important contextual insights into how and why Nietzsche speaks of the Christ and Dionysos in the same breath viewed in the context of *RESSENTIMENT*.

GIRARD CONTESTS NIETZSCHE:

A Case of Misplaced Resentment – Dionysos and the Crucified

Firstly, Nietzsche's Dionysos Zagreb rather than being an advocate for violence, is seen by him as 'a transgressor against the prevailing law of Pentheus and Lycurgus,' a Dionysos who acts sovereignly against this law in order '**to put an end to its violence,**'³ *not* to propagate it.

In addition, **Nietzsche's Dionysos** serves to expose *the violence and duplicity of any sacrificial system* and its values, highlighting 'its contingency, partiality and fragility' classifying this Dionysos as 'an iconoclastic and ascetic gesture' designed to humble precisely 'those in authority' who would attempt to justify violence in the name of a god or a greater Good.

³ I am indebted here to Grant Poettker for this insight.

Secondly, Nietzsche's notion of the *will to power* which is often linked with the violence which Dionysos is alleged to sanction, is in fact not "a quest for self-engineered adversity," as often alleged but an *ascesis* (a self-giving act) directed at a purification and [a] higher *life* and so not 'a wanton act of self-destruction' **pathology** at all.⁴

Thirdly, Nietzsche should not be understood as an exemplary story of 'empio punito' (the ungodly one punished) – the philosopher arrogantly defying Christ and being destroyed by his own foolishness,'⁵ as some have alleged.

Nietzsche's chief and most strident detractor, Professor Giuseppe Fornari in his *A God Torn to Pieces, The Nietzsche case*,

is forced to admit, tucked away out of sight in his Forward, that 'In the end [Nietzsche] was much closer to Christ than many who would claim to be Christians,'⁶

yet, in the conclusion of the book, coming out with this salvo, referring to those like Nietzsche as:

blinded by the mask of their violence and so unable to see it... they must bend there before the one who was humiliated and trampled by all; they must recognise that there alone lies the blame and there alone redemption.

But there are those who refuse to do this, who refuse to believe that they too, have been forgiven; and so in order to see, to embrace this inaccessible God, they are reduced to madness.⁷

⁴ Again I am indebted here to Grant Poettker and his article.

⁵ Giuseppe Fornari, (Michigan State University Press, *East Lansing*: 2013), xiii).

⁶ Ibid: xvi

⁷ Ibid: 118.

Thus, when Nietzsche publishes *So Spoke Zarathustra*, his *magnum opus*, (seen by some as a parody of the life and ministry of Jesus), entitles his second most important work (a serious review of his entire life's work designed to provoke his readers to think critically) *Ecce Homo*, and then follows this up with *The Antichrist*, what are we to make of his claim then that

Ecce "homo" is who I am – I am the man. My title aims to make that point. I am identified with Christ on Pilate's judgement day. And when you behold me, in the persona of the Christ, I am asking you to cast a long lingering look, not a passing glance, but make of it a considered, rational intelligent observation borne of curiosity as to why I am so identified. The whole exercise of this book... intended to enlighten and to startle I suspect is going to be [all] too successful.

Especially when as Professor More argues that

Ecce Homo recasts Nietzsche's corpus in its own image. We find a self-examining, funny, spiritually selfish, recuperative, angry, and skylarking book that expresses good cheer and an encompassing gratitude—all in the face of personally dismal stimuli. And Nietzsche shows us how to read his previous works in the same way.⁸

Professor More claims, Nietzsche,

does not write philosophy, he writes a travesty of philosophy [which] shows how our disciplines have gone stray by universalising its prescriptions and by denigrating our emotions. Nietzsche writes philosophical satire as several ancient satirists did against philosophy, out of love for philosophy. Thus, Nietzsche is not a philosopher, he is a satirist of philosophy. And satirizing philosophy constitutes his genuine pursuit of wisdom.⁹

⁸ *Ecce Homo, Nietzsche's Last Laugh*, (2011: 123).

⁹ *Ibid*, 2016: 2011.

Are these, Nietzsche's mature works, published and posthumously published, then, to be dismissed *as*

- the "enfant perdu" of Nietzsche's books, "revolving around delirium as its axis" (Pierre Klossowski),
- or an "impossible transgression of the dialectic logic of traditional metaphysics" (Jacques Derrida)
- or an indulgence "in a Dionysian satiric festival erected in defiance of Christian mores" (Sarah Koffman).
- Or worse the "unconscious condition of decadence."

Professor More's concludes that Nietzsche's satirical style 'is the very net to catch out careless readers and humourless resentment by surprise.'

I argue that Nietzsche's project cannot be understood unless we stand with Christ on the day of Pontius Pilate's judgement (provoked by the maddened crowd) against him.

One of his most mature works, *Ecce Homo (EH)*, is not only an autobiography inspired by his deep knowledge of Greek and Roman satire (Moore, 2014), but also, I contend, **a deliberate provocation** directed at future readers to imagine Nietzsche as standing mute in the place of Christ on that day of judgement.

In effect will we, as Nietzsche recounts his autobiography and reviews his major works in provocative ways, side with the maddened crowd baying for blood just because he calls himself the ‘Antichrist’? Or will we see him for what he is—the innocent condemned for a label that was designed as a provocation? (Kee, 1999).

For just as the Herodian, Jewish religious, and Roman authorities of the day out of a *ressentiment* fed by jealousy and fear, twisted Jesus of Nazareth’s words and fashioned him into a ‘King of Blasphemy’ or the ‘King of the Jews’ (*INRI*)—so Nietzsche’s detractors are caught in the trap of their own making entangled in the mimetic mirror of the phantom of their own egos.

Which causes Nietzsche to ask: will they *recognize* me for who I am? Will they *understand* me?

As Alistair Kee indicates:

It is as if Jesus too is the Anti-Christ. He stands against this new Golden Calf... Shoulder to shoulder, not one but two Anti-Christ, standing proud and firm against the Church’s Christ.¹⁰

Before we examine whether such an unexpectedly profound identification with Christ is possible and what it might mean in terms of *theology* and specifically *soteriology* (the theology of salvation), a more grounded beginning might be to examine its **historical significance**.

¹⁰ Nietzsche *Against The Crucified*. (SCM Press, 1999), 148.

David Lloyd Dusenbury has much to teach us on this in his *The Innocence of Pontius Pilate – How the Roman Trial of Jesus Shaped History*.¹¹

These are the conclusions I drew from his masterful treatment of the question.

- A. The combined verdict of the Temple authorities and the Roman legislature of Pontius Pilate, Procurator under the Imperial Rule of Tiberius was that **Jesus of Nazareth was guilty**
- B. His guilt from the Roman point of view is that Jesus of Nazareth has offended and violated the '*maiestas*' of the emperor, which was not only a crime against the *secular authority* of Tiberius, but also a crime against his *religious authority* as *Pontifex Maximus*
- C. In this double offence Jesus of Nazareth's crime not only affronted the secular (*saeculum*) and religious (*religio*), it also effectively split them apart, decoupled them by claiming that *his* authority was "not of this earth" (*religio*) superseding all earthly authority (*saeculum*), including the *maiestas* of the emperor – thus taken **together, a political secular crime and a serious religious crime of which Jesus of Nazareth is condemned**
- D. This is why the Jerusalem Temple authorities, and the Roman Imperial authorities were of the same opinion. Dusenbury summarises the Temple perspective this way (my interpretation):

Because the pre-Christian State is by definition a temple-state, there was no separation between religion and secularity, and violence is both cult- implicated and cult- sanctioned.

¹¹ (Hurst & Company, London 2021). Dusenbury is a research fellow of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem's Centre for the Study of Christianity.

Rousseau uses this fact as an accusation against the Christianity of his day and its in-fighting – Protestant *versus* Catholic, Protestant *versus* Protestant, Catholic *versus* Catholic as a descent into a pagan past and a movement away from the early Christian *unease* with the archaic temple state which Jesus of Nazareth, the founder of Christianity had come to dismantle.

In other words Jesus' kingdom of another world severs that connection, and with that severance the sanctioning of *cultic violence*, of which he was its emblematic, historical victim, the victim representing all the victims of the secular and the religious past, is exposed.

In effect 'Jesus is the first figure in history to prophetically decouple the temple-state from false religion, by declaring himself to be the head of a spiritual kingdom,' quite outside of that false religion's ambit ¹²

"Before [that]... the life and death of Jesus ... no such concept is on record."

"Jesus splits the archaic temple-state and ascribes different logics or codes to all the polities of this world age, and to the divine polity of a world-age to come."

"Pilate is a legate in the Roman temple state in the Judean temple-city. For Pilate as for the Judean Temple elites who charge Jesus with blasphemy and treason, the codes of *religio* and the *saeculum* had not been decoupled. It is in part *because* Jesus decouples them that he is sent

¹² Dusenbury: 2021, 246.

to the cross. And it is in part through his convict's death, signified by the cross, that he still shapes history."¹³ At least that is Dusenbury's claim.

To those like Dusenbury who claim that Nietzsche sides with Pilate (sees himself as a sort of new Pilate), they need to take more seriously the fact that he writes to the Vatican's Secretary of State Cardinal Rampolla and King Umberto I of Rome signing the letter, "The Crucified" in his November 1888 letter and also regards himself in the January 1889 letters as "The Crucified."

In a nutshell, my argument is that while Nietzsche sides with Pilate, who he sees acting with integrity, he understands Pilate's innocence if there is one, as defined by Pilate's integrity in following the law *religio* and *saeculum*.

For on the matter of Christ's guilt Pilate had no doubt and so follows the law to the letter – that was the truth of the matter of the legal proceedings of the day.

While this may true, Nietzsche, as Professor Fornari, his most scathing and ardent critic admits—is intensely identified with Christ more than any pious Christian he knows.

How then do we resolve this conundrum. I take us back to Alistair Kee,

It is as if Jesus too is the Anti-Christ. He stands against this new Golden Calf... Shoulder to shoulder, not one but two Anti-Christ, standing proud and firm against the Church's Christ.

¹³ Ibid: 247.

To which he adds these citations from Nietzsche's *Nachlass*:

Christianity is still possible at any time. It is not tied to any of the impudent dogmas that have adorned themselves with his name; it requires neither the doctrine of a personal God, not that of sin, nor that of immortality, nor that of redemption, nor that of faith; it has absolutely no need of metaphysics and even less of asceticism, even less of a 'natural science.' Christianity is a way of life, not a system of beliefs. It tells us how to act, not what we ought to believe.¹⁴

What did Christ deny? Everything that today is called Christianity.¹⁵

What a strange alliance. As if Jesus too is the Anti-Christ. How and why does this make sense, *should* this make sense in the present?

What can **Jean-Luc Marion's assessment of Nietzsche's identification with Christ** in *The Idol And Distance – Five Studies*,¹⁶ do to clarify **Nietzsche's attitude to Christ's death and its significance** specifically as it relates to **Dionysos and the Crucified**.

First of all, Marion concedes that for all the names Nietzsche gives to the divine and to himself, he always returns to the Christ, in Marion's parlance, 'the *Christic* structure' (2001: 59), 'the 'figure of Christ' (by which I presume he means 'figura'), a 'pastiche' [of various elements]. Having conceded, then, that there is 'a *Christic* structure in the Nietzschean text' (2001: 59) and having acknowledged Nietzsche's 'strange' 'theological penetration' and the 'respectful intimacy approaches [to] Christ' (2001: 61), Marion nevertheless finds it

¹⁴ *The Will to Power*, 101.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 98.

¹⁶ Translated and with an introduction by Thomas A. Carlson, (Fordham University Press, 2001), originally published as *L'idole et la distance*, (Editions Bernard Grasset, 1977).

impossible to accept the reality that 'Nietzsche meditated on the mystery of Christ, nor even that he undertook consciously to repeat the mystery of Christ after or at the moment of emptying it' (2001: 61).

This denial exposes Marion's erroneous assumption, **that Nietzsche has categorically rejected Christ.**

Ironically, the 'emptiness' to which Marion alludes, points to the *kenosis* of Christ which enables Jesus of Nazareth to overcome *ressentiment* and which Nietzsche actually does meditate on sufficiently enough to provide the '*Christic*' details which Marion himself has highlighted.

Their significance, however, evades him. Marion by insisting that Nietzsche's stance is unambiguously the anti-Christ, is as Kees argues earlier, missing the point of Nietzsche's *actual* position i.e., where *that kind of* [institutional] *Christ* is opposed by two Anti-Christ:

Jesus of Nazareth (the Christ of the Evangel) and Nietzsche who together stand as one against any and all violence and blood-shedding in the name of religion.

Marion's sensitive speculation that 'underneath the holy fable and disguise of Jesus' life, there lies concealed one of the most painful cases of martyrdom of knowledge about love' (2001: 61b), elegantly underlines nothing less than Nietzsche's interpretation of the Christ of the Evangel's journey to the cross, to which Nietzsche often alludes.

Marion in the name of a different cause, however, operating as we have said, on the erroneous assumption that Nietzsche has no room for

any Christ, concludes that Nietzsche's stance is an intractable Anti-Christ sentiment and therefore this 'Christic structure' must be deemed unconscionable if Nietzsche is to avoid inconsistency and contradiction.

My argument contends that when a *different* assumption is proposed, the apparent conundrum is side-stepped.¹⁷

Putting all this substantial evidence together, at times using Nietzsche's notes even if they include the much debated *Will to Power* 167 = VIII, 2, 350, 11 [282], we have a compelling case for Nietzsche's utter identification with the Christ of the Evangel, **the one who was there before the 'decadent' Church's manufactured Christ and its irruption within the primitive church. That was the Christ of the early Christian 'naïve' (2001: 64) movement**, which Nietzsche describes in his notes as

A Buddhistic *peace movement* in the very middle of and starting from within ("mitten aus") there [emerged - "heraus"] [a] people of *ressentiment*.¹⁸

¹⁷ Marion teases out the vital elements from the Nietzsche 'pastiche,' hoping to prove Nietzsche's case a *non sequitur*: (a) that Christ 'by loving on the cross, overcomes *ressentiment* (2001: 64); (b) the disciples, '[that] small community did not understand the main point, the exemplary character of this kind of death, the freedom, the superiority over any feeling of *ressentiment*' (AC, 40) (cited 2001: 64); (c) that the community did not comprehend that *ressentiment* disappears before love, life affirmation and the *Amen* (2001: 64); (d) that as a consequence, the return (eternal return of the same)—my inference—'the most unevangelical feeling, *revenge* came to the fore again... a feeling that created 'gods born of *ressentiment*' (AC 40; Kaufmann 615).

¹⁸**The inference in that note is this: that at a critical point in its early development, 'genuine, original Christianity' (AC 39; Kaufmann, 613), was hijacked, derailed by *ressentiment* which 'immediately reinterpreted it, abolished it, and developed it into a reactive system (law, morals) ... that organizes history with the aim of accusing beings**

The respected theologian for Girardian scholars, Father James Alison in his analysis of reconciling the 'wrath of god' with the loving Christ would explain this by means of a mimetic hermeneutic. Which, simply stated, is human beings projecting their violence onto God. That the violence is really *their* doing not God's.

The conclusion is the same i.e., that there has been a distortion of interpretation, but *the source* of that distortion is read differently by Alison and by Nietzsche. And there you have the knot of the debate between Girardians and Nietzsche's interpretation of *ressentiment* exposed, with the one side (Nietzsche after all is mute) ever tightening that knot of contention.

However, when one understands that each party in the debate is committed to the same principle of the primacy of mimetic pathology (including Nietzsche's highly nuanced much misunderstood notion of "Mitleid"), that Nietzsche's charge of *ressentiment* against Christianity is not a blanket rejection of original, pure Christianity, as has been indicated above, then perhaps the knot may after all, not be so impossible to untie, for the simple reason that Nietzsche has always respected the Christ of the Evangel. And much more than that, his understanding of this Christ aligns very respectably with modern

(Parousia, judgement, hell)' (2001: 64). But that this derailment need *not* be the end of the story in as far as that same 'genuine, original Christianity' 'will be possible at all times' (AC 39; Kaufmann, 613), (2001: 64).

Pauline scholarship and also the 'Jesus Project.' In effect, his identification with Christ, his meditation on the 'mystery' of Christ, is remarkable, and the defining of the distortion, identical, based on the same cognitive dissonance caused by the *ressentiment* of Girard's revised view in *Achever Clausewitz*, where it is *ressentiment* which misapprehends ("méconnaissance") **false religion as true**, and not Nietzsche the saint.¹⁹

Marion, *par contre*, dismisses what he sees as Nietzsche's 'two-way bet.' Marion might have said that Nietzsche's claims are similar to Kant's 'evasion' in the 'Critique of Reason', for which Nietzsche reserved critical scorn. After all, a rigorous, rationalist, Enlightenment world, a world of uncompromising scholarship demands otherwise—an uncompromising atheism, where such evasions are utterly unacceptable.

For this reason alone, Marion's unpicking of Nietzsche's alleged 'idolatry' is worth following to test his reading.

Marion begins with Christ's cry, 'my God my God why hast thou forsaken me?' which he interprets as 'a general disappointment and enlightenment over the idol, 'illusion' ["Wahn"] of his life' (2001: 65).

Marion uses this cry as proof of disqualification of an 'idolatrous illusion of the Christ' one which renders it untenable, with the inference that Nietzsche even in the pursuit of a revisionist Christ, is entertaining an idol unawares.

¹⁹ For Marion these revelations are inconsistent with Nietzsche's will to overcome idolatry (my reading of Nietzsche's interpretation of 'idolatry' is *anything* that is false, anything that rings hollow, anything that negates life rather than affirms it and *anything* that seeks to escape life as it is in order to build castles in the sky: becomes a self-delusional world, not just religion).

Marion likens this cry to ‘the cry of a *foetus* hurling at life, the cry of the one who pierces the idolatrous veil to swim in the ocean of distance... the death of the idolatrous representation of the divine’ (2001: 65) which, he insinuates, thus condemns Nietzsche to be ‘still idolatrous’ (2001: 68).²⁰

On the one hand, the cross is pictured as a victory over *ressentiment*; on the other, it is depicted as a defeat at its hands, ‘a phenomenon of *ressentiment*’ (2001: 67). For Marion, too, the introduction of *ressentiment* renders Nietzsche’s explanation of love ‘not credible’ (2001: 68), indeed, unconvincing (2001: 66):

If the privileges of the Christ do not spare him an unappealable disqualification, perhaps the reason for this is found less in the Nietzschean interpretation of the Christ than it is of “God.” More precisely, Christ is one of the names for one who experiences the divine. But of what divinity does Christ experience the divinity?

Here clearly Marion understands that the acceptance of this revisionist Christ is still an acceptance of a ‘G-d.’ His verdict: that the love which is inferred in Nietzsche’s ‘Christ of the Evangel’ who operates, ‘through love’ ‘... suffices neither to define nor to account for a

²⁰ He finds it ‘remarkable’ that Nietzsche should ‘posit’ that ‘abandonment becomes the condition of relation to God as a person and not as an idol’, and that same abandonment, ‘offers one of the faces of communion—perhaps the highest.’ For Marion this is the site of Nietzsche’s ‘massive’ omission’ (2001: 66), and he thinks Nietzsche to have caught himself in a standing contradiction. On my second reading of this I am reminded of what is overlooked by Marion: that Christ is meditating on the first lines of Psalm 22 i.e., that this is the cry of meditation, not of despair. Hence, perfectly consistent with Nietzsche’s ‘Christic’ structure.

“God” against whom only the analysis of *ressentiment* penetrates’ (GM II, 21).

By this, I suspect that Marion is treating Nietzsche’s pitch of the Christ of the Evangel as merely one designed to discredit St Paul and *that kind of Christianity* (Luther’s Christianity, a pietistic Christianity), which in his opinion, lands Nietzsche in the same standing self-contradiction and negates his ‘God is dead’ ‘We have murdered God’ thesis.

Marion’s theistic case against Nietzsche, thus, follows hard upon the contradictions he discovers in the ‘*Christic structure*’ of the Nietzschean text. It can be summarized as follows.

Starting with the premise that “God” loves only in hating, i.e., that for that kind of “God,” love demands ‘strict reciprocity’ (2001: 69), which Nietzsche himself underlined in *The Case of Wagner*, ‘he becomes terrible when one does not love him in return.’ *That kind of love is ‘a barbarism,’ it is exclusivist, egotistical* (2001: 70).

Nietzsche’s Christ of the Evangel, the one who overcomes *ressentiment*, is for Marion a Nietzsche who ‘admits a “beyond” of love, another world, where love yields to something vaster and stronger than it is’ (2001: 70), the very things he critiques in the metaphysical sleights of hand. For Marion this whole process is ‘duplicitous,’ a ‘dissimulation,’ a ‘hypocrisy,’ a ‘deficiency’ (2001: 71).

But Marion’s objections are based, as I have been arguing, on a *misreading* of Nietzsche. And this emerges very clearly in his

misunderstanding of Nietzsche's 'God is dead' provocation. Before we discuss this in some detail, let me conclude Marion's interpretation of it.

Firstly, I do not think he gets the idea that Nietzsche is an *agent provocateur* and that not everything he writes is to be taken either literally, or at face value. **Satire and irony seem lost on him.**

Secondly, no distinction is made between the old and the revised Dionysos which is encapsulated in the question, '...what face [of] the divine can still assume after the "death of God" and before the still-to-come advent of Dionysus' (2001: 71).

Thirdly, Marion falls into what we have seen Girard call 'the philosopher's error' in its misapplication of the 'will-to-power'. Here this "God" becomes, with Marion's uncritical acceptance (by which I mean he does not take into account the published canon of Nietzsche's works), 'God as a maximal state' (2001: 72).

Thus, in Marion's reading of Nietzsche, 'the idols remain'; 'the "new gods" themselves also remain tied metaphysically to the will to power... they play and dance like idols' thus, Nietzsche, claims Marion, 'remains an idolater' (2001: 73). Which brings us to the mad man who seeks God.

For Marion this is the abyss, the 'distance that identifies and also is identified with God,' 'the "God" who dies remains still too close, metaphysically for his death not to be idolatrous and for the new face that succeeds him not to reestablish another still metaphysical idol' (2001: 74-75).

Marion's case is faulty in as much he draws too heavily (inferred above but not stated) on what he knows is 'the texts of the collection called *The Will to Power*' editorial control of which was heavily imposed by Nietzsche's sister. Marion's claim that Nietzsche is an idolater because his belief is, 'most clearly the onto-theological comprehension of the "gods"' (2001: 77), is thus undone by his admission that this 'might not count among the last fragments,' to which he adds the *Antichrist*, *Ecce Homo*, *Nietzsche contra Wagner* and the *Dithyrambs* (2001: 77).

Marion's comments confirm he is held in thrall by the false assumptions previously mentioned.

Certainly, no concession is allowed for Nietzsche's attempts to uncover a G-d who is more like nothing at all, than one of the gods, which is my reading.

And as for Dionysos 'touching' him, and that the 'distance' which Nietzsche claims for himself, is not there, but yet Marion will (curiously) allow for 'a distance of Goodness', which he admits, 'is most precious' (2001: 78).

What Marion never acknowledges, is that the dictum Nietzsche follows is perfectly consistent with the classic definition of God: that God is more like nothing at all than one of the gods who declares, 'I shall be *who* or *how* or *where* I shall be.' To that premise, Nietzsche holds fast throughout his writings, but Marion cannot see through the parody and the satire which inform the project.

Thus Spoke Zarathustra, for example,

- is partly a parody of the Bible and ‘an imitation of Menippean satire’ (More: [2014], 2016: 169),
- partly an expression of Nietzsche’s mysticism, to which Nietzsche devoted the longest book treatment in the *Ecce Homo* review of his life’s work, which has also been much misunderstood.
- *EH* has always been cast as the *enfant perdu* of Nietzsche’s books, wrongly diagnosed as symptomatic of his madness: that Nietzsche had ‘lost his grasp on reality and become completely immersed in himself’ indulging in an ‘excessive degree of self-glorification’ and an ‘extreme conviction that he had a mission to fulfil [that] are both embarrassing and repulsive’ (Frey-Rohn: 1984: 262).²¹

At the end of the day why should any of this concern us?

- Does it matter that we do or don’t understand Nietzsche?
- Does it matter how we represent or misrepresent Nietzsche?
- Does it matter that we dismiss him as a madman, decry him as an apostate, refuse him a seat in the academy of the great philosophers

²¹ The fact is that it is also steeped in Menippean satire, designed to ‘reform philosophy,’ one that ‘mixes jokes and serious matters together’ a philosophy that sought to create particular feelings, not to prove new doctrines’ one that attempted to take up the struggle against the feelings of revengefulness and vindictiveness’ (More 2016: 209-210). He learned, as More notes, ‘to write by the dictum of his Roman hero Horace: *ridendo dicere severum* – say what is grave by laughing’ (More: 2016: 211). And, to borrow from More’s delightful title for *Ecce Homo* as Satire, this is ‘Nietzsche’s last laugh’ on those who fail to take account of the medium and genre as well as the words in which his works are cast.

and philologists?

- Does it *matter* that we walk away from him not knowing him, treating him as one – to use his own quaint way of putting it – to content ourselves to know him “only as a cloud” of his true self, the true person that he is, and just allow him to drift across the horizon of our preconceptions, our prejudices precluding the deep insights he offers us which may serve us in this urgent time of **the most radical revaluation of values** ever faced in the history of humankind?
- Will we walk away from him and call him a liar and deceiver?
- Or will we join him in, again in his own words, to “serve the truth”?
- And at the end of the day when we have made up our minds, will we at least embrace the perennial challenge he puts before all: is *that* what we want? is *that* what we think? is *that* really what we should be thinking and wanting?

We finish as we began by allowing the encounter between Christ and Pontius Pilate to speak to us.²²

P: So you are the King of the Jews.

J: They’re your words.

P: Well you are Jesus of Nazareth, aren’t you?

J: Yes, I am.

P: Well that’s what they’re saying you are the King, the Messiah.

It’s also said that you do miracles. Is it good magic or bad magic? Can we have some kind of a demonstration? I mean can

²² Of course I know this is *The Last Temptation of Christ* and Scorsese’s version (for example, the way Daniel’s prophecy is brought into the dialogue), but you must agree it is true to the Biblical account, despite its poetic licence.

you do a trick for me now?

J: No I'm not a trained animal. I'm not a magician.

P: That's disappointing. This means you're just another Jewish politician. [*sends away the guard*] Do you want to know something? You're more dangerous than the Zealots. Say something... you'd better say something.

[PAUSE]

Alright, tell me what you tell people on the streets.

J: Yes?

P: Yes.

J: The prophet Daniel had a vision. A tall statue had a gold head silver shoulders, the stomach was bronze the legs were iron the feet were clay. A stone was thrown. The clay feet broke, the statue collapsed.

P: Yes.

J: You see God threw the stone. The stone's me and Rome

P: And Rome is the statue. So your kingdom or your world will replace Rome. Where is it?

J: My kingdom? It's not here, not on earth.

P: It wouldn't be, would it? [*sitting together*] You know it's one thing to want to change the way people live but you want to change how they think, how they feel.

J: All I'm saying is that change will happen with love, not with killing.

P: Either way it's dangerous – it's against Rome it's against the way the world is. And killing or loving it's all the same. It simply doesn't matter how you want to change things, we don't want them changed. [*Silence Jesus looks at Pilate, Pilate looks at Jesus... Pilate walks back to his previous place of distance*] You *do* understand what has to happen? We have a space for you up on Golgotha 3,000 skulls up there by now probably more. Guard... I do wish you people would go out and count them some time... maybe you'd learn a lesson. No... probably not....

PostScript Notes: to refer to in the Q & A

1. What is the lesson... for us?
2. Is it to do with as Jesus said that we as humans are constantly wearing masks, which he also calls hypocrisy?
3. Is it that we are categorisers, so busy *labelling, typecasting, stereotyping, prejudging* each other to the point where we can't hear or see each other anymore, as we are?
4. To the point where we go around not knowing what we are doing, having to be forgiven all the time, forgiving ourselves for having so stupidly misunderstood, misrepresented, misconceived what is before us – because neither our values nor our awareness nor our understanding or our moral courage is up to it?
5. Masking and categorising – categorically denying what is evident to a dispassionate observer ... to ourselves in our better moments?
6. Do we take seriously the distinction Jesus makes between **a sign** and **a miracle**... whereby *a miracle* may be questioned and debated – misrepresented. But *a sign* is incontrovertible, solid as reality is solid even when we

don't understand it and can't see it with the naked eye - like *dark matter* and *dark energy*?

7. **The sign of Jonah is for apocryphal times like ours...**

whereby the last message of Jesus of Nazareth is not only "Father forgive them for they don't know what they are doing,"

- but that "change will happen with love not with killing,"
- that love sits at the centre of all dark matter and dark energy... and will have the last word?
- That no blood or life offering is required to satisfy an angry God... **just a radical change of mind, of justice and kindness and mercy like the Ninevites in sackcloth and ashes, and all their animals with not a one destroyed as a holocaust.**

8. How did **Benjamin Netanyahu** answer to the Book of Jonah when it was read in full at Yom Kippur? Will he run away as the prophet did because God is too merciful?

9. What will **Vladimir Putin**, what will **the Patriarch Kirril**, leader of the Russian Orthodox Church say who sits

beside Putin, the one who walks with him, blesses the troops who go out to kill?

10. What will **Donald Trump** say who faces 90 charges and more, holding up his designer Bible (*KJ*) for the elections coming up, after which if he is successful, will claim immunity – what do we think when he threatens a bloodbath if he's *not* elected?
11. **The list goes on... the challenges of *undergoing, overcoming and becoming...* the onus of living an exemplary life... the one to which Nietzsche summons us.**
12. **And to which Jesus (Nietzsche's Christ of the Evangel) summons us all** (The Message paraphrase Matthew 11:28):

“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.”

