

Christian & Nihilist: The Confession and the Paradox

By: The Theological Maniac

Living as both a Christian and a nihilist causes a strange sort of double vision. It's similar to knowing that both churches are yours while standing in the center of two churches, one with stained glass light and the other silent and dark.

They should be fierce rivals on paper. Christianity maintains that the universe is curved toward the will of a loving Creator and that life has ultimate meaning, purpose, and direction. The converse is true of nihilism, which holds that everything we create will eventually crumble into dust, that space and time is meaningless, and meaning is a human construct.

These systems have been viewed as mutually exclusive by philosophers for ages. You have to choose between the two. However, both are true, or at least feel true, in the weird, uneasy realm where I reside.

The 2 Views

My Christian perspective takes over on some days. God's presence surrounds my life like a gentle stream. Praying is like breathing. Even if the world is chaotic, I think it's a part of something intentional. Everyday things like the warmth of sunlight coming through a dusty window, a friend's generosity, or the passages in scripture that appear to be written with my name on them all give me a sense of purpose.

On other occasions, the nihilist perspective appears without request. The world appears arbitrary. It's like leaving voicemails on a disconnected phone when you pray. I witness

unresolved suffering—children dying, the guilty getting away with it, the good being forgotten. And during those times, "God's plan" seems like a catchphrase designed to prevent us from yelling.

These lenses don't respectfully take turns. I occasionally wear both at once. It's possible for me to be moved while reading the Gospels and hear that dark, quiet voice in my thoughts telling me, "You're just getting emotional over words." All of this is a myth that people make up to feel secure.

Nihilism = Honesty?

Christianity rarely gives the bluntness that nihilism does. When disaster strikes, it doesn't give me catchphrases. When I see a family bury their child, it doesn't make me think that "everything happens for a reason." Finding the moral lesson in a cancer diagnosis is not required.

Rather, it chuckles and states, "The cosmos isn't trying to harm you, but it's also not trying to help you. It is indifferent. And you won't either one day.

That's uncomfortable. In a sense, though, it's also honest. There is no obligation to make sorrow uplifting or to fit suffering into a heavenly story. Pain is pain. Loss is simply loss. In any case, the globe turns.

And occasionally, that degree of harsh clarity is a relief, particularly when faith feels brittle.

Why Not Leave Christianity?

Despite its directness, nihilism does not provide a remedy. Although it identifies the wound, it provides no solution for its healing. Not only does it eliminate illusions, but it also eliminates hope.

Even in my darkest moments, Christianity continues to give me hope that's not the sentimental, "everything will be fine" kind, but the obstinate kind. The type that says, "I will have faith that what exists is more than what I can see," while gazing into the empty space.

Jesus visiting the tomb of Lazarus. Even though he knows he is going to summon his friend back to life, he nevertheless breaks down in tears. Every time, that detail breaks my heart. I cannot deny the existence of a God who joins us in the pit rather than yelling encouragement from afar.

Many of Jesus's followers leave after a particularly difficult lesson, according to a tale in John 6. "Do you want to leave too?" he asks, turning to the twelve. Peter responds, "To whom should we go, Lord? The words of eternal life are in your possession."

I feel that way about faith. There is nowhere else that gives anything other than emptiness, even when I am angry with God, when I doubt, and when nihilism is warning me to go.

The Fight

On most days, this is what is in my head:

Nihilism: "Give up looking for purpose. You're wearing yourself out trying to find something that doesn't exist."

Christianity: "Everything has meaning at its core. You just do not yet have a whole picture."

It's like two individuals constantly talking over each other.

The majority of people prefer that I choose one. I don't. I've recognized the truth in both, not because I'm unsure. My religion doesn't become foolish because of nihilism. Christianity prevents my nihilism from turning into hopelessness.

Nihilism in the Bible

Ironically, there are a lot of voices in the Bible that sound just like mine. The opening of Ecclesiastes is:

“Meaningless! Meaningless! Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.” -Ecclesiastes 1:2

That is the official story, not an atheist tantrum. Examining work, pleasure, wisdom, and even righteousness, the author declares it all to be vapor. He acknowledges that both the wicked and the pious suffer the same fate. The battle is not for the strong, and the race is not for the quick.

Job is an example of righteous suffering for which there are no definitive answers. He rejects the weak theology his friends give him, which is still in use today. When God does respond, it is with a barrage of questions Job is unable to answer rather than with reassuring platitudes.

The Psalms are full of laments that could double as existential poetry:

“How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?” (Psalm 13)

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Psalm 22) which is the same words Jesus himself cries on the cross.

Philosophy Side

From the perspective of philosophy, this tension is intriguing. It is a paradox rather than a formal logical contradiction. Christianity and nihilism function on distinct levels.

The material world is addressed by nihilism: the universe has no intrinsic purpose in the absence of God.

Christianity grounds meaning in God and asserts that it transcends the material world.

Both may be true in practice. You can believe that the world has ultimate meaning even while it feels meaningless.

Kierkegaard referred to this as "the leap of faith" which is the point at which you decide to believe even though reason isn't able to support you further. Pascal presented it as a bet: if Christianity is real, then all is gained, but if the cosmos is uncaring, then believing results in nothing being lost. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky depicts characters who are caught between religion and meaninglessness, perfectly encapsulating the insanity I experience.

Living This Way Without Breaking

You must acquire a few survival abilities in order to survive here:

- Give up imposing a solution. The paradox doesn't need to be resolved. Sometimes faith flourishes in doubt, but it doesn't always need to be eradicated.
- Set your moral compass in advance. Make a decision right away about your behavior for the days you believe and the days you don't.
- Look for tiny, concrete reasons to live. Music and coffee. The comfort of having a pet curled up next to you. When cosmic purpose seems far away, these items might help you stay grounded.
- Go through the texts of darkness. Job, Ecclesiastes, and Lamentations serve as reminders that this path has always been taken by God's people.
- Consider hope to be a discipline. Practice it even on the days when it seems unreal.

Is God Offended By Nihilism?

The more scripture I read, the more I believe that my worst ideas have no impact on God. They were included in His book. He did not suppress the prophets' sadness, David's depression, Jeremiah's lament, or Thomas's skepticism.

Faith is not denying the existence of the absence. "Here," it says, drawing the emptiness into God's presence. What I have today is this.

Christianity guarantees that even if nihilism destroys life, the bones will still be able to survive.