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The Alternatives — God or Nothing

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David Bentley Hart argues that contemporary persons are increasingly committed to belief in nothing. He does not mean that modern persons do not believe in anything, but that they are actually committed to a form of nihilism. Speaking as a representative of modern humanity, Hart simply explains — “our religion is one of very comfortable nihilism.”



Then he offers this eloquent and provocative analysis of the modern prospect:

[N]either we nor our distant progeny will live to see a new Christian culture in the Western world; we must accept to this with both charity and faith. We must, after all, grant that in the mystery of God's providence, all this has followed from the work of the Holy Spirit in time. Modern persons will never find rest for their restless hearts without Christ, for modern culture is nothing but the wasteland from which the gods have departed, and so this restlessness has become its own deity; and, deprived of the shelter of the sacred and the consoling myths of sacrifice, the modern person must wander or drift, vainly attempting one or another accommodation with death, never as escaping anxiety or ennui, and driven as a result to a ceaseless labor of distraction, or acquisition, or willful idiocy. And, where it works its sublimest magic, our culture of empty spectacle can so stupefy the intellect as to blind it to its own disquiet, and induce a spiritual torpor more deplorable than mere despair. But we Christians — while not ignoring how appalling such a condition is — should yet rejoice that modernity offers no religious comforts to those who would seek them. In this time of waiting, in this age marked only by the absence of faith in Christ, it is well that the modern soul should lack repose, piety, peace, or nobility, and should find to the world outside the Church barren of spiritual rapture or mystery, and should discover no beautiful or terrible or merciful gods upon which to cast itself.

SEE: David Bentley Hart, “God or Nothing,” in *I Am the Lord Your God*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Christopher R. Seitz (Eerdmans, 2005).

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