Evangelism in "an Age of Normal Nihilism"

Joel P. Okamoto

Abstract: This article considers how Christians should understand the Gospel of Jesus Christ and its proclamation where "nihilism" is the normal condition. "Nihilism" means, as Nietzsche put it, that "the highest values devalue themselves; the aim is lacking; 'why?' has no answer." Nihilism is a normal condition for many in North America (and elsewhere), and its effects are both subtle and profound for Christian identity, life, and witness. This article will focus on the effects for the third term—Christian witness.

Among the challenges confronting contemporary followers of Jesus Christ is the *nihilism* that has become the normal condition for life in Europe, North America, and other parts of the world. For Nietzsche in the late nineteenth century, "Nihilism [stood] at the door."[1] But in the twenty-first century, nihilism has come through the door and made itself at home. We live in "an age of normal nihilism."[2]

Nihilism as a condition of life raises vital questions for Christians as they consider their lives today, including questions about the Gospel and evangelism.

What is nihilism?

The word "nihilism" is used variously, but we are following Nietzsche when he said:

> What does nihilism means? That the highest values devaluate themselves. The aim is lacking; "why?" finds no answer.[3]

For Nietzsche, the "highest values" included "God," "redemption," "eternity," "faith," and "truth."[4] He called them "values" because people held them *only* for their value to themselves and their lives. It did not used to be this way. At one time throughout the West, "God," "Christ," and "the Church" had unquestioned authoritative status. So they directed the lives of people in definite ways and with ultimate authority. It was enough to answer "Why?" with "It is the Word of God" or "the command of Christ" or "the will of the Church." But Nietzsche concluded that now they had authority only because people gave it to them, because *they valued them.* They were *highest* values, to be sure, but since there were just values, they

---

Joel P. Okamoto is Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, where he also holds the Waldemar and Mary Griesbach Chair in Systematic Theology and serves as chair of the Department of Systematic Theology.

could not have the status that they once enjoyed. The values devaluated themselves.

Others before Nietzsche had discerned the devaluation of the highest values. Standing on "Dover Beach," Matthew Arnold could hear and see it:

> The Sea of Faith
> Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
> Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
> But now I only hear
> Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
> Retreating, to the breath
> Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
> And naked shingles of the world.
>
> Ah, love, let us be true
> To one another! for the world, which seems
> To lie before us like a land of dreams,
> So various, so beautiful, so new,
> Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
> Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
> And we are here as on a darkling plain
> Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
> Where ignorant armies clash by night.

"Faith" for Arnold was one of the "highest values," and its retreat was with a "melancholy, long, withdrawing roar." And in that loss, there was now darkness, confusion, and ignorance: "the aim is lacking; 'why?' finds no answer."

Similarly, Søren Kierkegaard opens *Fear and Trembling* with an explicit sense of the devaluation of the highest values: "Not only in the business world but also in the world of ideas, our age stages *ein wirklicher Ausverkauf* [a real sale]. Everything can be had at such a bargain price that it becomes a question whether there is finally anyone who will make a bid."[5] Charles Baudelaire attested both to God as "highest value" and to his devaluation when he observed how perversely people had come to regard him:

> Even though God did not exist, Religion would be none the less holy and divine. God is the sole being who has no need to exist in order to reign. That which is created by the Mind is more living than Matter.
>
> The most prostitute of all beings is the Supreme Being, God Himself, since for each man he is the friend above all others; since he is the common, inexhaustible fount of Love.
>
> *God and His profundity*. It is possible even for the intelligent man to seek in God that helper and friend whom he can never find. God is the eternal confidant in that tragedy of which each man is hero. Perhaps there are

> usurers and assassins who say to God: "Lord, grant that my next enterprise may be successful!" But the prayers of these vile persons do not mar the virtue and joy of my own.[6]

Nihilism excludes neither trust in God nor belief in truth nor convictions about right and wrong, although it may come to that. Nietzsche was convinced that nearly all people were unconscious of their nihilism, that their faith and convictions were honest and sincere. For Nietzsche, nihilism *derived* from the conviction that there are no supernatural gods, no life after death, no "real world" or "sacred realm" beyond or transcending the world of experience. Nietzsche's presupposition was: "that there is no truth, that there is no absolute nature of things nor a 'thing-in-itself.'"[7] This is why he was utterly certain "the aim is lacking, 'why?' finds no answer," and, more generally, why he was thoroughly dismissive, scornful, and resentful of Christians and most philosophers. But neither being a nihilist nor dealing with nihilism requires unbelief or agnosticism or even doubt. One can be both a devout, deeply convinced believer in Jesus Christ and a nihilist.

But nihilism does give rise to a range of subjective states. The most basic is the sense of loss. This is nihilism as a *subjective condition*, or as Nietzsche said at one point, "nihilism as a psychological state."[8] He called this "the feeling of valuelessness" brought about "with the realization that the overall character of existence may not be interpreted by means of the concept of 'aim,' the concept of 'unity,' or the concept of 'truth.'"[9] Arnold reflected this sense keenly in calling the sound of Sea of Faith's retreat "melancholy" and in picturing "a darkling plain."

"An Age of Normal Nihilism"

In our age, nihilism has become a normal condition of life. Following Nietzsche, we can explain this by saying that throughout society—in our schools, in our economy, in our civil politics, in literature, and so forth—"the overall character of existence may not be interpreted by means of the concept of 'aim,' the concept of 'unity,' or the concept of 'truth.'" Today's formal education aims to give students the knowledge and skills to do what they want or have to do in the economy. "Why?" has no answer further than "If you try hard in school, you might be able to get a job." The aim of business is to buy and sell. What is bought and what is sold, however, matter primarily to the bottom line. The aim of civil politics is to stay in office and serve the ones who got you into office. Meaninglessness, emptiness, confusion, sterility, and loss are standard themes not only in literature itself but also in literary criticism. For example, T. S. Eliot not only wrote "The Waste Land," a landmark in modern literature and an exemplar in displaying the contemporary world's barrenness, but also wrote of James Joyce's use of the *Odyssey* in *Ulysses*:

> In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. They will not be imitators, any more than the

> scientist who uses the discoveries of an Einstein in pursuing his own, independent, further investigations. It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. It is a method already adumbrated by Mr. Yeats, and of the need for which I believe Mr. Yeats to have been the first contemporary to be conscious.[10]

With all of these features of contemporary life, we must conclude that nihilism is normal. Accordingly, we also must conclude that we are nihilists, because our lives are spent dealing with and dealing under these values in our schools, at our workplaces, in our shopping and entertainment, and in our communities.

It is no different in our churches and other religious institutions. Here, too, nihilism is a normal condition. Following philosopher James Edwards in his book *The Plain Sense of Things*, which explored the impact of the "age of normal nihilism" on religion and religiousness, we may explain religion as "a set of values, a set of structures of interpretation employed in the hope of preserving and enhancing what we most care about."[11] Accordingly, we must consider ourselves in our religious lives to be nihilistic too. As he explains:

> What does it mean for us to be religious? It means for us to be some sort of nihilist, conscious or unconscious, joyful or sorrowful, or somewhere in between. We can no longer serve gods, nor gaze on Forms, nor encounter ourselves as the fully present ego-subject; we can only monger self-devaluated values: values that still trade under old and hallowed names "Yahweh," "Allah," "Jesus," "truth," "love," "reality," "evil," "I," and so forth; but values that are now a bit shopworn from our handling, and a bit gimcrack when seen in bright light. . . Nihilism is now the way the world comes to us, the way it sounds itself out in us; it is the way we comport ourselves to what we are given. We are all now nihilists.[12]

The idea that "Yahweh," "Jesus," and so forth are now values is evident in the way that Christians have come to regard *doctrine*. In his 1968 lecture "Religious Significance of Atheism," Alasdair MacIntyre summarized the Christian response to the threat of atheism as one that offered "atheists less and less in which to disbelieve."[13] He was referring not only to "modernist" or "liberal" Christians who openly gave up such teachings as the Virgin Birth of Jesus or His resurrection from the dead. He also meant orthodox-minded Christians:

> Despite the utmost orthodox insistence on retaining traditional creedal formulations, a process of "natural selection" seems to be occurring in which only some of the dogmas are really maintained with conviction while others, mere "vestiges," receive only the inconsequential deference of not being expunged from the articles of faith.[14]

Such treatment means that *all* doctrines are treated as mere values, and some as not very valuable ones at that.

The force of this observation intensifies when we realize what doctrines have become vestiges: those about the return of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, the life of the world to come, and the Trinity. All are confessed week after week in churches, but in the lives of many, that rote recitation is as far as they go. Few go to sleep praying for Christ to "come again in glory, to judge both the living and the dead" or "look[ing] for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come." They prefer to pray, "If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take." The vestigial state of the doctrine of the Trinity can be seen not only in the difficulty most Christians have of making sense of the Athanasian Creed. It is also apparent in the inability to answer basic Trinitarian questions like, "Why was it appropriate for the Second Person of the Trinity to be incarnate, and not the First or the Third?" Karl Rahner was right:

> [D]espite their orthodox confession of the Trinity, Christians are, in their practical life, almost mere "monotheists." We must be willing to admit that, should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of the religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged. Nor does it help to remark that the doctrine of the *incarnation* is theologically *and* religiously so central for the Christian that, *through it*, the Trinity is always and everywhere inseparably "present" in his religious life. Nowadays when we speak of God's incarnation, the theological and religious emphasis lies only on the fact that "God" became man, that "one" of the divine persons (of the Trinity) took on the flesh, and not on the fact that this person is precisely the person of the Logos. One has the feeling that, for the catechism of head and heart (as contrasted with the printed catechism), the Christian's idea of the incarnation would not have to change at all if there were no Trinity.[15]

Once again, we must recognize that treating these doctrines as less valuable than others means that *doctrine itself* is a value. It would be one thing to observe that the situation that gave rise to a certain doctrine no longer obtains, as the first part of the Smalcald Articles did with the doctrine of the Trinity. It is another thing to be largely absent in the theology and practice of churches, which is what MacIntyre was observing. Here a selection has been made, not on theological grounds but for the sake of *survival*, that is, "in the hope of preserving and enhancing what we most care about." What is valuable stays; what is not goes. But in this even the highest values—the survivors—are devaluated, and there one finds nihilism.[16]

The idea that religion itself—faith in God, praying, belonging to a church, reading the Bible, etc.—also now is evidently a value for the many who regard religion principally to be "useful," that is, an "instrument." Baudelaire saw this kind of religion in God as "the eternal confidant in that tragedy of which each man is

hero," which was why God "has no need to exist in order to reign." The instrumental notion of religion explains such things as the success of both *The Prayer of Jabez* and *The End of Faith*; *The Purpose-Driven Life* and *The God Delusion*; *Your Best Life Now* and *God Is Not Great.* On both sides, the Christian and the atheist, argue about religion's usefulness. To be sure, the Christian argues that it is helpful and the atheist that it is harmful. But for both, such things as right doctrine and right worship do not matter much; but practical outcomes in everyday life, in culture, and in civil politics do.

Practical outcomes also amount to the point of "therapeutic" religion. This term comes to us from Freud by way of Philip Rieff, who wrote of the "triumph of the therapeutic."[17] Rieff was writing at a time when much learned opinion feared the demise of supernatural religion. To the contrary he argued that there would be more religion, not less, but that it would be very different. "The wisdom of the next social order, as I imagine it, would not reside in right doctrine, administered by the right men, who must be found, but rather in doctrines amounting to permission for each man to live an experimental life."[18] The therapeutic very clearly illustrates what Edwards meant when he said that religion is "a set of structures of interpretation employed in the hope of preserving and enhancing what we most care about."

In his recent study of American youth and their religious lives, sociologist Christian Smith concluded that this kind of religion was "the de facto dominant religion among contemporary U.S. teenagers"—and their parents. He called it "moralistic therapeutic deism," and about it he said, "what appears to be the actual dominant religion among U.S. teenagers is centrally about feeling good, happy, secure, at peace. It is about attaining subjective well-being, being able to solve problems, and getting along amiably with other people."[19] It is, in a word, useful.

"Useful" is also the operative word for God in particular. The conception of God corresponds to this religion:

> This God is not demanding. He actually can't be, because his job is to solve our problems and make people feel good. In short, God is something like a combination Divine Butler and Cosmic Therapist: he is always on call, takes care of any problems that arise, professionally helps his people to feel better about themselves, and does not become too personally involved in the process.[20]

Evangelism in "an age of normal nihilism"

Even from this brief sketch, one can intuit that nihilism poses serious challenges for Christians in their life and witness. Here are six specific considerations for the nature and task of evangelism in an age of normal nihilism. These are sketchy and incomplete, but they do touch on the most basic and obvious matters for evangelism.

1. Evangelism must acknowledge the devaluation of God, Christ, salvation, Church, Bible, etc. They must recognize and respond to the fact that

> Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have come to be seen by us as competing sets of values, as alternative ways of interpreting (and thereby, one hopes, mastering) the opportunities and the obstacles thrown up by one's experience. Even if one might be moved—for reasons of sentiment, or of political advantage—to defend one of these sets of values over the others, one must at the same time realize that such a defense has now become necessary: no form of life is unquestionable by us; none is proof to our capacity and need for irony. Organized religion has certainly not disappeared in this shadow-time of values, but it has certainly changed its character in fundamental ways. There are still devout Jews and Muslims and Christians around, of course, but to us they begin to look like the folks who need to wear nothing but Polo head to foot, or those who spend all their free time arguing the advantages of IBMs over Macs. The Christian bookstore is for us just another shop in the mall.[21]

Because nihilism is normal, it will be impossible to overcome the appearance that being Christian is a matter of personal preference or advantage. Christians cannot help but appear as one set of structures of interpretation, that is, one way of making sense of, giving meaning to, and dealing with life.

Not only that, but Christian witness often will present itself as a way of interpreting life and the world. This is what C. S. Lewis did in "Is Theology Poetry?":

> Christian theology can fit in science, art, morality, and the sub-Christian religions. The scientific point of view cannot fit in any of these things, not even science itself. I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.[22]

Lewis was not wrong for regarding the Christian faith as a worldview, but this move does show that Christianity has indeed come to be seen, even by Christians themselves, as a set of values. The same happens when Christians regard the Church as "an interpretative community" or the Gospel as a "metanarrative." Such moves do amount to a concession by Christians to their devaluation in the West. But here, as the saying goes, "honesty is the best policy." It would be confusing at best to do anything else.

But it is a devaluation for Christians, a *modest* form of nihilism.

2. Christians should not allow their witness to be *only* a way of interpreting life and the world. The Christian message must do more than offer a way to "see everything else," even if this way seems better or the best. In evangelism, this means that the Gospel has to do more than account for "heaven and earth, and

all things visible and invisible," although it should do no less. The truth of the Gospel must also come through.

For a long time Christians had been able to ignore the truth question. Now that they can't, they have often sought to make the question irrelevant or to just get by with some assertions. The "triumph of the therapeutic" amounts to giving up on the truth question, and so does a "prosperity gospel." But many retreats to rigidly following a tradition and traditional ways will do just as poorly when they beg the question concerning truth, asserting it rather than arguing for it. "God said it, I believe it, that settles it" settles nothing. Neither does "I believe what the Church teaches." And platitudes like "You can't argue anyone into believing" or "It takes the Holy Spirit" are often just convenient excuses for ignoring the truth question.

This is a *robust* form of nihilism.

Normal nihilism means that we should *expect* others to be sensitive to the truth question and also to be inclined to dismiss our claims as just another story, just another set of values, just another way to cope with life. This is likely to happen even when we pay attention to truthfulness. It is all the more likely to happen when we don't. To be sure, in our nihilistic age, we should expect to find some for whom another set of values is just what they are looking for. A different and perhaps more congenial interpretation of themselves, their lives, and the world is just what they need. But, as my earlier mention of Christian and atheist bestsellers implied, this cuts in all directions—for the Christian, but also for the atheist, and the Muslim, and the Buddhist. So the truth question remains basic.

Dealing with the question of truth is not philosophical, in the sense that the right philosophical theory of truth is necessary. It is theological. Stanley Fish was correct to point out that "whatever theory of truth you might espouse will be irrelevant to your position on the truth of a particular matter, because your position on the truth of a particular matter will flow from your sense of where the evidence lies, which will in turn flow from the authorities you respect, the archives you trust, and so on."[23] For us Christians, the truth of our message and the truthfulness of our lives are found in and through Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God, as proclaimed by his apostles, as handed down in the Gospel, and as attested to by his Church.

3. The question of truth matters for evangelism because this question is central to the Gospel. In each of the canonical Gospels, the truth about Jesus is central to the account. For each of the evangelists, questions like "Is He the king of the Jews?" "Is He Israel's Messiah?" "Is He the Son of God?" "Is He the one come to redeem Israel?" "Is His word God's Word?" "Are His deeds God's deeds?" are the ones that Jesus prompts, that lead to the cross, that God answers decisively in raising Him on the third day. Christian life and witness will do right by the Gospel itself only as it does right by these questions and answers.

Constructively, this is the first requirement for evangelism in an age of normal nihilism. Put concretely, evangelism must be grounded in the proclamation of the

coming of the reign of the God of Israel over all creation through Jesus of Nazareth, who is the Son of God and the one whom God appointed as ruler and judge. The truth of this message is found in the first coming of Jesus. He came to Israel proclaiming this reign of God and inaugurating it in His signs and wonders. But He was rejected and crucified for His claims and His deeds. In other words, the truth of Jesus concerning Himself, His mission, and His God were denied. However, the God who sent Him raised Him from the dead. In this act, God vindicated Jesus and His words and His works. He proved the truth about Jesus. Jesus did not immediately complete His mission—He did not at that moment "redeem Israel" (Lk 24:21) or "restore the kingdom to Israel" (Acts 1:6). Instead, He sent His followers out to "make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:18). And while much of Israel continued to reject Jesus as the Son of God and as their Anointed One, the word of Christ's reign and of His call to repent, receive forgiveness, and follow Him was proclaimed and believed among the nations of the world. And so it should continue. Evangelism, to say nothing of catechesis and dogmatics, includes more than this; but evangelism, especially in an age of normal nihilism, must not include anything less.

4. Some Christians may find this message "too much": too stark, too tribal, too apocalyptic. They may be right, but simply saying so begs the question. I would acknowledge that this account could be given differently, but I also would argue that the account given is reflected in the canonical Gospels (particularly the synoptics), affirmed by the preaching in Acts, confirmed in the letters of Paul (especially Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and Colossians), acknowledged in versions of the Rule of Faith, and consistent with the ecumenical creeds.

I am more concerned, however, that such challenges arise because *non-Christians* will have trouble with the Christian message. One should be concerned with *how* one approaches others in evangelism. But to question or challenge this as "unhelpful" or "off-putting" to others is to indulge in nihilism itself.

5. Christians should seek to live faithfully according to the Gospel. As bearers of the dominant Western religious tradition for over a thousand years, Christians have much responsibility for today's normal nihilism. Their lives have done much to foster and promote the emptiness and meaningless of contemporary life, because they would not answer many questions in rich and coherent ways. Therefore, churches in an age of normal nihilism should strive toward fostering more faithful discipleship. Christians can be faithful witnesses only to the extent that they lead faithful lives. The Lord can and does work in many and various ways and in spite of our weaknesses and errors. But this is no excuse for ignorance, indifference, or error on the part of His people.

6. Faithfulness in all matters of life matters. However, for witness in our situation, perhaps the most significant will be in *valuing one's neighbor*. This is not a contradiction. In the first place, "value" itself is not the problem of nihilism, but living only by values is. In the second place, the problem of nihilism is that one

values things *for oneself*. Valuing one's neighbor, that is, "loving your neighbor as yourself," is not just different from living by values, but quite the opposite, and it reflects something very different from nihilism. To be sure, that reflection may go completely unnoticed. In that case, nothing is lost: the neighbor will have been served. But when it is noticed, it may prompt the question "Why?" And that will be an opportunity for evangelism in an age of normal nihilism.

Endnotes

[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1967), 7. In quoting from this work, I recognize that "*The Will to Power* is a dubious text for several reasons" (Rüdiger Bittner, "Introduction" to Friedrich Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, ed. Rüdiger Bittner, trans. Kate Sturge [Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003], xi). But such doubts do not matter for my purposes.

[2] James C. Edwards, *The Plain Sense of Things: The Fate of Religion in an Age of Normal Nihilism* (State College, PA: Penn State University Press, 1997).

[3] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 9.

[4] Examples of "values" are everywhere in the late writings of Nietzsche. The ones mentioned here come from this passage in *The Anti-Christ*: "The pathos that develops out of [a wrong and dishonest attitude towards all things] is called *faith*: closing one's eyes with respect to oneself for good and all so as not to suffer from the sight of incurable falsity. Out of this erroneous perspective on all things one makes a morality, a virtue, a holiness for oneself, one unites the good conscience with seeing *falsely*—one demands no *other* kind of perspective shall be accorded any value after one has rendered one's own sacrosanct with the names 'God,' 'redemption,' 'eternity.'" Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, §9, in *Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Books, 1968), 120. Both *Twilight* and *The Anti-Christ* bear references to the "revaluation of all values," so what Nietzsche meant by "values" is clear in those books. See also "Critique of the Highest Values" in *The Will to Power* (83–257).

[5] Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/Repetition*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 5.

[6] Charles Baudelaire, *Intimate Journals*, trans. Christopher Isherwood (San Francisco: City Lights, 1983), 21, 74, 90.

[7] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 14.

[8] Ibid., 12.

[9] Ibid., 13.

[10] T. S. Eliot, "'Ulysses', Order, and Myth," in *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Jovanovich, 1975), 177.

[11] Edwards, *The Plain Sense of Things*, 196. Space does not permit and the present purpose does not require a summary of the book, but it is thoughtful and thought-provoking consideration of religion after nihilism, and I recommend it highly to all readers of this article. I also recommend the more recent book on contemporary nihilism, *All Things Shining*, by Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Dorrance Kelly (New York: Free Press, 2011).

[12] Ibid., 45–46.

[13] Alasdair MacIntyre, "The Fate of Theism," in *The Religious Significance of Atheism* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1969), 24.
[14] Ibid., 16.
[15] Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Herder and Herder, Inc., 1970), 10–11.
[16] More has happened here than I have space to explain, but I will identify one important factor: the loss of authority in both church and civil realms after the Reformation and seventeenth-century religious wars. Claims of truth and rightness were freed from the authority of the divinely appointed rulers. New philosophical approaches to authority were tried, and Christian teachings were subject to new questions and criteria. More than their content was challenged; their nature was too. For a relevant discussion of this loss of authority, see Jeffrey Stout, *The Flight from Authority: Religion, Morality, and the Quest for Autonomy* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981). For more on the contemporary nature of doctrine, see George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984).
[17] Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: The Uses of Faith after Freud* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1966, 1987).
[18] Ibid., 26.
[19] Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 162, 164. Smith had also found that American youth are largely very conventional in religion and follow their parents. See esp. 120–122.
[20] Ibid., 165.
[21] Edwards, *The Plain Sense of Things*, 51.
[22] C. S. Lewis, "Is Theology Poetry?" in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, rev. and expanded ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1980), 92.
[23] Stanley Fish, "Truth but No Consequences: Why Philosophy Doesn't Matter," *Critical Inquiry* 23 (2003): 390.