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Holocaust Memorial Day was Friday gone. It is nearly 80 years since the liberation of Auschwitz/Birkenau by the Russians. On occasions like this the question resurfaces. What perverted the minds of so many people which led to death camps?

According to the well-known philosopher Nietzsche, who died in 1900 God is dead. Life is for the sleek and powerful. The fittest should rise to the top; those at the bottom should be dismissed from living. Sounds like emerging ideas of the master race coming through here. He scoffed at the teaching of the beatitudes, the substance of today's Gospel. To him the imperial self is not accountable to God or any moral authority. Self-justification, not the justification which comes from Christ is the one important thing. We can see that these words might have had a malign influence on the architects of the death camps. They could easily colour our way of thinking as well. This philosophy of life, as we can see, runs directly counter to the teachings of Jesus in the beatitudes.

The beatitudes are an attempt to describe the true meaning of happiness and the type of people who will inherit the Kingdom of God. The happiness described is more than feeling good about ourselves or the pleasure we get from a job well done. During his trial Jesus said to Pilate: 'My Kingdom is not of this world'. Well, the happiness of the beatitudes transcends what this world with all its delights and attractions and rewards has to offer.

Fundamental to the idea of happiness in the Gospel is an unbounded dependence on God through all the vicissitudes of life. The happiness which Jesus offers is not at the mercy of feelings or individual tastes. You will not be devoid of inner peace even when your Christian beliefs are ridiculed. In the last two beatitudes, for instance, happiness comes as a result of persecution and abuse suffered in the name of Christ. The beatitudes will seem to go against man's natural desire for independence which makes him, and him alone, the master of his life and destiny. Their message is that man is not at the centre of everything but God. We own our existence to Him. Our ultimate destiny lies in His hands.

The common denominator of those who are termed 'blessed' is a humble acceptance of one's earthly condition. 'Humility' comes from the Latin word 'humus' which means 'of the earth'. We are of the earth, we are not God.

Adam and Eve tried to dethrone God and set themselves up in His place and we're all suffering as a result of their Original Sin

When we live the beatitudes we're leave behind 'middle of the road Christianity' and take on board more intensely the mind of Christ.

Nietzsche's philosophy had a disturbing influence on the minds of those who later became architects of the death camps. Christ's philosophy upholds our human dignity as children of God and our creaturely dependence on Him and is life-giving both here and in the hereafter.