

## Closing Time in Eden

It wasn't long before Christmas- the department store was filled with late afternoon shoppers.

Outside the Main Street was already getting dark and a cold wet wind out there made the inside of the store- with its parade-si-ac abundance of merchandise, its sparkling St Nichols lights and colors seem warm and inviting.

But soon a bell sounded and the atmosphere inside the store began to change.

Clerks started shrouding the counters with dust cloths - one by one the lighted decorations were doused- customers drifted out into the half-frozen twilight.

One little fellow, however, standing near the door, didn't want to go. As far as he was concerned, that store was a Garden of Eden and he wanted to stay. But his mother kept tugging at him, saying "Honey, it's closing time; it's closing time, honey and we gotta go."

I

You know, there are many people around the world this Christmas-who are neither capitalists nor Christians- who look at our store house- our cozy, upper middle class culture, with its paradisiac abundance of story book things for the privileged--- there are people who look at our churches, full of lights and glass and sweet doctrines, all warm and inviting- and who firmly believe that for us- a cold, wet wind is blowing just outside our civilized door- that a death knell is soon to sound- for our faith as for our finery- that though we may be unaware or unwilling to leave it behind- nonetheless it is closing time in this Garden of Eden we have built for ourselves on this golden shore.

Closing Time –for us- and we soon must go – out into the half frozen twilight of a world more harsh- more mindless, more heartless-than our soft, so soft- souls have ever dreamed. It is fashionable today to say that is GOD is not dead, he is moribund in a dying state- near death.

Well tell me- Is it closing time or moratorium- All in favor of following God say aye. There are those who would call closing time today on faith in God.

### Is it Closing Time for

1. The Eden of faith in God- now that we have passed even the machine age and have reached the atomic era creating a new Eden \_\_\_\_\_. Is it time to close the door on belief in God as a sweet but antique garden dream? Is it time to canonize the streets of force and fear like, I believe it was Adolf Hitler who in one of his anti-God spasms shrieked, "leave the sky to the sparrows!".? Unfortunately when he called closing time on God, the sky was filled with buzzards, birds of death. Others in our day- not so common, so course as Adolph, shut God out- not just because they feel guilty as he did and want to get rid of the judge - but rather more likely because their schedules are just too crowed to let in him in. As one society lady said to mother- "It isn't my atheism that keeps me away from church, my dear, it's my agenda.

These people don't claim to be atheist- goodness no! That's out of taste in these days or Peal and Sheen. Why, it's smart not to say politic, to take God rather seriously- on the side, of course. But these sophisticated make the real God of their lives, not the Judaic nation- god of rigorous moral commands-but they make a god or gods out of other odds and ends: Like the stock market, the cocktail shaker, the exclusive [redacted], the sex drive –or whatever and find their fulfillment making pour psychoanalysts both miserable and rich. Long ago, our Lord knew the demonic in life cannot abide a vacuum soul- but will fill at once a heart empty of God.

So much for the sinners and sophisticates.

Others being what the Apostle Paul in Romans 1:28 (Phillips) called "to high and mighty to acknowledge God" declare closing time on him for what they call "intellectual reasons." They called God an old garden legend- then proceed to set up systems of their own even harder to swallow- like the Freudian Ritual. Russ Cosmet-[redacted] "no angels know" and it was a certain philosopher of wide repute (Prof. W. T. Stace of Princeton)

"For my part, I believe in no religion at all. Since the world is not ruled by a spiritual being, but rather by blind forces (notice, you must believe this because he says so) there cannot be any ideals, moral or otherwise in the universe outside us."

2. If this is true- then this era is declaring not only the death of God or at least a moratorium in God not only closing time for God but in 2<sup>nd</sup> place the death of man also but a moratorium for man also. For If man belongs to no plan outside himself- if there is no objective meaning to his life-then he might as well act like what the godless state makes of him- a walking, talking animal "a dog dancing to the hurting master's whip"

For if particularly scientific man is just an animal, he probably will blow this newly blooming electric Garden of Eden to bits. As one scientists says of the next war, 'The people who are in the [redacted] ground [redacted] will probably be the most fortunate ("that is to say they at least will be painlessly atomized, evaporated.") Gilbert Seldes writes; "I cannot follow the feelings that it would be worthwhile to survive in a world so monstrously stupid as to let the bombings occur again."

Long before the atom bomb, however, there have been those trying to call an end to man. Phyllis McGinley poetizes sarcastically:

"It seems vainglorious and proud of Atoms-  
man to boost so loud. His praises homicidal.  
When one remembers how for years,  
with their rude stones and humble spears,  
our sires, at wiping out their peers, were almost never idle. "

The only thing that can be said of us is that now we can do a more tidy job of it.

3. Well, if you say, "God is dead" and "Man is dead" what you are saying is I am dead also. We must agree with old H.L (Mencken – p 86 in Prejudices) who, more sincerely than he

wished us to believe, said, "What could be more logical than suicide? What could be more preposterous than keeping alive?" As one of our college youth group said- "Oh that is just the old out-out brief candle!        "

But I have talked with many a despondent person who agree with Mencken that –

"Man cannot sit still, contemplating his destiny in this world, without going frantic. So he invents ways to take his mind off the horror of himself. He works. He plays, He accumulates the preposterous nothing called property. He strives for the coy eye-wink called fame. He        a family, and spreads his curse over others. All the while the only thing that moves him is simply the yearning to lose himself, to forget himself, to escape the tragi-comedy that is himself. Life, fundamentally, is not worth living." (Pg 90 Prejudices) So that work, play, family, property, religion, and education are all nothing but inventions to help man forget his life is stupid and without purpose.

Roll that around in your mind for a while. And where does it leave you—where does this attitude leave you? I'll tell you where it leaves you. It leaves you with T. S. Elliott's character in the Cocktail party who said: "Hell is oneself" OR It leaves you with Freud's "Subjective Condition" OR with Heiclegger's "floating" sensation OR with Sartre's "Existence in Nausea" OR with Camus "Absurdity of life" OR with Tennessee Williams "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" and finally it leaves you in the physician's office chanting Stephen Vincent Benet's litany

"Chloral have mercy on us

Luminol have mercy on us

Nembutal have mercy on us"

OR maybe at some club box chanting your own litany.

"Lord Calvert have mercy on us."

We might as well take to pills or whiskey if we think we are nothing but one of the Orishers lobsters or squid- meant only to eat or be eaten. OR if we agree with morally existentialing Roquentin that "every existing being is born without reason, prolongs itself by weakness and dies by fortuitousness"

Then you might as well pass the pistol, Mr. Jones, for truly, it's here we go again-out of the blossoming Garden of Eden- the new electronic Paradise is about to shatter.

II

BUT wait a minute says the old faith- hold your horses- all is not over yet. That's just part one. – part two is coming up

For there is one great fact we have not even mentioned – one great fact – that, taken into account by the Christian- changes the picture of God and man and oneself entirely.

"For in thy dark streets shineth an everlasting light." Yes, there is a light shinning in the darkness- in the dark night of the soul who would sound the death knell for God and man and

its own life- there comes, to some, a new light-come by [redacted] encounter, [redacted] education- the light of God- in the face of Jesus Christ – and as the God of Jesus says that “ Light still shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never put it out ( Jo 1:5 Phillips)

The end for God and Man? No, the Kingdom of God stands as open today as it ever did. It only takes enough faith and intelligence to see it.

The nation church, the nation college, the nation family- man is not ready to take Thomas Hardy’s advice and “throw in the sponge.” Not by a long shot. The nation Church in its temples and colleges stands to say God is not dead – for says John “His word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory.” Our faith believes this. This Christ is still alive to be encountered even where he is denied- especially present where there is open antagonism to him. Could a Hitler or a [redacted] grapple with him if he was one of them? As W. B. Yeats said of G.A. Shaw, he is “haunted by the [redacted] he faults.” Friedrich Hietsyshe, unless haunted by the X-figure, would never have written his anti-Christ.

We believe in the continuing work of the incarnate Lord not only among those who deny him but loving those who confess him openly in the life of the church even though as Kipling put it

“But His own disciple

Shall wound Him worst of all.”

H. E. W> Fosbroke has written: “In this time of general disillusionment there are many who can think only of the failure of this [redacted] church country. And there are those who have named this a post nation era. Indeed, it must be admitted that much that passes for religion today is but a conventional recognition of GOD. But granting all this, it is still true that down through the centuries millions have found in the fellowship of the church forgiveness of sin and a glad sense of belonging to the infinite other than self and have discovered in this relation to God a new quality of meaning for life. “(In preaching for nation year, Pg 12 ed. by Harvard A Johnson Church Scriptures-N Y 59.)

In the community of X- man does find God today- so that he finds himself also discovering that he not find just a card in an IBM machine, he is not just a biological accident, he is not just an educated ape---Rather that he is a child of God. For X “calleth his sheep by name” not by serial number. And when in the church of Christ- a man discovers his identity himself as a person under a personal God- he discovers other persons too even in this depersonalized world- And learns how to live in love with those he might otherwise fear or hate—for as Paul Tillich says- “Here (in this church) the reunion of man with man is pronounced and confessed and realized even in fragments and weakness and distortion.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer – in his little book Prisoner for God – wrote in a desperate liberation himself that God was “the beyond in the midst of life, not simply where human life gives out in the borders, but in the center of human achievement and joyous living.

Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; Instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial; for an everlasting sign which shall not be cut off." Indeed where man is known and loved, EDEN blooms again.