

Historical Effect Of the Absence of God

THEOLOGY OF THE WORLD

(Eighteenth in Series)

By BISHOP FULTON J. SHEEN

Though modern man does not want God, God still wants modern man. As man says: "Goodbye, God", God answers: "I will be seeing you." The Absence of God in our times is a kind of Presence, as darkness implies light. In the previous article, three consequences of the Absence of God were noted. Only the first was treated, namely, the loneliness of the modern soul. In this article the concern is how the Absence of God affects society, the world situation and the unfolding of human history.

Once God becomes absent, mankind falls under the judgment of God, or in modern language, the times undergo a crisis. The word "crisis" means judgment. If, for example, I do not take any food for three days, I will suffer a headache. Does this mean that God, by a distinct act of Providence, punishes me by giving me Excedrin headache #32? Certainly not! It merely means that God made the body in such a way that for every violation of its immanent laws, certain consequences follow.

Whenever we do something evil we produce an effect which we did not intend. This does not happen ordinarily when we do something good. If I use a pencil, for example, to pry open a tomato can, I destroy the pencil, and I do not open the can. If I live my life according to its highest purpose, namely, union with God, I perfect it, but if I live according to the animal that is in me, I frustrate my life. The harvest is a judgment on the seed that is sown; the oak is a judgment on the acorn.

Sin is a self-mutilation. A man wills to over-drink; he wills not to ruin his health — but he does. He wills to steal; he wills not the prison; but he gets into it.

The Judgment of God definitely does not mean that God is outside history as a mighty Potentate who occasionally, to remind subjects of His power, smites them for His good pleasure. Neither does it mean that war is a Divinely sent visitation or punishment, extrinsic and unrelated to our decisions as a spanking to a child who stole the jam, for a spanking does not necessarily follow the stealing.

The judgments of God are no more due to God's interference with the laws of nature than thunder is due to His interference. God did not suddenly decide to applaud by thunder at the sight of pyrotechnics in the heavens. But He so made the universe that where there is lightning there is thunder. It is a certain effect following a certain cause.

Every now and then there are particular judgments on the way mankind lives. Each era of history is a field in which certain seeds are planted. They grow, bloom, bear fruit and die; and the kind of ideas that are planted determine the lot of that civilization.

What is the purpose of Divine Judgments in history? They are guarantees of the permanence of the laws of God. Would men so universally respect the laws of health, if the violation of those laws did not entail such painful consequences? Would we go to a dentist if we did not have a toothache? "See your dentist twice a year" is really a caution directed against a dental crisis. Judgment, or the consequence of our decisions, affirms that the world is informed by God's Presence and is under His guidance. It is a reminder that God's moral law will never be destroyed, as the sun will never cease to rise in the east. He made the world that way. In disobeying His Will, we destroy ourselves. In stabbing Him it is our own heart we slay. By catastrophes must we sadly learn that the moral law is right and will prevail.

The judgment at the end of the world will be a guarantee of the eternal distinction between right and wrong. That is why there is a heaven and a hell, namely, because right is everlastingly right and wrong is everlastingly wrong.

Does the Absence of God Imperil Our Times?

Is catastrophe imminent in our civilization? Is Pitirim Sorokin right in saying that a sensate civilization, like ours, which is guided neither by faith nor reason, is in danger of a disaster? Is Spengler right in predicting that the West is in the winter and final stages of its history? Are we gradually ushering into our country a kind of God-forsakenness which follows from the exiling of God?

If there is any chapter in the New Testament which describes the violence, rebellion, eroticism and perversion of our times, it is the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. The Altizers, Camuses, Hamiltions, and Nietzsches of those days were saying: "God is Dead."

"They knew all the time that there is a God, yet they refused to acknowledge Him as such, or to thank Him for what He is or does. Thus they became foolish in their argumentations, and plunged their silly minds still further in the dark."

St. Paul correlates the decline of belief in God with an increase of homosexuality and lesbianism: "Their women exchanged the normal practices of sexual intercourse for something which is abnormal and unnatural. Similarly, the men, turning from natural intercourse with women, were swept into lustful passion, for one another. Men with men performed these shameful horrors, receiving, of course, in their own personalities, the consequences of sexual perversity."

Paul then describes the consequences of our unbelieving society which read like headlines in the morning newspaper: "... wickedness, rottenness, greed and malice; their minds became steeped in envy, murder, quarrelsomeness, deceitfulness and spite. They became whisperers behind doors,

stabbers-in-the-back, God-haters; they overflowed with insolent pride and boastfulness, and their minds teemed with diabolical invention. They scoffed at duty to parents; they mocked at learning, recognizing no obligation of honor, lost all natural affection, and had no use for mercy — and they did not hesitate to give their thorough approval to others who did the same". (Rom. 1/28-32)

Now comes God-forsakenness: "They gave up God, therefore God gave them up to be playthings of their own foul desires in dishonoring their own bodies". Here there is a kind of abandonment by God. This is not to be understood that His Presence is no longer available to those who seek Him. A physician whose orders have been repeatedly disregarded may allow the refractory patient to prolong his suffering. In like manner, God delivers men over to those who willfully reject Him. When God abandons man, it does not mean that He impels him to evil, or that He is wholly passive. He withdraws His Hand, like ceasing to hold a boat as it is dragged by the current of a river.

At a given moment the Father of the prodigal son had to let him go, allowing him his freedom of conscience and even sharing with the prodigal some of his goods.

The forsakenness is merely a way of expressing that men bring disaster upon themselves when they defy God's laws. In the individual this manifests itself in experience of guilt as a consequence of a personal offense against the Divine Will; such as David had after killing the husband of Bethsabee. As sometimes a neurosis is a judgment on the hidden guilt of an individual, so catastrophe and disaster are manifestations in society of the way people think, will and love.

God spoke to Moses and said that if the covenant which he had made with his people would be broken: "On that day my anger shall blaze against them; I will forsake them and hide My Face from them. A host of disasters and misfortunes will overtake them to devour them, and when that day comes, they will say, 'If such disasters overtake me, surely Yahweh, my God, cannot be with me?' Yes, indeed, I shall hide My Face that day for all of the evil they have done". (Deut. 31/17)

Theological Effect — The Wrath of God

Given the scandals in the Church, dishonesty in business and politics, infidelity in marriage, carnal baseness in the theater, violence on the streets and rebellion against parents, may we not fear that we are under the Wrath of God? This Wrath is not a permanent disposition, only a temporary reaction provoked by disobedience.

"I did forsake you for a brief moment But with great love I will take you back. In excess of anger, for a moment I hid My Face from you, But with everlasting love I have pity on you, Says God, your Redeemer". (Isa. 54/7, 8)

There are two ways of avoiding the Judgment of God. One is by renewal of the Church, the other is by catastrophe. The renewal has not been conspicuous. About the only great renewal is liturgy, but this is because it involves no great moral change in those who practice it. It offers a "field day" for those who want change, but it too often leaves untouched those who identify liturgy with the bizarre, the novel and snobbish. The Church cannot avoid recalling that the Lord can be angry.

Whoever saw an angry lamb? Every description of a lamb is about his meekness. But not so with the Lamb of God:

"Then all the earthly rulers, the governors and commanders, The rich people and the men of influence, The whole population, slaves, citizens, Took to the mountains to hide in caves and rocks — They said to the mountains and the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the One Who sits on the Throne, And from the WRATH OF THE LAMB'". (Rev. 6/15-17)

Wrath, in Scripture, means the working out in history of the consequences of sin. But here the Wrath is that of the sacrificial Lamb of God. This Wrath is not purely in the future; it is a process and, stretching from the Cross to the Second Coming, is effective in different moments of history.

It would be well to turn our attention today from the autonomy of the self which has brought such chaos, the Wrath of the Lamb, which is really a question of God's Power in the face of human rebellion. Power should be very intelligible in our atomic age. God's Power works out in two ways: first by His Wrath in which men suffer the consequences of their own sins; it is not God Who seeks wars of nuclear destruction; man does. God is indirectly involved for they rebelled against His laws, and human selfishness and stupidity eventually get control of nuclear buttons.

But the Power of God is manifested in another way, and that is by taking the personal wrath of man against Him, and suffering it all on a tree. Absorbing it, forgiving it, interceding with the Father for it, He pleads: "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do". Nailing, ridiculing and taunting are all voluntarily suffered, "For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength". (1 Cor. 1/25)

The Absence of God on the Cross

To the Christian who believes that the mess this world is in is due to an abuse of human freedom, the supreme consolation is that God Himself came into this mess to endure it and conquer it by His Resurrection. Like a mother who takes castor oil before giving it to a child, saying: "See, mother takes it", so God took upon Himself all of the abuses of human freedom. He is a God who took His own medicine. Since loneliness is one of the effects of the absence of God, it was fitting that Christ Himself experienced it, as He cried out

(Continued on Page 8)

LETTERS

to the editor

'Sacred Cow'

Congratulations to Paul Brayer on his perceptive and intelligent article of April 4. It appears to me that the Catholic schools are the "sacred cow" of the Church! At the mere mention of reassessing the number-one priority placed on them, all kinds of emotional response is evoked. For years adults have been second class citizens in the area of religious education.

Why has our education been so child oriented; why have adults been so neglected? If as much attention and encouragement were given to adults to better educate themselves in their religion as is given to the Catholic schools, I believe the state of religious education on all levels would be much healthier today.

It is in the final analysis the parent who educates the child, and if the parent is a committed knowledgeable Christian that is passed on to the child.

Let's stop playing the numbers game with adults who do or do not come to education courses or discussion groups (re: J. K. O'Loane, April 25) and put some muscle and imagination and money into adult programs. Then watch us change the world!

Mrs. J. R. Hensler, Rochester.

Back Sex Course

The following resolution was unanimously passed at the meeting of the Parish Council of Immaculate Conception Church, April 14.

"WHEREAS the sex-education program developed by the Board of Education of the Catholic Diocese of Rochester has recently been the subject of vigorous and often unfavorable criticism;

"AND WHEREAS the program as explained by those most familiar with it — the authors, the teachers, the students — appears a prudent human and Christian response to the needs of our youth;

"The Parish Council of Immaculate Conception Church resolves to go on record as supporting the sex-education plan already being implemented in some of the Catholic schools of this diocese.

—Virgil Fields, Chairman.

Idea for Culture

I am an eighth grade student at Most Precious Blood School, and I am writing this letter to tell of the experience I had in visiting the George Eastman House with my class.

George Eastman was an American inventor, manufacturer, and philanthropist born in 1854. In 1888, he invented the portable camera known as the 'Kodak'.

The Eastman House is located at 900 East Avenue. On my visit I was amazed at the many valuable relics that this house contains. I never realized that there were so many different kinds of cameras. On closer ob-

Word for Sunday

The Spirit Guides, Illumines

By Father Albert Shannon

These Sundays after Easter are Pentecost oriented. Last Sunday Christ spoke of the Spirit. This Sunday He says He goes, that the Paraclete may come to them.

Of the many things the Spirit will do, Christ enumerated but two: one concerned the Spirit and Himself; the other, the Spirit and His disciples.

In reference to Himself Christ said, "He will glorify me." "To glorify" means more than to praise. It means that, to be sure, but glory surpasses praise in two ways. Glory is always based on true excellence. Often one is praised who doesn't deserve it, or one is praised (more correctly "flattered") just for the sake of getting something. Secondly, glory implies notoriety — everybody knows about it.

To glorify a person, therefore, means to reveal to everybody just how truly wonderful someone is so that everyone else spontaneously praises him. When an audience sees a good performance, it bursts into applause. When the flight of intrepid astronauts is flashed around the world, everyone crowds out to praise them; there's always the ticket-tape parade down Wall Street. They are glorified.

The Spirit glorifies Christ, makes Him known: His goodness, His love, His life. Praise follows upon this knowledge naturally as the thunder-clap of lightning. The work of the Spirit, therefore, is not creation, but revelation. The sun glorifies the earth by revealing the landscape, not by creating it.

servation I was able to compare the cameras of the past with those of the present.

Another part of the Eastman House is called the Dryden Theatre. Here many old time films, silent and talkies, foreign and American, are shown.

I would like to urge parents to put pressure on schools to take pupils to various places for cultural advancement. I feel that we learn more by direct experience than by having someone tell us about it.

—John Joseph Galletto, Northhampton St., Rochester.

Wedding Communion

Although we do not need a "special" invitation to receive Our Lord at Mass, maybe at Nuptial, Requiem or other commemorative Masses, it might be appropriate and recommended, to extend a verbal invitation or gesture to the guests.

Why are countless hours of time, energy and concern devoted to the material and social preparations of a wedding and so little thought given to the spiritual, the Mass celebration? Include a separate slip in your wedding invitations to guests who share the Catholic faith, to read, e.g. "John and I sincerely wish that you join with us in receiving Holy Communion." Then people will come prepared to be active participants!

Weddings should be punctual and an additional priest should be available to distribute Holy Communion. If time is limited, possibly our expressions of "Congratulations" could be reserved for the Reception gathering.

—Mrs. Lawrence Almeter, Hilton, N.Y.

CHURCH HUMOR



"Before we continue, Father, I'd like to go to confession."

MS Work Lauded

I want to make the people aware of the wonderful work the RAMS (Rochester Area Multiple Sclerosis) are doing for their patients.

They have many fine programs and services and also provide patients with wheelchairs and other needed equipment. The most outstanding feature is the RAMS mobile, a special bus which holds eight wheelchairs. It was given to us by the Rochester Mason Supply Dealers.

This is like a magic carpet to us because it takes us all over the city. We get to places that we never dreamed possible. We go to many sports events like hockey, the Ice Capades, the circus at the War Memorial; baseball at the Silver Stadium; movies; many wonderful picnics; and on shopping trips. We are grateful to the managers of all these places who accept us so willingly.

We also go to the Brighton Town Hall on Sunday afternoon once a month where friends of the handicapped treat about thirty wheelchair patients to a nice home-cooked meal and we spend the afternoon together.

One of the most important things for the hospitalized wheelchair patient is to visit home once a month.

It takes many people to help us with our outings — nurses and attendants who get us ready to go out; volunteers who help us wherever we go. These outings help us forget our illness for a little while, and we are grateful to the many people who make it possible.

So when contributions are given to the Community Chest, this generosity is not in vain because it makes a lot of people happy.

—Marian Valenza, Monroe Community Hospital.

Speaks

Bish

Geneva — Scout ing a mission by k before the minds Fulton J. Sheen at the 22nd annu the Diocesan Cat Scouting.

Held in the Am Home on Lockian featured presenta a priest and ten l

"You have a m told His listeners Church but also you wish to keep have to keep yo liberties, you've a God."

There is a pot Bishop declared, fully "tapped."

The dinner in It was the first I has presented an and the first tim a non-Catholic la a Catholic Scout

The woman is l St. Charles Borr ester, who has b Den Mother for l

The layman is has been cubm sponsored by H since September,

Father Joseph St. Bernard's Se Bronze Pelican interest in Scout that he has—l Orliana Council nary. The next r Sept. 28-30.

Charles F. K



SISTE

Nun 75 Y Religi

Seventy-five y will be marked M. Ottilia Kasse years of age. St. Joseph in ti

Sisters and f the anniversary Thursday. May Heart of Mary for retired Siste Ave., Rochester, has lived since

Sister Ottilia St. Francis Xavi to enter relig in diocesan sch fore retiring.

Sister taught School, Webster also taught at Rochester, Gree Wayland and F Relatives and ing to observe May 28.

Presbyti Invited

Members of Church have b a.m. Mass Sun Ghost Church. Vickers, pastor congregation, w and will extend gregation.



\$100,000 Dryc

Dryden — Cross parish v the topping of the fund-appe learned they m by early Octob

Father Thon the parishione campaign work in the parish \$1,000 over 6 ished that con immediately a on May 11.

The new br rectory connec on South Geor Route 13 in th

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