

Extract from James Jones' *From Here to Eternity*

(Jack Malloy and Prew, characters in the novel, are soldiers. □ Jack is sharing his ideas with Prew.)

(Pages 569 – 571)

...I'm a fatalist. If you believe in the logic of evolution you have no choice but to be a fatalist.

I've thought about it a lot. Christ had to have his Isaiah; even Martin Luther had his Erasmus. I think the Wobblies[1] were the prophets and forerunners of a new religion.

Christ knows, we need one.

And if you had ever studied the evolution of religions as natural facts instead of supernatural mysticisms, like I have, you wouldn't look so startled.

You think religions are constant things? Inflexible and solid and born full-grown? Religions evolve.

They grow out of a need, just like any other natural phenomenon, and they follow the same natural laws.

They are born, grow, have sons, and illegitimate sons, and die.

Every true religion follows the same logical path. First come the prophets, growing new faith out of the deathrot of the old. Every Christ has to have Isaiah and John the Baptist to prepare the way for him.

Read up on religions sometime and see.

You can see how they all follow the same logical principles;

Every religion starts at the bottom level, with the whores, publicans, and sinners. Logically, it has to start there, with the dissatisfied.

You can't get the satisfied to accept new ideas.

And every religion brings martyrdom to its innovators. That part is a test of natural selection. If the new faith is strong enough, it conquers persecution and goes on to glory.

And then—and only then—in every religion, the satisfied ones (who through fear did the persecuting) do an about-face and climb on the bandwagon, through the same fear that made them once persecute it.

And, also, every religion begins to die then, at that moment. When the Emperor Constantine accepted Christianity because it won a battle for him and made it the Roman State religion, he also at the same moment decreed the inevitable decline and death of Christianity.

The stronger the religion, the longer it takes to triumph, and the longer it takes to die, and the more illegitimate offspring it has. But they all follow the same step-by-step logical process.

They are prophesied, they come up, they triumph, they are accepted, they degenerate, and they decline. A religion that has done its work and made its point and taught its lesson has no other place to go but down. It must crack up and begin its degeneration to make room for its successor, that will take the old one's lesson and elaborate it and evolve it—just as Christianity once did for Judaism.

Look ... what was Judaism? Judaism taught that God was fixed as the earth around which the universe revolved, unchangeable, a God of perpetual punishment and vengeance; Judaism taught the Ten Commandments.

What did Christianity do? Christianity took Judaism and changed it a little. It still taught that God was fixed, unchangeable, but fixed as the sun around which the earth and the universe revolved, further away but still unchangeable, a less personal Center.

It changed the God of perpetual punishment and vengeance to a God of perpetual love and forgiveness that only punished evil when He absolutely had to.

Christianity replaced the Ten Commandments with the Sermon on the Mount.

Okay, what would be the next step, the next logical evolution? Mightn't it be a religion that would teach that God was not fixed at all?

A religion that would teach that God was nothing at all if He was not eternally Changeable?

That neither the earth nor the sun is the fixed unchangeable centre, but that there is no centre, as Einstein says the universe is a circle in time where both the earth and sun are small minor parts and everything is in a constant flux and forever changing.

Mightn't the new religion teach that instead of being permanently fixed God is growth and evolution, a God which is never the same twice?"

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You see what that implies? If God is Instability rather than Fixity, if God is Growth and Evolution, then there is no need for the concept of forgiveness.

The mere concept of forgiveness implies the doing of something wrong.

Original Sin.

But if evolution is growth by trial and error, how can errors be wrong?

Since they contribute to growth?

Does a mother feel called upon to forgive her child for eating green apples or putting his hand

on the stove?

Did you ever truly love some body, or some thing?

A woman ; did you ever love a woman?

If you ever really truly loved a thing, you never considered forgiving it something, did you?

Anything it did was all right with you, wasn't it?

No matter how much it hurt you.

You don't have to forgive something you love.

You forgive the ones you don't love.

If you love someone, ... you never even think of forgiving them. You may fight them like hell over something, and use every pressure to change them.

But when the brawl is over and you haven't changed them one bit, you go right on accepting them.

You're never so smug, or so righteous, or so superior, to tell yourself—or tell them—you forgive them.

And with that Jack Malloy's philosophy was expounded, his religion preached, his credo stated. All the years of the Wobblies, the fights with the Communists, Haywood and Chaplin, Upton Sinclair, Harry Bridges, the years at sea, the women he had loved to sleep with, and the Army; all rolled into one superhuman distillation of experience in an attempt to account for everything. He came back to it again and again, later on. He couldn't stay away from it. It meant too much to him.

But always it amounted to this same thing:

that over the old God of Vengeance, over the new God of Forgiveness, was the still newer God of Acceptance, the God of Love-That –Surpasseth-Forgiveness, the God who saw heard and spoke no Evil simply because there was none.

[1] Members of IWW (Industrial Workers of the World, an anti-capitalist movement, promoting the rights of workers – a form of socialism)