

March 12, 2016

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

A Tale of Two Cities

A Tale of Two Cities is a historical novel written by Charles Dickens in 1859. It is set in Paris and London before and during the French Revolution. The novel begins with its most famous line: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way, in short, the period was so far like the present period ...”

It was a period like the present period in so many ways. There are at the same time two different cities, or large groups of people. Each one appears to believe so strongly in their own opinion. This is certainly true when it comes to those of us who believe in God and those who do not.

The word, atheist, comes from the Greek word, *atheos*, meaning “without God.” The first individuals who identified themselves as such appeared in the 18th century and came to power with the French Revolution. It was noted for its violent rejection of Christianity. Catholicism was banned in 1792 and a new belief system was created to replace Christianity. Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris was rededicated to the Goddess of Reason in 1793 and its religious treasures plundered or destroyed.

World War II presents another tale of two cities. Christianity was persecuted by the Nazis in Germany. Shortly before Eva Braun committed suicide alongside of Hitler on April 30, 1945, she wrote a letter to her best friend that was to accompany all her jewels on the last flight out of Berlin before the Russians arrived. Eva Braun wrote: “What should I say to you? I cannot understand how it should have all come to this, but it is impossible to believe any more in a God” (Antony Beevor, *The Fall of Berlin*, p. 279). She lived a privileged life. Her tale of disbelief was in contrast to the suffering millions in the concentration camps throughout Europe, who held onto their faith.

One such tale of belief comes from Auschwitz, Poland where Elie Wiesel and his family were prisoners. Elie was only 15 years old when he was sent there. The guards tattooed A-7713 on his left arm. He and his dad were separated from his mother and sisters upon arrival. In *Night*, he speaks about his father’s faith in a place that he called hell on earth, with “so many cries, so much bestial brutality.” Unable to bear such hardship, Elie saw his father weeping, but as he wept, he could hear his father’s prayer: “May His name be blessed and magnified.” (pp. 31-32)

These are the best of times. These are the worst of times. Do not fall into the darkness of disbelief. For those who believe, this is the age of wisdom, the season of light and the spring of hope.