



DECISIONS



HE WAS AN OLD MAN, SICK, TETHERED TO OXYGEN, coughing up blood. But still working. The last completed film he directed was entitled *The Dead*. In his final days he was in and out of hospitals, each time he was thought to be at death's door.

John Huston was a brilliant director and screenplay writer (*The Maltese Falcon*, *The African Queen*, *The Kremlin Letter*) and accomplished actor (*The Wind and the Lion*, *The Bible*, *Chinatown*). He was charming, entertaining, intelligent, and could spin a good yarn. He was also an unapologetic womanizer, a drunk, utterly self-centered, brutally callous toward his many wives and mistresses, and someone who loved to play vicious, cruel jokes on others.

During his last stay in a hospital, when he believed himself to be close to death, he was visited by Zoe Sallis—never his wife, but mother of Huston's son, Danny. Zoe—born in India, educated in England, whose spirituality had come from an Indian guru—described their last time together:

John was beginning to think he was a burden on everybody. And he didn't want to be alone, ever. He was like a little, frightened, vulnerable child. All those tubes in him, it was so painful, he couldn't sleep.

Because he was sleeping so much I was scared he'd died. He wasn't moving. I put all the prayer vibes I could possibly get into him. He had spent years criticizing my beliefs, but at the end he sort of realized that there must be something bigger than him. He asked me to get him tapes of Plato, Socrates, and Nietzsche to listen to. And he told me how dangerous ego was—so he got that in the end.

(as quoted by Lawrence Grobel in his biography, The Hustons)

John Huston did not know, and even during his last days did not want to know, God.

With his eternity staring him in the face, John Huston wanted to pick and choose his faith as if browsing a smorgasbord. With only days left to live he thought he might listen to a little “Plato, Socrates, and Nietzsche” to see which of those philosophers might offer him a little insight regarding truth and the hereafter.

How very sad.

“HOW LONG HOP YE ABOUT UPON TWO BOUGHS?”

Around the time of the prophet Elijah, the nation of Israel was behaving in much the same way. The episode comes to a dramatic climax (John Huston would have loved it) in the eighteenth chapter of 1st Kings. Elijah sets up a challenge between himself and the local prophets of Baal which includes the comedy of 450 of Baal's prophets pleading all morning for him to do something, to no avail, and Elijah taunting them with

“Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.”

1 Kings 18:27 ESV

When Baal never responds, Jehovah immediately answers Elijah's prayer with fatal results for not just the altar sacrifice but all 450 of those prophets of Baal. Earlier, however, the Lord's prophet had something pithy to say to the people of Israel, whose king, Ahab, had forsaken *Jehovah-adonai* for pagan gods.

So Ahab sent *a message* among all the sons of Israel and brought the prophets together at Mount Carmel. Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long *will* you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.” But the people did not answer him a word.

1 Kings 18:20-21

Elijah’s question—translated, “How long will you hesitate between two opinions?”—is, in the original Hebrew, more colorful. It could be more literally translated, “How long will you limp on the two divided opinions,” or even “How long hop ye about upon two boughs?” The people of Israel were like dithering birds, hopping about from branch to branch, unable to make up their minds where to land permanently. They didn’t want to *completely* turn their backs on Jehovah; they didn’t want to lose that option. But they also wanted to sample these other fascinating deities being offered to them.

The prophet of God had lost patience with them. He was saying, essentially, *How long will you insist on having it both ways? You want to love God while you love everything that stands against Him! If Jehovah-adonai is the one true God, then you must follow Him. If this Baal creature is the one true God, then you must follow Him. But you cannot follow both!*

HE DOES NOT SHARE POWER

It would seem that most of contemporary society prefers to live and think as the late John Huston—following then discarding, picking and choosing from a panoply of colorful philosophies and gods. Or not bothering with it at all.

God—the *real* one—is gracious and longsuffering, but He is also jealous. He cannot abide diluted loyalty. He does not share power. Time and again He tells us we cannot have it both ways—we cannot keep Him, but toy with other deities. We cannot keep Him in our back pocket as an insurance policy against our own foolishness while we dither away our lives hopping from one branch to another, sampling first one fanciful god after another.

**“And I will be a father to you,
And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,”
Says the Lord Almighty.**

2 Corinthians 6:18

The Lord Almighty, Creator of the universe, will not be a distant cousin, favorite uncle, or even step-father to us. He will be Father to us—or nothing at all.



“Now, therefore, fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

Joshua 24:14-15

The essential attitude of Platonism is aspiration or longing: the human soul, imprisoned in the shadowy, unreal world of Nature, stretches out its hands and struggles towards the beauty and reality of that which lies (as Plato says) “on the other side of existence”... In Christianity, however, the human soul is not the seeker but the sought: it is God who seeks, who descends from the other world to find and heal Man; the parable about the Good Shepherd looking for and finding the lost sheep sums it up.

C. S. Lewis