

THE CATHOLIC HOUR

COURAGE—A CIVICS TEXT

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Fellow Americans:

The season of humiliations had indeed passed. Humanity, united with divinity, its head bowed in death on Calvary, finds the earth under the weight of the cross breaking the bonds and loosening the shackles by which men's souls had been robbed of their vision. Yes, humanity, as the head of Christ droops in death, finds its eyes raised to a recaptured perspective in which life is revealed in its fulness of meaning. Witnessing to the triumph of the cross and to the freedom which had come to men's souls with the passing of the season of humiliations, ". . . the earth quaked, and the rocks were rent, and the tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep arose. . . ." (Matthew 27: 51-53).

From the lips of the Roman Centurion came the testimony, the substance of which from generation to generation was to dissipate men's fears, establish their faith and sustain their hopes. This pagan, as the earth trembled beneath his feet and he heard humanity's cry come forth from the parched lips of its Savior, exclaimed, "Ay, truly

this was a just man; this was indeed the Son of God." In the hearts of the soldiers who had stood with their leader "over against Jesus" atop the hill of crucifixion, the testimony of the Centurion was re-echoed. They together, leader and soldiers, in their fears, their faith, and their hopes, gave voice to the heart of all mankind. Recognizing that God through Christ's humanity made expiation on Calvary's cross, men's sights were raised anew to that vision which God in the beginning had established for the children of men.

Ever since, men in their governments have sought more or less successfully to state as the foundation of their political structure the truths which constitute the substance of this vision. It was not, however, until eighteen centuries after Calvary that the highest and most complete political declaration of these truths was formulated. With a courage, born of exile from home for conscience's sake, the Founding Fathers of our glorious nation gave to the world in their Declaration of Independence, the classic political expression of those truths

brought from obscurity by the death of the God-Man on Calvary.

July 4, 1776, is more than the birthday of a nation; current events dramatize it as the pole star of the race of men struggling ever against the destructive forces of slavery. Emancipation from the slavery of sin came with crucifixion on Calvary. The Blood of the Redeemer of mankind, flowing into the stream of humanity, re-established the priceless worth of the human personality. Down through the ages since Calvary, there have come tyrants who would re-enslave men and blot out the individual's personal worth. Always, too, since Calvary there have been men, borrowing knowledge and strength from Calvary's redemptive force, who, in the words of the Founding Fathers, could mutually pledge to each other their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor in defense of man's God-given and God-restored freedom. These Founding Fathers acted, as they themselves state, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence.

Out of this deep and abiding trust in the Providence of the good God, the representatives of the United States of America, in Congress assembled, July 4,

1776, brought forth a document unique in the political annals of mankind. In their Declaration they incorporated the charter of human liberty and human freedom, sealed by the Precious Blood of the God-Man on the hill of crucifixion. They, the Founders of our country, passing through the humiliations heaped upon them by the tyrant's rule, under the impact of suffering rose to the glorious heights of Calvary.

We, of this modern America, have inherited the priceless legacy of freedom so clearly defined by those to whom our country owes its origin. We, of this modern America, reviewing current events, wonder whether the newspaper headlines are but the passing shadows of a season of humiliations that we perforce must suffer. Will we, before crucifixion, rise to the heights of Calvary and recapture the vision which gives meaning and substance to our boast of freedom and strength to our stand for liberty? In the death on Calvary a new hope and a new courage came into the hearts of men. From the crucible of sufferings on Calvary was distilled a strength which has enabled men to rise above petty ambitions and declare themselves for those principles which give life mean-

ing and make it purposeful. Nicodemus, the member of the Sanhedrin, who, it seems, only at the hour of crucifixion, courageously declared his faith in the God-Man, has many counterparts in the world of the present time.

Today, we, as a people, are challenged by a political system which is the negation of our own. In effect, we are asked to demonstrate that we genuinely cherish for ourselves and for others the spiritual and intellectual freedom of which we boast. We are challenged to show that we are willing to sacrifice to preserve them. By implication we are asked to prove that these freedoms, which have made for progress on the part of the race, are still the means whereby men can steadily advance their own development.

Must we, as a people, experience crucifixion before we will profess openly the validity of the premises on which our country's Declaration of Independence and its Bill of Rights rest? Must we, as a people, have part in crucifixion before, like the Centurion, standing "over against Jesus," we declare courageously our attachment to "the laws of nature and nature's God"?

Looking back upon the as-

sembly of July 4, 1776, we see there the position the citizens of this nation must assume if we are to hasten the passing of the season of humiliation. Looking back, we see the position which, once assumed, should save us the horrors of crucifixion. Looking back on that historic assembly, out of which came our nation, the United States of America, we see there men of varying shades of religious belief. While not uniform in the practices of religion, or in the content of dogma, they were united in the acceptance of that central sweeping dogma which gives integrity and solidarity to the race of mankind and establishes the equality of all before God and governments.

They, Protestant, Jew, and Catholic, on that memorable Fourth of July, 1776, "with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence," jointly and unitedly professed their common faith.

One hundred and sixty years have passed since Protestant, Jew, and Catholic, acting together, gave to the world this classic political Declaration of what was written first in the race's oldest document, the Book of Genesis, and later brought out into bold relief on the heights of Calvary. In these one

hundred and sixty years, under the impact of economic changes, men have become confused and bewildered while striving for an economy which would reflect the equality politically declared by the Founding Fathers. Seeking the good things of earth, they have lost sight of the self-evident truths which alone can rationalize and support their strivings. Emotionally motivated, they have pulled away from the safe and secure moorings of reason.

This is, indeed, a time of crisis. National unity is threatened, and strange as it may seem, the threat is from within, because there are so many in our civic life who get their inspiration by fixing their eyes on the earth. "In God We Trust" is to them something archaic, something in the nature of a pietistic hangover. If national unity, in defense of Americanism, is to be had, then all enjoying the rights and privileges of American citizenship must rededicate themselves to certain religious truths, as proclaimed by the Founding Fathers, and described by Thomas Jefferson, the Apostle of Americanism, as self-evident.

All must accept these truths axiomatically, without reserve. To reject them, or quibble about

them, or call into doubt their validity, manifests the fact that we are not truly American.

His Holiness, Pope Pius XII, in *Sertum Laetitiae*, a letter addressed "to the Church in the United States," reminds us that "we must make possible a salutary union of thought and policy between Catholics and other believers in God." "It is impressive," the Holy Father writes, "that the Spirit of God still dwells in the multitude." This salutary union of thought and policy, enunciated by the Pope, we Catholics of the United States see reflected in a measure in our country's dual system of education. The Catholic school and the public school are both equipped to train intelligent American citizens; both are approved by the state. Each experiences the same concern in the crisis through which our nation is passing as it endeavors to bring the curative power of its political and religious faith to a world that is stricken.

Catholic schools in partnership with public schools in seeking to achieve the American educational objective of better citizenship serve as a ferment to keep active in the life of the nation the self-evident truths of our country's Declaration of Political Principles. Not in com-

petition, but through cooperation, the Catholic school with the public school serves the welfare of the nation by training its pupils and students for intelligent participation in the rights and duties of citizenship.

In the spirit of the members of the Congress assembled on July 4, 1776, the Catholic school insists that education should concern itself, not alone with mere knowledge, but with the inculcation of the causes which give meaning and purpose to the objectives which education sets itself. Happy in the knowledge that its philosophy is consonant with the philosophy of the Founding Fathers as set down in the Declaration of Independence, the Catholic school rejoices that its system in its enunciation and integration of this philosophy actually complements the public school curriculum in the field of citizenship.

Because the public school has as yet been unable to formulate a civics text which would escape the charge of sectarianism and thus be acceptable to all, the coordinating philosophy, stemming from the Declaration of Independence, has not rooted itself in the curriculum of American schools financed by public funds. Until such a text is formulated, the Church school

will be the ferment keeping active the cause on which are based Americanism and its unique championing of human dignity, human liberty and human freedom.

The Catholic school, public in all things save its method of support, centers on the sacredness of the human personality and insists that man's highest natural endowment is that of free will wherein the Creator gave to him the faculty and capacity of returning love for love, service for service, the fulfillment of duties for the exercise of rights. Its classrooms, from kindergarten to grade and high schools into college and university, are not unlike the classrooms of schools under public auspices, except that religious pictures and crucifixes combined with the teachers' garb stress the inherent dignity of the individual and the moral obligations this dignity entails.

Again, its classroom instructions are not unlike the classroom instructions in schools under public auspices save that through the instructions in the Catholic school, like a golden thread, there runs the truths which the Declaration of Independence enunciates as self-evident, and more, the truths which

make of life a totality extending the bounds of time. The teachings in our Catholic school demonstrate the citizen as a child of God, having obligations to fellow citizens and to the state.

From the acceptance and fulfillment of these duties will flow an order resulting in peace and tranquility. This teaching supplies motives for the fulfillment of obligations, even though the fulfillment at the moment seems antagonistic to self-interest. In a word, the Catholic school points the Way, which is Christ; teaches the Truth, which is Christ; urges the Life, which is Christ. Its instruction seeks to form the child into a citizen charged with making secure his eternal welfare through serving the welfare of his nation.

Conscious of the high destiny of the nation as our wounded world's workshop of human values, the Catholic school knows that this destiny arises from our country's Declaration of Independence. Unless the supernatural aspect of the premises of the Declaration's corollaries of human freedom and human liberty are recognized, they become meaningless and ineffective. Realizing this, the Catholic school is distressed that a vague sort of emotionalism in

the thinking of so many citizens is the only prop to support the cause of freedom and liberty.

The Catholic school, in its anxiety to preserve American values which are likewise Christian values, looks hopefully to the future now that world distress and totalitarian challenge are forcing a re-examination of premises. More and more, developments show that freedom and liberty do not result from legislative enactments, but from the Providence of an all-wise, and all-loving Creator. More and more, too, developments threaten crucifixion. It is the prayer of the Catholic school child and the Catholic school authority that American faith, as enunciated in our country's Declaration, will re-assert itself and force the formulation of a civics text which will elaborate on causes as well as on effects; which will profess and rationalize American faith as well as the benefits that faith establishes.

Looking to the signers of our country's Declaration, we see there Protestant, Jew, and Catholic, men of varying shades of belief, but all concurring in the acceptance of certain supernatural principles which give meaning and substance to America's boast. Looking to our

country's practice, we read as the basic tenet of American economy, "In God We Trust," and we find in Executive Proclamations the conviction that thanks should be returned to God.

We, of the Catholic school, would like to believe that eventually all the schools of the nation will incorporate in their civics text the whole American tradition of belief and trust in God and the necessity of returning thanks to God. The conviction of a personal God from whom has come the noble endowment of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, together with the conviction that the nation is the creature of the people protecting this God-given endowment, is not foreign or alien to the American concept of government. A civics text declaring and giving the reasons for America's faith could dissipate confusion and establish order at home and enable the world at large to understand the better America's aims and objectives. Such a civics text seriously and sincerely taught, could so indoctrinate the children of the

schools that within their own generation they would constitute a valid hope for a lasting and just peace.

The atom bomb is the result of knowledge. The Declaration and all it implies is our security against the disastrous effects of uncontrolled knowledge. The Centurion, "over against Jesus," on the hill of crucifixion, feeling the earth trembling beneath his feet, made his act of faith.

Our country, with its harnessed atomic energy, has the capacity of shaking the world with fear; with its faith declared and expounded, it has the capacity of sustaining men's hopes for a better and more peaceful world. The pledge to our stricken world is not in energy stored and assurances given, but rather in the declaration of principles made and integrated in the nation's life. Our prayer is that we, as a nation, with courage will so declare our faith, and so act accordingly that exemplifying the truths, which were salvaged on Calvary, we, and the world through our leadership, might escape the sufferings of crucifixion.