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DO WE NEED CHRIST?



Rev. Robert I. Gannon S.J.
The Catholic Hour

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
How Man Needed Christ From the Beginning	7
How Christ's Own Generation Needed Him	13
How Our Generation Needs Him	19
How I Need Him Myself	25



HOW MAN NEEDED CHRIST FROM THE BEGINNING

Address Given On December 2, 1945

In the Gospel for this, the First Sunday of Advent, we come upon Our Lord sitting at the foot of a fig tree. The day is a clear blue day in early Spring, just before the Pascal moon—His last Pascal moon. What remains of His human life is measured now in weeks, so that He is sitting in the deepening shadow of another tree, an invisible tree, the gaunt, black tree of the Cross. It is a solemn and rather terrifying moment, for Christ is telling His Apostles, who know something now about His first Coming, what the human race can expect on the day of His last Advent. He glances around that circle of earnest, puzzled, weatherbeaten faces, and descending to their level says: "Look at the fig tree." They all look up. "When that brings forth fruit, you will know that summer is nigh." They nod their simple heads. "So when you see these wonders in the heavens and the earth, know that the Kingdom of God is nigh." And as His human eyes looked from face to face, from Andrew to John and John to James, the same eyes,

divine as well as human, looked from end to end of time.

It was as though He had on His knees the story of Mankind and was turning the pages, until coming to the last, He found it strewn with ashes. Or better still, it was as though He saw spread out before Him an enormous pattern of men's morals, a pattern of occasional beauty and much drabness, spotted here and there with blood and filth, but all its parts reduced to a kind of symmetry by the black thread of Original Sin. This thread brought Adam into every part of the design, for Adam's sin has touched the lives of every one of us and the tragedy of his own life, outlined in the Book of Genesis, is still the enduring condition of the human race.

Of course, just now that human race happens to be in a highly emotional state and is not interested in Original Sin or any other fundamental that requires hard thinking. Men are alarmed at the cracks that are appearing in our civilization, but still sneer like a lot of mid-Victorians at those fundamental truths that

have given our civilization whatever solidity it can claim—truths like Creation and Redemption, merit and grace and sin, especially Original Sin. Original Sin hasn't even any sentiment attached to it. Original Sin is considered obviously absurd, a relic of the past that is positively funny. However, since not two persons in a thousand have any clear idea what we mean by Original Sin, let us today, instead of routing our adversaries with heat, see if we can throw a little light on what the Church really teaches in this technical and dry but vitally important matter.

First, then, in touching on the difficult Book of Genesis, hold this in mind: that we Catholics cannot consider it a myth or an allegory. We must believe that at least in its essentials it represents a true relation of facts. It has a literary form, of course, an Oriental mode of thought and expression which we have to allow for. It has metaphors and similes and so on, but with these we are not concerned. What essential facts does it offer which we must believe? It tells us that in the beginning of time God created the universe, taking perhaps millions of years to bring it to its present form. Then,

when at last conditions were suitable for human life, man was made, male and female, not simultaneously in all parts of the earth, but just one man and one woman. These, our first parents, were before their sin superior to us in every way, for they were destined from the first breath of life to a supernatural end, destined to see God face to face. Their minds were clear, where ours are confused and clouded; their wills were strong and faithful to their interests, where ours are enemies within the gates. They could not be blinded by passion, as we are constantly. If they sinned, it was by a calm, deliberate, judicious choice. Our concupiscence, which works such havoc with us, had no dominion over them. Although their bodies were disposed to corruption like any other living organism, still, as a special gift within the giving of the Creator, they were never to taste the bitterness of death; by a miracle of God, their souls were never to be separated from their bodies. Thus, in our first parents, we see man at man's best—a very little lower than the Angels.

But brilliant of intellect and strong of will, man was not confirmed in grace. He could have been, had God so willed. But in

His Divine Providence, God wanted the love of a man who was free, so He gave man the power, as it were, to vote for Him. The other candidate proposed was self-love, and Man in the person of our first parents elected self-love as the ruler of his life, a choice that has been pretty consistently popular ever since. Of course, God could have loaded each succeeding generation with the same unmerited gifts He had given to Adam; He could have allowed each generation a separate trial. But He willed that the first man should be the moral as well as the physical head of the race; that Adam, being an almost perfect creature, stronger and wiser than any of his children, should speak for them as their representative and choose between the services of God and the service of self. Why didn't God act otherwise? I don't know. Nor is it surprising or important that we cannot grasp the motives of Infinite Intelligence. It would be miraculous if we could. For we are descended (and we include everybody that ever lived) from a line of ancestors distinguished chiefly by their folly and stupidity, and unfortunately for us, stupidity and folly have been the most pardonable aspects of our family his-

tory all along—ever since the Fall, ever since the day when man chose self instead of God, ever since the day when following that first sin, concupiscence flared up in the human body and the crazy flame almost destroyed the temple of the Holy Ghost.

So look at them now, that poor man and his woman, settling down to what we call life; settling down to a bare existence which, compared with their former state, was a kind of torpor. They had had the satisfaction of seeing mortal sin face to face, but what a price to pay for this enlightenment! Peace of mind quite gone, strength of will nearly gone, brilliance of intellect dimmed beyond recognition. Like a man who has had a ravishing sickness and has to learn all over again how to walk and talk and write, we see them now clad in skins, living probably in a dirty cave, fighting wild beasts with the crudest weapons, eating flesh raw, perhaps, and bloody for want of the knowledge of fire, and sustained in their struggle to keep themselves above the moral level of the brutes around them only by memories of God and Paradise, only by hope in a promise that had been made to them—memories and hopes that were to form the poverty-

stricken heritage of even the most primitive races. Distorted by subsequent myths and fables, the substance of the tradition has always remained. Man has always been haunted by the memory of a decline.

This tradition is familiar to all serious students of antiquity and most of the effects of the Fall can be scientifically established as facts, though not, of course, as effects. It can be proved from inscriptions and remains and legitimate inferences that we have been a stupid race as far back as our story can be traced, subject to sickness and death and slaves of concupiscence. Naturally, however, no scientist can prove that all this was the effect of Original Sin. Only revelation can do that. For science cannot affirm or deny the existence of a supernatural destiny. All the laboratories in the world, with two billion dollars to spend, could never determine whether I am, or whether I should be, or whether I could be walking toward the outstretched arms of God. Science can make no contract with grace or the merits of Christ, and such are the concepts involved in the concept of Original Sin.

In fact, to understand even the ABC of this puzzling state

we must grasp such superscientific facts as the following: Man is a creature whose family tree is rooted in nothing. He is not limited but there is no perfection which he can say is his by right. God is the Creator, Infinite, possessing by His very nature all perfection. Man, therefore, left to himself, by reason of his nature has no more right to enjoy God for all eternity than a truck horse or a fish might have. So that when God opens up that possibility to man and man abuses the privilege, God can take it away again without the slightest injustice. He can simply ignore the human race, let man take care of man and make what he can out of life.

And that is what happened—almost. When man chose self, God almost left him to what self could give him. If he had, all expectation of eternal happiness—to which man could make no natural claim—would have become impossible. Our good deeds would have had no value beyond the grave. Our lives would have been as pointless as that of a little dog who barks at shadows with the air of accomplishing wonders. As it was, we were born in some such state as this because of Adam's sin. There was no personal guilt on our

souls. We were, in fact, personally as innocent as we looked, but we had not a heritage which we could have had. We were not walking toward the outstretched arms of God, as Adam had been before the Fall: and that want of a supernatural end, that deprivation, that pointlessness of our being before Baptism, in so far as it is the result of Adam's sin, we call Original Sin. We must not think of it, then, as a dark spot upon the soul. We must think of it as the absence of light, a light to which we have no claim by our own nature, a light to which God's love, poured out on us in the Sacrament of Baptism, has given us some claim through the merits of Christ.

Why, then, did we say that God *almost* left man to what self could do for him? How could He have left man more completely to himself? Did He not banish him from the easy familiarity of Paradise? Yes. Did He not strip him of Sanctifying Grace and abandon him to the fever of concupiscence? No. Not quite. Man has never been quite abandoned, for under the very shadow of condemnation he saw the light of hope.

He could still be saved if a second Adam could be found, human and divine, a real man and

representative of men and still so superior to us common clods that his actions would of themselves have supernatural value; a second moral head of the human race whose infinite merits, poured with the breathless extravagance of the Sacred Heart, would make graceless, stupid, sinful souls like you and me worthy to look into the face of God, worthy to be called His heirs, His children. Man could even be kept on a wavering level of morality if among his treasures of grace he could cherish the example of One who had lived a human life, who had known sorrow and disappointment and discouragement—had almost known abandonment; had been in everything a man—sin excepted. Were the children of Adam darkened in intellect? They should have "a light to the revelation of the Gentiles." Were they weak of will, were they badgered and tortured by a rebel flesh? They should have before their eyes the strength and the charity and the white-hot purity of Mary's Son. Did they above all and in everything need Christ? Christ would come to them.

Thus on that first day of wrath when the human race found itself staring blankly into

the darkness of its own mind, when its soul was frightened by a moral stillness that promised a dreadful storm—suddenly, as from a clear silver bell high in the mountains, a single note rang out. "I will," said the Lord God

to the serpent, "put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel" (*Genesis* 3:15). Her seed! Mary's Son! It was the first note of Christmas.

HOW CHRIST'S OWN GENERATION NEEDED HIM

Address Given On December 9, 1945

Many thousands of years have passed since last Sunday afternoon, when we left our first parents staring stupidly, their backs to Paradise, their faces turned for the first time toward the dullness, the irritation and confusion which we call—Life. How many thousands of years, nobody knows. Nobody knows how many centuries there were between the Flood and Abraham. For known history is a brief story at best, and traveling the road to yesterday, we soon find drawn across our path a curtain on which are painted as a background the earliest traditions of the race. Beyond that is pre-history; but science and revelation, piecing together a few scattered facts, give us glimpses of even pre-historic man—reassuring glimpses which show us how much like us the first men were, mentally, morally, and physically. Facts, of course, they had to learn as time went on—how to use fire, how to use weapons, how to travel, how to weave and how to sing, each generation adding to the treasure house left by the last—but Cain

and Abel had an intellect essentially like ours, an intellect and a conscience. Theirs was human behavior and personal sin; so that a moral decline was possible for the race from the very beginning. For just as an individual, with every advantage of education and family can, through debauchery, lower himself to any level, so whole sections of the race, now in one part of the world, now in another, could climb to little eminences of culture and then collapse again, producing the wave-like movement that takes the place of progress in human history.

At times the collapse of man has been dreadfully widespread, almost universal. But in the darkest night, there was always one flickering torch. The Gentiles might rage and multiply their gods, but the Jews would always include a few faithful souls and these would keep alive the ancient tradition of a coming Redeemer. Egypt and Greece and Rome and India and far-off China told generation after generation the story of Paradise Lost, of the Golden Age that had

been and was no more. There was a vague idea of redemption all over the pagan world, but only the seed of Abraham had any definite idea of Him who was to come. And the reason is obvious, my brethren. Memory is a natural thing; and races, fuddled with pantheism and creature-worship, could remember. But hope is supernatural, a particular grace of God, and only by such grace could the Jews for centuries look with confidence toward the East for the "Day Star," "The Orient who would come on high," the Messianic King. And look they did, from Abraham the Shepherd of Ur, to John the Baptist, crying in the wilderness. They slaved under the lash of Egypt and wept by the waters of Babylon, and always they sang and dreamed of "Him who was to come." Of course, through years of plenty, there was always the old disloyalty, the tendency to forget, but in time of calamity and disaster they would turn to their Father like frightened children, more frightened than affectionate, and cry for the promised Messiah.

Thus it happened that the cry was particularly fervent in the days of Caesar Augustus. The Coming of the Messiah was being feverishly discussed among the

unfaithful, paganized Jews, as well as among the devout, and the expectation that was a hungry longing in Israel was echoed by a kind of wistfulness among distant poets—like Horace, with his dream of the Isles in the Western Sea, and Virgil, with his Eclogue describing the child who would restore the Golden Age. For anyone with a remnant of spirituality or even of idealism in his soul must have felt that the end was near; must have felt that civilization would soon be a different thing, transformed by an unknown force or engulfed in its own bestiality.

Because a mature paganism, my brethren, is not the pretty thing that the neo-pagans would have us think. They have created the fiction that a shadow was cast over the natural joy of the ancient world by the Pale Man of Sorrows hanging on His Cross. But clearly, they have been looking at the dancing figures on a Grecian vase and are forgetting the slave murder, the degradation of women, and the unnatural vice of the best people of Athens and Ephesus. They have been looking at the code of Roman Laws and forgetting the corruption of their administration, forgetting the diabolical obscenity of public life. Above

all, they have been reading what other smart scribblers have said about Christ, without reading the Gospels themselves. They have gone around the guard-room collecting impressions from the soldiers who spat in His face. Christ Himself they have never known—they have never tried to know. They have never received Him in Holy Communion. They have never spoken to Him at Benediction, face to face. They have never for a moment tried to reproduce in their own lives something of His. Moreover, His message, so fresh and clear to us, is blurred for them by two centuries of Rationalism and a century of Intellectual Anarchy. They cannot even guess its meaning any more. They only know from hearsay that He spoke of suffering for justice' sake, of self sacrifice and sorrow for sin, and most preposterous of all, of purity. So they turn away in boredom or disgust and long for the spacious days of Caesar Augustus.

So what, actually, was the state of affairs in the world when the Star appeared in the East and led the Magi over the desert to Bethlehem? In Judea, where paganism was supposed to have no place, we find the end of an era and spirituality nearly dead;

the temple at Sion, forgetting its ancient glory, had become the center of ward politics; the Saducees were preaching stark Rationalism and denying the immortality of the soul; the High Priest, Annas, was a common grafter; the King, a bloodstained degenerate; and the rank and file a generation that had already forgotten the Maccabees. Over in Greece, conditions were only apparently better. It is true, a tradition of fine culture lingered from the distant age of Pericles—but with it a degree of sexual corruption that made Athens the poisoned well from which all Europe came to drink. Rome had already drunk deep and the debauchery of the East was creeping up through Italy like gangrene. Then, even more than now, marriage had become a joke—a mere civil contract depending on mutual desire. Either party could dissolve it at will and marry over and over again, like our own dogs and cats.

For the first 520 years there had not been a divorce in Rome, but after the Punic Wars, Seneca tells us that Roman matrons counted their years by their husbands, instead of by the Consuls. Martial mentions one with ten husbands, Juvenal one with eight in five years, and St. Jerome

caps the climax with the story of a lady who had a twenty-fifth husband of whom she was the twenty-first wife. For in the new social order that came with Imperial Rome, woman had been emancipated—that is, instead of reigning like a queen, like the mother of Coriolanus or the mother of the Gracchi, honored in the sanctuary of a clean home, she was now free to frequent the vilest theatres, notorious public baths, and a round of social functions from which she was regularly carried home in a stupor. Her enthusiasm for publicity kept pace with her taste for liquor, so that in the time of Nero and Domitian, the ladies of Rome descended into the arena to fight as gladiators. Whether or not they could do much damage to an adversary, whether or not they could handle the tridents, the nets, and the swords, is beside the point. The point is that they were just as free as men to degrade themselves in public.

Of course, with this emancipation of women, it was inevitable that home life should undergo some modification. The household gods began to disappear and children began to disappear with them. Some were abandoned outside the home or

murdered in one way or another, the rest were abandoned inside the home to servants and only their souls were murdered. So that the poor little Romans who did survive had the same chance of integrity, the same chance of a secure, useful, noble life, the same chance to save their souls as our own boys and girls who day after day are swept out on the human dump that stands behind every divorce court in America.

For home is the children's whole world. There, if at all, they are taught the primary virtues, self-control and honesty and purity and charity. There, because the teaching must be done by those whose claim the child can recognize, whose word the child can believe. If there is, besides, a bond of love, obedience becomes easy through these plastic years and habits are formed. That is the reason why good parents stay home themselves. That is why good husbands and wives quietly endure so much. They know that their own boredom, or irritation, or even humiliation, is such a trifle compared with the warping of a little life. But broken homes and warped lives are nothing new in history. They were the ordinary thing in the Rome of Caesar Augustus.

They always exist in abundance when public opinion is easy on divorce—in other words, when society forgets the primary end of marriage and its own end; in other words, when man gets used to a pagan atmosphere where libido is the first fact and God is the last.

Is that our situation here and now? We must try to be judicious. It is true that the situation is alarming enough for any moralist, but it would be a wild exaggeration to claim that post-war London or New York, or even Hollywood, could be compared with the classic cess-pools of antiquity. For something has happened in the meantime. We have our faults, God knows, and they have been accentuated by the war, but we must remember that the ancient world was peopled with men who never knew Christ, who never knew men who had known Him, and who were planning their lives without even an unconscious thought of Him. So that when we picture the world of Christ's own generation, we cannot people it with modern pagans whose background and ancestry for two thousand years have been at least Christian, and for fifteen hundred years Catholic. If, for example, you were to stroll

around the forum of Augustus you would not look for people like John Burroughs or Walt Whitman, for these men had known Christ dimly—and were better than they would have been, because of it.

So with our neo-pagans of today, smug and smart and superior. They have grown up in a civilization where practically all the factors that make for true happiness are Christian. The best elements of our laws, our liberties, and our customs have been profoundly influenced by Christ, and this influence out-lives the apostasy of individuals, or even of nations. For instance, our defense of the innate dignity of man, whether slave or free, is a Christian innovation. The fundamental idea that woman is worthy not only of protection but of honor is *His* idea. Before a Virgin was espoused to a man named Joseph, women with few exceptions were servants and playthings; not souls, but bodies. So that Christianity has given woman all the dignity she has. It has been responsible for whatever good there is left in our marriage laws and social customs; for the natural chivalry of Western Civilization; for practically everything which tends to protect the woman who in a

pagan society could not protect herself. For chivalry is as alien to a pagan as compassion toward the weak. That is why St. Paul described pagans as "without affection, without fidelity, without mercy." If pagans admire such virtues now, it is because the odor of His sweetness has filled the earth and they are more Christian than they know. The fact is, these parlor pagans of our time have habits of thought, modes of action, and unconscious ideals that go straight back to the Sermon on the Mount; and the reason why their reckless attacks on the principles of Christ achieve results so slowly is because men still recognize in

these principles the mainspring of order and decent society, and most men still vaguely link these principles with Christ.

But in dwelling on the need that His own generation had of Him, we should be blind if we did not see a disturbing resemblance between the moral chaos that existed then and the post-war condition of today. If there was need then to prepare the way, as John the Baptist warned his contemporaries, lowering the hills of pride and filling the valleys of despair, so is there now. May the Advent of Our Lord in 1945 do for us what it did for the world of His own generation.

HOW OUR GENERATION NEEDS HIM

Address Given On December 16, 1945

On the first Sunday of Advent it was not too difficult to discuss the problem of prehistoric man and determine that what he had needed above all was Hope in the coming Messiah, a supernatural virtue that could most surely keep him from walking mentally on all fours. Neither was it too difficult for us, glancing down over the thousands of years that followed, to see in a single frame a picture of the Western World at the time of Christ: its art, its learning, its wealth, its hardness, its cruelty, its incredible lust—a world that was “foolish, dissolute, without affection, without fidelity, without mercy” (*Romans* 1:31). It was not difficult to picture the human race then living and realize that of all its needs, it needed most a new emotion—charity. It needed not more armies or academies or senates, not more philosophers, poets, or scientists, but a little child who was Eternal Love, Emmanuel, “God with us.”

When we come to our own generation, however, the difficulty multiplies immeasurably because, for one thing, we know so little

about it. Teletype and radio and pictures keep pouring facts into our minds, but facts are only the beginning of truth. Perspective is the principle element of knowledge and few people are profound enough to have perspective with regard to the passing show. That is why there was, a few short years ago, such childish confidence in the promises of winged words like “progress,” “education,” “democracy” and “science.” Lacking perspective, everybody was so pathetically sure that man was getting better and better. In 1918, when we finished the war that was to end all war and looked forward 27 years to the Christmas of 1945, what a beautiful world it was going to be. No war, no crime, no ignorance, no misery.

On the other hand, what depths of despair can be reached in dark times like the present by those who have only current facts to guide them. There are people alive who think that this is the first time that Europe and Asia have been desolate; the first time that stately cities have been destroyed, looted, and burned by

the conquerors; the first time that thousands of women and old men and little children have been slaughtered uselessly. They think there is something new in transplanting populations, in marching off endless files of combatants and innocent civilians, destined to die of hardship. The scale may be new. It may be difficult to match in ancient times the picture of a great modern power with an economy founded on the labor of something between 10 and 40 million slaves who have been herded together in dreadful camps where even native hunters would not seek to penetrate, but the principle was just the same in the time of Ivan the Terrible, Genghis Khan, and Caligula. They were just as cruel as their modern counterparts, though their opportunities were not so great.

So with the breakdown of morals all around us, only the scale is really new. Everything we deplore is more widespread, perhaps, than after the other great wars of history, but then this was the greatest war we have had so far. It killed and wounded more innocent people, drove more nervous people insane, sank more ships, blasted more houses and more homes, created more problems and

spread more hate than all the wars of the 18th and 19th centuries put together. Ours is the bloodiest century in history not because we are more uncivilized than the Mongols and the Huns and the Mohawks, but because there is so much blood to spill nowadays, and mass production has made it possible to spill it so much more rapidly. It is not surprising, then, that the stench of mortal sin that rises to the nostrils of God whenever war is declared is greater in volume now than ever before. But the sins are essentially the same.

So that to speak of our own generation as though men and women of today had a corner on cruelty, or greed, or lust is to overlook everything we have learned in our history, philosophy, and literature. Nothing, in fact, is more reassuring than a collection of old sermons running back a thousand years or more. So many of them begin with the words "There never was a time when—", and yet, most of them could have been preached a dozen times in the intervening centuries.

Still, we have a few variations that we can call our own and a certain emphasis and coloring that is very much 1945. The variations have arisen from peculiar

circumstances like lend lease and income tax and trailer towns—and also from the subtle influence of a desertion, the subtle odor of dead religion. The emphasis and coloring comes from the fact that our simple faith has been taken from us or so weakened that our hope is dim and our charity superficial. This loss of Christian faith is the result of intellectual confusion and rapidly increasing spiritual ignorance, among those who consider themselves educated as well as among the millions who have merely gone through the motions of a high school graduation. It isn't their fault primarily. They are the end-products of a deliberate conspiracy. For 250 years men of genius, philosophers, scientists, and poets, not to mention the professional educators, have been hacking away at the foundations of intellectual and spiritual life, undermining the very essence of truth, denying that such a thing as truth exists, building up a spirit of doubt and scepticism that could ultimately result only in this present-day atmosphere: an atmosphere that would be called one of disillusionment except that what we lost was not an illusion—it was truth.

A great, dreary, hopelessness

has settled on the peoples of the world because natural faith has gone the way of Supernatural Faith. One nation has no natural faith in another nation, the rank and file has no faith in its leaders, and neighbor has no faith in his neighbor. This is partly the result of a mental fog that has been skillfully encouraged in certain influential quarters. By the simple trick of keeping the familiar sound of words while giving them an entirely new meaning, the average man has been turned upside down on too many basic questions and ends up by wondering if anything can be the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. He gets used to hearing that what is freedom of the press here is not freedom of the press there, what is democracy here is not democracy there, what is murder and slavery here is not murder and slavery there. Is it any wonder that the 1940's have already been labelled The Era of Doubletalk? Even more harmful, though, has been the growth of an assumption that morally we are all in the same waterlogged boat and if anyone appears to be better than another, the same is a hypocrite. Whoever is successful is dishonest. Whoever is beautiful is corrupt. Everybody has his price. And they say,

“That’s life, brother.” That’s not life; that’s death. The kind of death that can’t be kept in cemeteries. The kind of death that manages to come back from the wars with victorious as well as conquered armies.

It was to be expected, then, that our boys, introduced to an exploding world in their early twenties, would find plenty to disillusion them: the seamy side of military and civil authority; some of the men they met overseas, some of the men and women they heard about at home. But too many of them don’t trust anybody any more. Too many of them have lost their confidence in the millions of fine, clean, generous souls that are all around them; their confidence in the Church that wasn’t able to prevent the war and their Faith in God who allowed the whole thing to happen. One of them, with his eyes full of dumb misery, was heard to say, “If only there were something left that I could believe in!”

Perhaps the most difficult angle of the situation to handle is the fact that people who have been disillusioned in something and have become cynical about everything, picture themselves as the realists of the world. They think that everybody else is

either deceiving or being deceived, whereas the genuine realists are the ones who cannot be thoroughly cynical, cannot possibly despair. In the first place, the genuine realist knows what to expect of human nature. He knows that most people are not black or white, thoroughly good or thoroughly bad, but every shade of gray that lies between. In times of crisis the lighter in shade, under terrific strain, tend to get whiter, and the darker in shade still blacker—and the same thing can be said of nations.

But more important than knowing something about other people is the fact that genuine realists know something about themselves and about God. They can say without any emotion, “We are creatures. Left to ourselves we should be a dangerous lot of bipeds, with no more eternal significance than a housefly. But we have Christmas and Good Friday and Easter Sunday to remind us that through the merits of Christ we have been made sons of God and heirs of Heaven. Every one of us therefore is a creature of immense importance, created, ruled, and loved as an individual. ‘He calls his own sheep by name’ (*John 10:3*).” We are His as individuals, and He expects from us as indi-

viduals service which if we refuse He cannot get from any other creature. From this the Christian Realist learns a sane and sacred sense of superiority, "*His disce sanctam superbiam;*" and this is always enough to relieve attacks of sadness, timidity, doubt, and depression to a point where he can bear them. When the whole world comes tumbling about his ears with failures, betrayals, disappointments, and ill health, there is a still, small voice that whispers to him very quietly: "Thou art mine; thou and all thou hast or can accomplish." So that the true Realist can look life squarely in the eye and say, "Bitter? Of course it is. Nobody in his senses would try to deny it. Life is a warfare. But who ever said that this miserable round of weeks and months and years with all its meanness, its heartbreaks, and its killing monotony—who ever said that this is the whole story? Only 'the fool (who) hath said in his heart there is no God.'"

And who ever saw on the face of the earth a fool who was a realist? Or in Hell either, for that matter? Only fools like Lucifer are in Hell. The realists are all in Heaven—or waiting their turn here below. Those in Heaven were once men and wom-

en of simple faith who never forgot the lesson of Christmas, who never lost sight of the fact that although they were created from nothing, they were the adopted sons of God and Christ's adopted brothers. They were men and women of common sense who externalized their Faith by always acting as if God were God and men were men. And we who are waiting our turn here below are strengthened by the example of their Faith and common sense.

Such is the figure who still furnishes the most vivid human touches in the liturgy of Advent. It is the gaunt, strong figure of John the Baptist, at grips always and everywhere with reality, but undisturbed in the possession of strong and simple faith. His food, his clothing, his manner of life, his speech, **his action—real every inch.** No pretense, no pettiness, no self pity, no vanity. When an embassy of important men came from the Temple to hear him, Scribes and Pharisees and Doctors of the Law, he wasn't flattered, he didn't conform his conscience to theirs, neither did he despair. He knew they were rotten even if they did move in the best circles, so he lashed them just as the Son of God would have lashed them.

“Brood of vipers!” he shouted at them, “who has shown you how to flee from the wrath to come?” (*Matthew 3:7*). When the people thronged about him in admiration and begged for spiritual direction, he didn’t try to be clever or mysterious. He said quite simply, as the Son of God would have said: “Have you got two coats? Give one to him that hath none.” Then came the perfect test. He was praised and sought after as a Saint and a Prophet. Disciples followed him about in crowds and hung upon his lips. Slowly the impression gained strength that here was the Promised One, and they came to him ready to believe. He could have moulded them like wax had he cared to play with the truth, but not a single equivocal word ever entered his mind. His Faith shaped his conduct. “No, I am not the Christ. I am not Elias.” “I am the voice of one crying in the desert, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ ” (*John 1:23*). “. . . but in the midst of you there has stood one whom you do not know. He it is who is to come after me, who has been set

above me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to loose” (*John 1:26-27*). No false humility—that was the truth. No cynicism either. He knew his own generation but he did not despair of them because he kept his Faith in Christ. There was a man for you—a real man. “Aye, and greater than a prophet.”

That day in the desert, the Baptist spoke to a multitude that had not yet been strengthened in Faith by the teaching and miracles of Christ. In our own distracted time his words are repeated to a multitude that has forgotten what Christ said and did. Faith, Hope, and Charity, all of these depend on one another and none of them is ever found alone; but if prehistoric man needed most of all the virtue of Hope, and the man of Christ’s generation the virtue of Charity, the man of today needs most of all a lively and a simple Faith that will preserve what Hope is left and vitalize the feeble Charity of the modern world.

HOW I NEED HIM MYSELF

Address Given On December 23, 1945

The Church of Christ has no devotions that are meant to be secret. There are no Mysteries in the old pagan sense, nothing reserved to the select few—but one of the most beautiful parts of the Church's ritual is quite unknown to the average layman. I refer to the Divine Office. Everyone knows that Canons in their Cathedrals and Religious in their choirs chant the various hours from Matins to Compline and that all priests say them at least in a whisper once a day.

Too few of the faithful, however, take the trouble to find out what it is that they are chanting or reading. Fortunately, the growth of the liturgical movement in recent years has improved the situation a little and some have now discovered what the Divine Office can do for the spiritual and intellectual life of men and women in the world. It should be known to many more because it is an expression, in words, of the Church's daily life as identified with the daily life of Christ. For the Church is a Bride who is always young; always in the living presence of

the Bridegroom. How can She think of Him as a character of history dead and gone centuries ago? Through Holy Week, She grieves over every wound as if the blood were still running scarlet fresh. On Easter Morning She sings her Allelujas with all the glad surprise of the Apostles. But never is the past more present with Her than now, in these purple days of waiting.

For beginning three weeks ago and ending Christmas morning the Office is a study in crescendo—the Christ Child coming nearer and nearer day by day. The priest as he reads his Office cannot help falling under the spell. He feels like a traveller standing at the door of a lofty mountain shrine and listening. On the first Sunday of Advent, it is just the hour of dawn and the first gray streaks appear in the East. He seems to hear far off in the valley faint echoes of a band of pilgrims chanting—as he reads to himself the words: “Brethren, the time has come to rouse ourselves from sleep for our own salvation is nearer than we had believed.” Days pass. The music

and the words grow clearer as the pilgrims wind up the mountain side—the sky has touches of crimson in it now as we turn the page to the Antiphon: “O Orient splendor of Eternal light and sun of justice, come and illumine them who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.” By Christmas Eve, the pilgrims are in plain view and there is running gold in the clouds behind them as the Church sings at the Magnificat: “When the sun shall have risen in the heavens, you shall see the King of Kings proceeding from the Father as the bridegroom from the bridal chamber.” Until at last it is the very day—Christmas itself. The pilgrims have arrived at the door of the mountain shrine and are singing in a great chorus of full-throated devotion. The day spring has overflowed—floods of sunlight everywhere as we chant the Christmas Antiphon—“Christ is born today. Today a Saviour has appeared. Today the angels sing on earth and archangels rejoice. Today the Just exult, singing Glory to God in the Highest. Alleluja!”

In the spirit of the liturgy, then, we began our Advent course a long way off—in the need of the whole human race

for Christ: We saw how Adam and every son of Adam in every race and clime and time needed Him as a source of grace and merit; needed Him as a source of Hope. Passing over thousands of years, we saw how the world in His own time—hard, cold, cruel, and lustful—needed a new emotion, Love. So the God who is Love, assuming a most amiable form, loved His own who were in this world—loved them to the end. And every drop of blood as it made its slow, sticky way down the wood of the Cross seemed to say to the world: “Greater love than this no man hath” (*John 15:13*). Then after 95 successive generations of little boys and girls had grown up and whitened into old age, and been forgotten again, the calendars of 1946 were printed for men and women living in a bankrupt world, exhausted, disillusioned, skeptical. Men and women who need more than ever that habit or virtue by which they can assent to the highest form of truth, the truth which they have on the word of Christ, a habit or virtue which we call Supernatural Faith. For here and now we need the Truth, as His own decayed generation needed Life and the earliest races needed to be shown that

there was a Way. But Christ is "the Way and the Truth and the Life." So that what we need to-day is just what men have always needed. Not pale shadowy abstractions, but Christ. We need a perfect ideal, but He must be real; human, but above all criticism, a sample of what human goodness is in all its truth and completeness.

For such a one the ancient pagans looked in vain. Their spiritual leaders, Socrates and Plato and Marcus Aurelius and the rest, were all great men with faults as great as their genius, and I think in reading the Old Testament most of us have an embarrassed feeling that the Prophets and Patriarchs and Kings could have been a little more edifying than they were. For the best of them was only a type, a watchman in a tower with his eyes fixed on the horizon, waiting to announce the first faint rays of the Sun of Justice.

And now that Christmas Eve is almost upon us, that Sun of Justice is rising again, this time for me. Oh I know that He was born only once and then for all mankind, just as He died only once on Calvary; but I also know that when an infinite treasure of grace is poured out on a finite number of men, it is as

though each one had all, and I know that if I were the only creature living He would have made the self-same sacrifice for me. So too if there were just the Holy Family and myself in the world, there would have been a Bethlehem somewhere, somehow. For I need grace and hope as Adam needed them, though I have them more abundantly than he. I need love in my life, not as Caesar Augustus needed it, but as something I already have and need to keep. Because I was born in the year of Our Lord and not Before Christ, I have grown up from childhood in the warm glow of the Sacred Heart. I've seen the light reflected in my parents' eyes. I've seen it shining in the faces of His great and glorious Saints that look down from the altars. I've seen it in the careworn smiles of His little saints, unknown, beautiful souls that have brushed against me in daily life and left me a better man. I have love, yes, but I need to keep it always.

I need, too, a deeper sense of reality in my life, for I am part of my own generation with all its pretense and claptrap, with all its smartness and its infidelity. And I need first and last, as every man has needed from the beginning, the person of my

Lord; not the gifts He can give me, but Himself. So I listen and watch for His coming. The whole world seems to be listening with me, even those who hate Him. Tomorrow night a lot of careless people who think they have forgotten what it is all about will be crowded in night clubs and saloons celebrating—God forgive them—Christmas Eve. Those around them may be “foolish and clamorous and full of allurements and know nothing at all,” but sometime in the course of the evening they will think of the open fields and the starlit sky and the winding road that leads to a little cave. Even now, two days ahead of time, there are people all over the world wondering in every sort of language whether the little procession has started already from Nazareth; Joseph and Mary, who is with child, and the little neighbor who lingers so persistently in tradition. For the edict of the Emperor has been posted in the marketplace and the roads are full of travelers, each little group going to its own tribal town for the census.

The week has been a busy one for the Holy Family; there was so much to do before they could lock the door and begin the journey. There were some odd re-

pair jobs to be done in the village, a few poor little orders to be filled, tools to be sharpened and packed, and consultations to be held with the neighbors about the roads. Food had to be prepared and the house scrubbed clean from the ground to the roof-tree, because they would certainly be gone a fortnight, perhaps a longer, much longer time. And then there were those other little things which Mary had been preparing through the weeks, as she sat by the fire, spinning and dreaming and weaving her dreams into swaddling clothes. For the Christ Child was not to be wrapped in rags, though He was to lie in a manger. Mary herself may have been threadbare and Joseph in patches for all I know, but Mary's Child was to have all that a poor, thrifty, affectionate Mother could give Him, sweet, fresh swaddling clothes, the work of His own Mother's hands.

So Friday goes and Saturday, and Sunday at dawn they take the road to Jerusalem; first through Cana of Galilee, where the little bride and bridegroom whose wine is to fail them some day are not yet born. Then to Tiberius by the lakeside, a wealthy, miniature Rome full of strange looking painted people

who set the fashions for most of the East, though not for such as the Holy Family. Surely that is no place for them to spend the night, so they make their way without a stop to a camping site on the southern shore of the lake. Monday morning, when they come to the town of Pella, they cross the Jordan because of the hostility of Samaritans for Jews, and travel down the left bank of the river to the shallow ford below Jericho, where some day John the Baptist, now a baby at Elizabeth's breast, will stand knee deep in the water and point Him out to the people as the Lamb of God. Then, early next morning, it is up the steep hill that leads from Jericho to Jerusalem, with a glance back over their shoulders at Mount Nebo, where Moses died, and a few hours later another, a shuddering glance at Mount Calvary, where criminals are always hanging on rough crosses. It is Tuesday now, about noon, as they wind down the road from Bethany, in through the busy gate and the narrow streets to the temple on Mount Moriah. For a devout Jew never passed through the city without a visit to the center of revealed religion. Finally, in the afternoon, they hurry on out through the Joppa

gate, crowded, with merchants and hucksters and down the old limestone road that leads to Hebron, David's first capital, perhaps the oldest road in the world. Twenty-two centuries before that day Abraham had traveled the same road with his flocks, and coming the other way, not much later, Joseph had brought the body of his father, Jacob, back from Egypt. The old road was thronged with memories of romance and bloodshed and triumph; but the greatest day in its history passed without comment or notice. That was this wonderful day when a little band of country folk went trudging along through the limestone dust, and in the band a delicate girl whose unborn Child was God.

The world whisked by absorbed in trifles and ignoring essentials, just as it would today. The world is never impressed except by itself or by one of its own silly shows—and what a show it expected on the birthday of the Messias! For it never occurred to the worldly that He would not be one of themselves and that He would see things, to their way of thinking, upside down. Just as today the world's idea of glory happens to be tin horns and ticker tape and spot-

lights and stupid speeches, so 1900 years ago the best people had their own plans for the Advent of Christ. They thought that Caesar Augustus would sail in his triremes from Rome, with his nobles, his senators, his invincible legions; that Pharaoh would dash up through the deserts from Egypt with thousands of glittering chariots; and that the Medes and the Persians and the far-off Indians with caravans of jeweled elephants and camels would come trailing out of the East with hosts innumerable. And all this power and majesty would meet in the plains of Esdraelon and there with the music of ten thousand silver trumpets and ten thousand rolling drums the heavens would open—and backed by the golden splendor of His Heavenly Court, the Son of Man would come to save His people. Such was the way man had planned it, my dear brethren, poor, cheap, tawdry man! Poor, stupid man, with his eyes full of glitter and his ears full of sounding brass.

It is always so hard for him to grasp God's sense of values. Why, man feels that it was a kind of mortification to Christ to be born and live without the luxuries of the world. "Just think," he says to himself, "He

was only a carpenter. He might have been a king!" Yes, a King—with velvet shoes and oil on his skin, roses on his head and snow in his wine. Why that sort of antique nonsense would be tiresome even to a modern millionaire. What must it have been to God Almighty? Can you think of Christ being unhappy because His Sacred Feet were bare and there were no effeminate rings on His strong, brown fingers? The world says, "Born in a stable! What a dreadful humiliation for the Messias!" Because it doesn't realize that the supreme humiliation was the moment—not of His birth—but of His conception. Having degraded Himself to the point of taking a human form, everything else that happened in His life was trifling by comparison. Of course, a stable seems like a lowly place to us, but to God a stable was not very different from any other shelter in the world except that the beasts who occupied it were sinless beasts. There was a stench, I suppose, but nothing to the stench that rose to the nostrils of God from the palace of Herod. And besides—what else could matter much when He found Himself in the bosom of Mary—the sweetest, cleanest, and most beautiful

place in all the world.

So now it is Christmas Eve and I am all alone outside the cave. This year may have been the saddest I have ever known. I may have lost the one who gave me what color and music there was in my life—or it may have been the gayest, with dear ones returning home safe and sound and unchanged. But in any case, as far as my inner life is concerned, I am alone and waiting with a prayer in my heart for Christmas. Soon, “a Son will be born to us and a child will be given to us;” “the Desired of

Nations” and *my* hope; the beloved of all men, and *my* beloved. A perfect ideal who will satisfy completely—who will satisfy my heart and my head—my learning and my yearning, who will be not only my God but my own particular friend, my very best, perhaps my only Friend. For I’m standing *alone* outside the cave—and the older I am, the more alone I find myself. But Monday, at midnight, when the bells of Christmas ring, Christ will be born to *me*, and with Christ my life on earth is full, and my Eternity.

THE PURPOSE OF THE CATHOLIC HOUR

(Extract from the address of the late Patrick Cardinal Hayes at the inaugural program of the Catholic Hour in the studio of the National Broadcasting Company, New York City, March 2, 1930.)

Our congratulations and our gratitude are extended to the National Council of Catholic Men and its officials, and to all who, by their financial support, have made it possible to use this offer of the National Broadcasting Company. The heavy expense of managing and financing a weekly program, its musical numbers, its speakers, the subsequent answering of inquiries, must be met. . . .

This radio hour is for all the people of the United States. To our fellow-citizens, in this word of dedication, we wish to express a cordial greeting and, indeed, congratulations. For this radio hour is one of service to America, which certainly will listen in interestedly, and even sympathetically, I am sure, to the voice of the ancient Church with its historic background of all the centuries of the Christian era, and with its own notable contribution to the discovery, exploration, foundation and growth of our glorious country. . . .

Thus to voice before a vast public the Catholic Church is no light task. Our prayers will be with those who have that task in hand. We feel certain that it will have both the good will and the good wishes of the great majority of our countrymen. Surely, there is no true lover of our Country who does not eagerly hope for a less worldly, a less material, and a more spiritual standard among our people.

With good will, with kindness and with Christ-like sympathy for all, this work is inaugurated. So may it continue. So may it be fulfilled. This word of dedication voices, therefore, the hope that this radio hour may serve to make known, to explain with the charity of Christ, our faith, which we love even as we love Christ Himself. May it serve to make better understood that faith as it really is—a light revealing the pathway to heaven: a strength, and a power divine through Christ; pardoning our sins, elevating, consecrating our common every-day duties and joys, bringing not only justice but gladness and peace to our searching and questioning hearts.

92 CATHOLIC HOUR STATIONS

In 39 States, the District of Columbia, and Hawaii

Alabama	Birmingham	WBRC*	960 kc
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	Yuma	KYUM	1240 kc
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California	Fresno	KMJ	580 kc
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	San Diego	KFSD	600 kc
	San Francisco	KPO	680 kc
Colorado	Denver	KOA	850 kc
District of Columbia	Washington	WRC	980 kc
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92 CATHOLIC HOUR STATIONS

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North Dakota	Bismarck	KFYR	550 kc
	Fargo	WDAY	970 kc
Ohio	Cincinnati	WSAI*	1360 kc
	Cleveland	WTAM	1100 kc
	Lima	WLOK	1240 kc
Oklahoma	Tulsa	KVOO	1170 kc
Oregon	Medford	KMED	1440 kc
	Portland	KGW*	620 kc
Pennsylvania	Allentown	WSAN	1470 kc
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	Johnstown	WJAC	1400 kc
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	Reading	WRAW	1340 kc
	Wilkes-Barre	WBRE	1340 kc
	Rhode Island	Providence	WJAR
South Carolina	Charleston	WTMA	1250 kc
	Columbia	WIS	560 kc
	Greenville	WFBC	1330 kc
South Dakota	Sioux Falls	KSOO-KELO	1140-1230 kc
Tennessee	Kingsport	WKPT	1400 kc
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	Nashville	WSM*	650 kc
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	Dallas	WFAA	820 kc
	Fort Worth	WBAP*	820 kc
	Houston	KPRC	950 kc
	San Antonio	WOAI	1200 kc
	Weslaco	KRGV	1290 kc
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