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# THE CATHOLIC HOUR

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## THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST AND THE CRISIS OF OUR TIMES

BY

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APAM

## THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST AND THE CRISIS OF OUR TIMES

Several weeks ago a widely-quoted columnist disturbed his readers by asking: "Is it possible that we may be drifting into a new Dark Ages?"

He was answered a few days later by an equally famous colleague who could not understand why anyone need have any doubts.

"We *are* in a new Dark Ages," wrote the latter. "We are in it up to the neck. The question is whether there are sufficient remnants of civilization left to recreate order and security or whether the anarchy that has swallowed most of civilization already will become universal, to the point where the whole world is given over to armed gangs, and no man's property or life is safe anywhere on the globe."\*

Although that is a very harsh indictment of our postwar world, it can scarcely be called exaggerated. Surely, it is one of the bitter ironies of the late war that there is less freedom in the world today, less respect for the human person, more purges and arbitrary arrests and concentration camps than there were when the Hitler-Stalin pact signalled

the start of hostilities in 1939. One would have to go far back into history, perhaps as far back as the fall of the Roman Empire, to find a comparable crisis in civilization. The fact is that modern society is sick unto death. It is sick unto death because it has lost its soul.

We sometimes forget that every society has a soul as well as a body; that is to say, it has a vision of the universe, a code of morals, a religion. Even more than differences of climate, or geography or natural resources, this vision sets one civilization off from another and determines the value of its culture. If the vision is lost, if the citizens forsake the faith of their fathers, the civilization dies, just as a man dies when his soul departs from his body.

This fundamental law of society was the burden of what is, in retrospect, one of the saddest documents of our age. In 1922, the late Pope Pius XI wrote an encyclical on the evils which plagued the nations after the first world war. He pointed out that, although the fighting had long since ceased and the ink had dried on the Treaty of Versailles, there still was no peace.

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\* Dorothy Thompson, New York Post, March 20.

Class was leagued against class, nation against nation, and throughout society life was dominated by a ceaseless search for pleasure, a greedy pursuit of wealth, an unbridled lust for power. Yet, he said, people hungered for peace and order and security, apparently not realizing that their way of life—their Godless education, their desecration of marriage, their bellicose nationalism, their economic systems which widened the gulf between rich and poor—that all these evils were making peace impossible. And so with a cry that came from the bottom of his father's heart, His Holiness spoke this message to the world of the early 1920's: "There is no peace of Christ save in the Kingdom of Christ: there is no surer way of seeking to establish peace than by inaugurating the reign of Christ."

Looking back now we can see that the real cause of the disaster which shattered the world in 1939 was not the exaggerated nationalism of the Nazis, the plotting of the Communists, or the rapacity of the Japanese militarists. These were only the surface causes, the effects of an evil that went much deeper. The modern world failed to make peace after World War I, it failed to avoid a second and more

bloody holocaust, because the modern world had lost its soul. It had denied Jesus Christ and the Kingdom He came to establish.

One day several years ago, when our armies were on the defensive and the cause of the United Nations seemed desperate, the late President of the United States repeated the thought of Pope Pius XI. "The speedy and world-wide establishment of the Kingdom of Christ among men," he told a visiting dignitary, "not only in word but in spirit and in fact, is the only aim to compensate mankind for its sorrows."

That was a beautiful expression of an ideal worthy of a Christian nation—the truest and noblest utterance by any statesman during the entire course of the late war. But what did it mean? What did it mean to the boys who endured a living hell on Guadalcanal, who died in the air over Europe, who sank to their deaths in the South Pacific and the North Atlantic? What did it mean to the people back home who produced the food and armaments which brought us victory? What did it mean to our friends and allies, to the enemies we fought to destroy?

The establishment of the Kingdom of Christ—what does

that mean? It is an appealing phrase, no doubt, one of those romantic phrases which express an idea too good to be true; the sort of idea which poets invent but which has little meaning for the tough world of reality where men and women, with bended back and tired heart, must earn their daily bread.

Ah, but that is the paradox of Christianity: it is a fairy tale too good to be true, but it is true. The Kingdom of Christ is not just poetry. It is no more poetry than the astonishing reality of the coming of the Son of God to earth, than His dwelling amongst us, flesh of our flesh and blood of our blood, for three and thirty years, than His cruel yet inspiring death on the cross.

No, the Kingdom of Christ is a reality that we can recognize, and more than recognize: it is a reality that we can live, just as truly as we live the reality of our everyday lives. All of us, no matter how little we are, or how unimportant we feel, can help to inaugurate, as Pope Pius XI said, the reign of Jesus Christ; we can yet save our tottering civilization by making the Kingdom of Christ the most vivid reality in the modern world.

What does it mean, then, to make Christ rule?

It does not mean what the

enemies of Christ say that it means, that religion craves political power and seeks to dominate the State.

When the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, asked Our Lord during the course of His trial whether or not He was a king, He replied: "Thou sayest it: but My kingdom is not of this world. . . . My kingdom is not from hence." (*John* 18: 37-36). And on another occasion, when the Pharisees sought to trap Him, asking "Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar?" He took a coin, showed them imprinted thereon the image of Caesar and announced: "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's." (*Mark* 12: 13-17).

No, to establish the Kingdom of Christ does not mean to inject the Church into politics. It means something much purer and nobler than that. Quite simply it means to make the teaching of Christ, the commandments and example of Christ, the supreme norm of private and public life.

It means that for each one of us Christ must become the king of our hearts, His teaching the measure of our actions, His life the model and inspiration for our lives.

It means that Christ must rule over our families, His love sanctifying the love between husband and wife, the affection between parents and children; His doctrine dictating the duty of parents toward their offspring, the obedience of children toward father and mother.

It means that Christ must rule in public life: that the State respect the rights of the Church and encourage religion; that elected officials carry out their duties according to the principles of Christ and not the shifting rules of expediency; that educators and doctors and lawyers judge their professional conduct in the pure light of the Gospel; that the leaders of labor and industry and agriculture admit that Christ reigns also in the market-place, and that economic activities are not merely profitable or unprofitable but likewise morally good or morally bad.

This is one sense in which Christ is king of society. And in this sense every human being, unless he is ignorant through no fault of his own, and every government, are obliged to acknowledge the sovereignty of Christ and to advance His Kingdom.

But in another sense, too, Christ rules over society. By His death on the cross He redeemed

all of us. When the gates of Heaven had been closed by the sin of our first parents, He it was Who opened them wide again. We are His, therefore; we belong wholly to Him. We belong to Him so completely that apart from Him there is only rebellion—life without hope or peace or joy.

We can, of course, deny the facts of life. We can refuse, as a large part of the modern world has refused, to acknowledge the Kingdom of Christ. We can depart from the way He has marked out for us and rebelliously go our own way.

For we are free agents, and our King wants the love and allegiance of free men, not the cringing submission of slaves. We must choose once and for all; and we must choose soon. At this critical moment in history, we cannot afford to repeat the blunders which led to two world wars and have brought our civilization to the brink of destruction. Another war, an atomic, a bacteriological war, would be sheer catastrophe.

We want peace desperately, at home and abroad. We want a real peace, not just the absence of war and another twenty-year truce. We want, that is to say, the Peace of Christ.

My dear friends, we can have

the Peace of Christ, but only, as Pope Pius XI insisted, in the Kingdom of Christ. For the soul of our society, the principle by

which it lives and breathes and has its being, the principle the modern world has denied, is Christ Jesus, Our Lord.



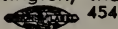
# THE CATHOLIC HOUR

1930—Seventeenth Year—1946

The nationwide Catholic Hour was inaugurated on March 2, 1930, by the National Council of Catholic Men in cooperation with the National Broadcasting Company and its associated stations. Radio facilities are provided by NBC and the stations associated with it; the program is arranged and produced by NCCM.

The Catholic Hour was begun on a network of 22 stations, and now carries its message of Catholic truth on each Sunday of the year through a number of stations varying from 90 to 110, situated in 40 states, the District of Columbia, and Hawaii. Consisting usually of an address, mainly expository, by one or another of America's leading Catholic preachers—though sometimes of talks by laymen, sometimes of dramatizations—and of sacred music provided by a volunteer choir, the Catholic Hour has distinguished itself as one of the most popular and extensive religious broadcasts in the world. An average of 100,000 audience letters a year, about twenty per cent of which come from listeners of other faiths, gives some indication of its popularity and influence.

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