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PROPHETS and KINGS

GREAT SCENES GREAT LINES

by
James M. Gillis, C.S.P.



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GREAT SCENES: GREAT LINES

By

Rev. James M. Gillis, C. S. P.,
Editor of The Catholic World

Nine addresses delivered in the nationwide Catholic Hour
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DEDICATION

This series of talks is respectfully dedicated to those hearers who have always known but were happy to have their attention called once more to the fact that the Sacred Scriptures are an unrivalled source of dramatic and poetic inspiration as well as of Divine Truth.



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MOSES AND PHARAOH

"Let my People Go!" (Exodus 5:1)

Address delivered on November 5, 1939

Those who listened to the Catholic Hour at this season a year ago will perhaps remember that the underlying idea of the discourses delivered at that time was that truth is often more dramatic than fiction, and that playwrights and novelists are blind to great themes in sacred and semi-sacred literature. This year I propose a cognate theme: that in the Bible are such soul-stirring scenes and such magnificent lines as are to be found in no other literary records, imaginative or factual.

Also I have it in mind to show that events which took place two or three thousand years ago are paradoxically as up to the moment as what you have read in the newspaper this morning. The totalitarian state was not born when the Weimar Republic died or when Il Duce marched on Rome in 1922. Totalitarian tyranny existed on the Nile when the Pyramids were built 5,000 years ago.

One more point I hope to illustrate in this discourse and those that are to follow: that when of old a King afflicted the people, a prophet was sent from God to confront him, rebuke him and to be perhaps a martyr in the cause of the people. "It is expedient that one man should die for the people," said Caiphas. To speak and if need be to die for the people is the vocation of a prophet of old and of the priest today.

One of the earliest recorded instances of this three-cornered conflict of king, people, prophet, is



that of Pharaoh, the people of Israel, and Moses. To appreciate that dramatic incident we must have the setting.

It was a dazzling civilization, that of the Pharaohs. Thanks to the preservative power of the sun and the sands of Egypt, a few fragments of its beauty and grandeur remain, and even the fragments are so magnificent as to seem incredible. At the pyramids, the tombs of the kings, the colossi and the temples at Thebes, the sun blazes so fiercely that we might imagine we were seeing a mirage on the desert. In the museum at Cairo, when we are shown the jewels, the furniture, the chariots, the upholstery, the fine fabrics, the designs, engravings, paintings buried with Tutankhamen, 3,300 years ago, we might be tempted to think ourselves victims of a hoax, that these things must be modern. But the pyramids, the tombs, the temples, are no mirage. The Great Pyramid of Gizeh covers thirteen acres, contains 2,300,000 blocks of limestone, each one weighing two and a half tons. It is 500 feet high and measures 750 feet at every one of the four sides of its base. There it has been since 2900 B. C. The Great Temple at Karnak is a quarter of a mile long, with the greatest colonnaded hall ever built in ancient or modern times, with carved columns 68 feet high crowned with capitals wide enough to support one hundred standing men.

Besides the temples and the palaces, there remains the ground plan of gardens as spacious and beautiful as those of Versailles in the days of Louis XIV, of Schonbrunn at Vienna in the heyday of the Hapsburgs, or at Kioto where the Emperor who calls himself God takes the air of an afternoon.

Clustered thickly about the Great Pyramid are

tombs of massive cut stone carved and painted from floor to ceiling with scenes of ancient Egyptian life. Jewelers, cabinet makers, merchants, are represented displaying their wares to a rich man. The actual wares, jewels and objects of art, are to be seen in the museum of Cairo, together with chairs and couches "overlaid with gold and silver, inlaid with ebony and ivory, upholstered with soft leather cushions,"* royal linens so fine that a microscope must be used to distinguish them from silk, softer and of a more delicate weave than the best product of the modern machine loom, fabrics finer than those beautiful specimens exhibited by France and Belgium and Italy at the recent World's Fair in New York. There too you may see a bowl of diorite, a stone hard as steel, ground so thin as to be translucent. And this, remember, was 3,000 years ago when your ancestors and mine were little better than cave men.

Over this magnificent Empire ruled the Pharaohs who were supposed to be sons of the gods with no blood but the divine in their veins. Pharaoh was regarded as an object of religious awe. His rule was absolute. He was master of life and death, his decisions were subject to no revision. His subjects accepted his edicts as unquestioningly as the dictates of Ammon Ra the Sun God, or of Osiris and Isis, god and goddess of the earth, children of Seb the god of the sky. The commands of such a king were to them like the law that makes the sun rise and set or the Nile to overflow.

Now we read in the Book of Genesis that a young Hebrew, Joseph, found favor with the Pharaoh of his day, and that the King said to him: "Thou shalt

*Breasted. *Ancient Times*. P. 65.

be over my house, and at the commandment of thy mouth all the people shall obey; only in the kingly throne will I be above thee. . . . Behold, I have appointed thee over the whole land of Egypt. And he took his ring from his own hand, and gave it into his hand: and put upon him a robe of silk, and put a chain of gold around his neck. And he made him go up into his second chariot, the crier proclaiming that all should bow their knee before him, and that they should know he was made governor over the whole land of Egypt. And the king said to Joseph: I am Pharaoh; without thy commandment no man shall move hand or foot in all the land of Egypt."

But an absolute monarch may be fickle. His mood may change like the wind; blowing a zephyr today and a hurricane tomorrow. Also a kind monarch may be succeeded by a cruel monarch. About 1500 B. C. there came to the throne of the Pharaohs Thutmose III, a kind of ancient Napoleon with a mania for conquest. He spent 20 years at war conquering and crushing the cities and kingdoms of Asia adjacent to Africa. The inevitable occurred: troubles abroad and dissension at home. The conquered nations revolted. There was disloyalty among the priests and treason among the soldiers. Into a situation of that kind stepped Rameses II, the Pharaoh with whom Moses had to deal. Perhaps because of natural disposition, perhaps because of his troubles, he oppressed the peoples under him, and he was especially ruthless with the Hebrews. The Book of Exodus says he "hated the children of Israel, and afflicted them and mocked them: And made their life bitter with hard works in clay, and brick, and with all manner of service, wherewith they were over-charged in the works of

the earth," and that finally he commanded all male children born to the Hebrews to be cast into the river. Now it happened that a man of the house of Levi had a son by a wife of his own kindred. She concealed the babe for a time but finally made a basket of bulrushes, daubed it with slime and pitch, placed him therein and laid him in the hedges by the river's brim.

But the story is too familiar to need retelling. The daughter of Pharaoh rescued the child, adopted him as her son and called him Moses. He grew up, educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. In spite of the phrase, "Meek as Moses," he had a fiery temper. Seeing an Egyptian striking a Hebrew, he killed the Egyptian and fled into the land of Madian where he married.

From that point the drama develops swiftly and tragically. Living in outward peace and quiet, he cannot but hear in his soul the groanings of his brethren left behind in Egypt. One day on the Mountain of Horeb the Lord appears to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: a fire that burned but did not consume. He hears the voice of the Lord, "Moses, Moses. And he answered, Here I am." The Lord warns him, "Come not nigh hither, put off the shoes from thy feet: for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground . . . I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses "hid his face for he durst not look at God." He is told to go back into Egypt to confront the Pharaoh and bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt.

Now *there* is a scene for a Shakespeare or a Sophocles: a foundling, a fugitive from Egyptian justice, a hired shepherd in a foreign land, com-

manded to walk defenseless into the court of an Oriental despot whose person was sacrosanct, whose court was guarded, double and treble guarded against intrusion, a king cruel and rapacious who, with a word, the lifting of an eyebrow, the movement of a finger, could condemn even a Grand Vizier to torture and death.

Moses protests to God that even his own people will not understand: "They will not believe me, nor hear my voice, but they will say: The Lord hath not appeared to thee." God makes naught of the protestations, but bestows upon His hesitant instrument the power of miracles. Moses assembles the ancients of the Hebrews and the people and persuades them that his message is of God. He goes in to Pharaoh and declares: "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel: Let my people go . . ." The King replies: "Who is the Lord, that I should hear his voice, and let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go." But Moses with increasing insistence cries: "Let my people go."

My friends it is a pity that this magnificently dramatic scene has been presented to the present generation of Americans as if it were no more than a folk legend of the colored people. "Green Pastures" contrived somehow to be reverent and to produce a spiritual effect, but it was after all a crude burlesque. But I can imagine what Shakespeare, or Racine, or preferably Corneille, the great French master of dramatic eloquence and majesty, might have made of that scene, and how tremendous it could be in the hands of an Edwin Booth, a Lawrence Barrett, or an Alexander Salvini.

If some modern playwright has the courage to venture it, I would suggest that he indicate in his

lines and in the development of the plot the fact that here, 3,500 years ago, was a champion of an oppressed people demanding what we call nowadays social justice, from an autocrat who had no more concept of that virtue than of Democracy or Political equality or of the inalienable rights of the poor and the helpless.

In the sphere of oratory we have Cicero in a terrifying denunciation of Catiline, Demosthenes whipping the Athenians into wild resentment against Philip of Macedon; in drama the mad King Lear apostrophizing the heavens, Macbeth the murderer challenging and defying Macduff. We have Mark Antony's harangue to the Roman mob over the dead body of Caesar; and the thunderous outbursts of Othello and Coriolanus. But why has no dramatist of the first rank exercised his talent upon the superb scene of the shepherd from the land of Madianites standing before the greatest of all kings of the earth, the most high and mighty potentate, Pharaoh the absolute, Pharaoh the Sun-God on Earth, and demanding of this fabulously powerful pseudo-god, "Let my people go!"

James Henry Breasted to whom we are indebted for a vivid presentation of the history of the Pharaohs, says that when we travel southward from the Delta of the Nile "we read the monuments along the great river like a vast historical volume whose pages will tell us age after age the fascinating story of ancient man and all that he achieved here so many thousands of years ago." "Such," he says, "are the thoughts which occupy the mind of the well-informed traveller." But with all due respect to the illustrious scholar, may I say that such were not my thoughts when I saw the ruins of the ancient glory

of Egypt. What I felt in Greece and Egypt and Syria and Palestine I wrote down and beg to quote:

“Those temples and statues had been erected by helots, slaves, of whom there were perhaps 200,000 in Greece. Today the guide calls the roll of the men of genius who made Athens the wonder of the world: Pericles, Phidias, Praxiteles, Themistocles, and all the other familiar names. But no mention is made of the drachmas extracted from the poor, or of the sweat and blood that went into the building of those superb monuments to false gods. So at Baalbek, so at Heliopolis, so at the Pyramids, so at Thebes, and Karnak, and at the tombs of the kings, so in Rome at the Forum and the Colosseum. No one seems to think of the slaves, who were whipped and driven and beaten and murdered in the building of the great monuments to human genius—and human vanity.”

St. Paul in Athens, I am sure, was less impressed by the magnificent architecture of the Parthenon and the beauty of the sculptures of Phidias and Praxiteles than horrified by the superstition, the slave labor, and the tyrannical oppression of the human soul even in glorious Greece. But Moses, more than a thousand years earlier, had anticipated the horror and the indignation of St. Paul.

That is what was in my mind as I looked at the Pyramids, the Sphinx, and at the lavish display of gold, precious stones, exquisitely fashioned objects of art and craft, that remain to testify to the magnificence of the Pharaohs. There is blood on every one of the millions of limestone blocks in the Pyramids; blood on those stupendous columns of the temple of Karnak; blood on the walls of the palaces of the kings, blood in the soil of the gardens

of the Grand Vizier; the blood of the people who were whipped with scourges or bastinadoed. Not all the beauty and the glory and the majesty of art and architecture and sculpture can atone for the oppression of the people by the Pharaohs and the Ptolemies, by Pericles, Caesar, Napoleon, and by dictators who in our own day care not how much misery is caused by their mad passion to build monuments—architectural monuments or political monuments—to their own vanity and to what they call the “glory” of their nation.

When Moses stood before the mighty Pharaoh and made the demand “Let my people go!”, he meant not merely that the Israelites should be set free to go “out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage,” but that God’s poor people 3,000 years ago, today, and always, should be allowed to go out from under the hand of tyranny, free from the oppression, injustice, physical and mental cruelty, laid upon them by kings, dictators, generals who seem so absorbed in plans for the aggrandizement of nations that they are blind to justice and mercy and right.

I think it therefore not fantastic or even unduly imaginative to hold that Moses was the first great prophet of God to champion the people when he spoke to that Egyptian potentate the words that have come down to us for 3,000 years, and that may well serve as an everlasting paradigm for those who fight the battles of the people against the tyrants, “Let my people go!”

THE PEOPLE TO SAMUEL

"Make Us a King, to Judge Us, as All Nations Have" (1 Kings 8:5)

Address delivered on November 12, 1939

In ancient times and medieval, in fact as late as the American and French Revolutions, the peoples of the world in general held a superstitious reverence for the person of a king. It didn't seem to matter much what kind of king he was, good or bad, kind or cruel, wise or foolish; once he was king, nobles, courtiers, ministers of state, "lords and ladies of high degree," prostrated themselves before him. As for the common people, they thought themselves privileged if they could so much as catch a glimpse of their king as he rode out in state or showed himself momentarily on a high balcony to acknowledge the cheers of the rabble. He might tax them near to starvation in order to assure luxury in food and drink to the royal table: he might maintain a dozen superb palaces and move from one to the other whenever he felt ennui, while the poor people had to be content year in and year out with their one same stinking hovel. Perhaps they whimpered a little, secretly, but in their hearts they were proud to know that their king lived magnificently and kept a more extravagant court than any rival monarch.

I say it didn't matter whether he was good or bad, wise or foolish. Nor did they ask whether he had come to the throne by lawful succession or by usurpation and assassination, whether he was a mighty warrior like Richard the Lion-Hearted or a

lily-livered coward like Charles of Orleans who had to be shamed into a show of courage by the peasant girl Joan of Arc; he might be a superb specimen of physical strength like Charlemagne or a spindle-shanked, knock-kneed, chicken-breasted caricature of a human being, like the king in Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*; he might be as wise as Haroun-al-Raschid of the Arabian Nights or as stupid as Louis XVI, who didn't know enough to run away on time; he might be a saint like Louis IV of France or a beast and a bluebeard like Henry VIII of England; an atheist like Frederick the Great or as superstitious as Louis XI; a scholar and a philosopher like Justinian, a doddering imbecile like George III, or quite mad like Rudolf of Hapsburg. Nothing mattered. As king he was idolized by princes and people. They kowtowed to him, heads of the oldest and proudest families waited upon him, basked in his smile or trembled at his frown, kissed his hand, the hem of his garment, the earth his royal foot had touched; went forth to battle for him, bled and died for him; died happy with his name on their lips even though it were the name of a coward, a roue, an ingrate. In a word, kings have received through the centuries such devotion as few men have given to God.

Now, it was perhaps for this reason that God had willed that His own people should have no king. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob were not kings. Moses was no king. He led the people out from under the rod of that most absolute king, the Pharaoh, and made neither himself nor any other man king. For 400 years after the Israelites came into their own land, they had no king. The Jewish state was not a kingdom, not an empire, nor yet a democracy or an

aristocracy. It was a theocracy. "We have no king but God," the Jews explained to the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Philistines, and all other peoples with whom they came into contact. It was later, much later, that they were to utter the blasphemy, "We have no king but Caesar"; and that ignoble protestation was, in the judgment of every faithful Jew then and now, a sign that the lowest possible depth of national degeneracy had been reached. "No king but Caesar!" from the lips of a people whose peculiar glory it had been to have no king but God.

But in the course of time the inevitable happened. Driven by the irrational impulse to have a man of flesh and blood upon whom to lavish their adulation, the people of Israel sent a delegation of the Elders to Samuel, the last of the Judges, first of the Prophets. And they said to him, "Make us a king . . . as all nations have." In Samuel's ears the demand sounded sacrilegious. This was apostasy. He reasoned with them, expostulated, warned, wept, uttered dire prophecies. But like all the wilful, who have no argument but reiteration, they insisted "Make us a king. All nations have a king. Make *us* a king!" Samuel prayed to the Lord and the Lord said to him, "They have not rejected thee, but me, that I should not reign over them. Now therefore hearken to their voice" (I *Kings* 8:7, 9).

So Samuel agreed that they should have a king; but being honest and wise, he warned them: "This will be the right of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and put them in his chariots, and will make them his horsemen, and his running footmen to run before his chariots. And he will appoint of them to be his tribunes, and

centurions, and to plough his fields, and to reap his corn, and to make him arms and chariots. Your daughters also he will take to make him ointments, and to be his cooks, and bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your best oliveyards, and give them to his servants. Moreover he will take the tenth of your corn, and of the revenues of your vineyards, to give his eunuchs and servants. Your servants also and handmaids, and your goodliest young men, and your asses he will take away, and put them to his work. Your flocks also he will tithe, and you shall be his servants. And you shall cry out in that day from the face of the king, whom you have chosen to yourselves: and the Lord will not hear you in that day, because you desired unto yourselves a king" (I *Kings* 8:11-18).

But the people, stiffnecked then as in later days when Jesus was to apply the term to them, only cried the more, "Nay: but there shall be a king over us" (I *Kings* 8:19).

They got their king, and with him they got what Samuel had prophesied—and more. First, they had Saul who commenced well enough, but couldn't stand the demoralizing effect of too much power. His head turned by victories in battle, he came to consider himself above and beyond obedience to God, like other kings, ancient and modern, who think themselves like Nietzsche's superman "beyond good and evil."

God, however, had not abdicated. "I will give thee a king in my wrath," He said, "and will take him away in my indignation" (*Osee* 13:11). Samuel confronted Saul, rebuked him, and went in search of a king after God's own heart. David is discovered, secretly anointed by Samuel; he joins the

army of Saul against the Philistines, engages Goliath in single combat, kills the braggart giant, hears the ecstatic cry of the people: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands" (I *Kings* 21:11).

Saul becomes jealous, morose, vindictive, insane. He hurls a javelin at David in the attempt to transfix him to the wall. David escapes the king, flees the court, is befriended and protected by the magnanimous Jonathan, the king's son. The king, now mad with rage, orders the soldiers to kill David, and attempts to murder his own son Jonathan. The Jews had a king, a mad king, a murderer king, but a king. David, now a fugitive, is "hunted like a partridge in the mountains." Outcast from both Jews and Philistines, he becomes a desperado, and gathers all malcontents into a band of outlaws at the Cave of Adullam. He attains the throne. Giant-killer, hero, harpist, poet, forever famous as the composer of the most soulful poetry ever written, the Psalms, he none the less succumbs to the temptation of kings. He becomes a merciless slaughterer. Conquering Rabbath, he takes that king's crown, "the weight of which was a talent of gold" (II *Kings* 12:30), and has it placed upon his own head. As for the people, "he sawed them, and drove over them chariots armed with iron: and divided them with knives, and made them pass through brickkilns: so did he to all the cities of the children of Ammon" (II *Kings* 12:31). The white-haired boy, youngest son of Benjamin, has come a long way since the days of the pebble and the sling shot.

Likewise he becomes an adulterer and a murderer. After the assassination of Uriah and his marriage to Bethsabee, a son is born of the union—

Solomon. He succeeds to the throne of his father, and proceeds to live in such magnificence as to out-rival the kings of Egypt and Babylon. Such splendor as that of the court of Solomon astonished visiting royalty, the King of Tyre and the Queen of Saba. They had heard rumors of the more than Oriental opulence and magnificence of the court at Jerusalem, but when they came they exclaimed, "We were not told the half of it."

Now this was what the people wanted, a king who could dazzle the heathen monarchs with pomp and splendor. For the details of that splendor you must read half a dozen chapters in the Third Book of Kings: the bare recitation of Solomon's possessions and his achievements would take twenty or thirty minutes of the rapidest possible speech.

But again the inevitable happened: the great king went after strange women. He married heathens, the daughter of Pharaoh, Moabites, Edomites, Hittites. In all he took to himself 700 wives and 300 concubines. With the women came their gods. Idolatry was established; the abomination of desolation was found on the Mount of Sion a thousand years before Pompey brought in the Roman eagles.

Solomon's magnificent expenditures were not made without the usual cruelty and rapacity. When he died the people came to Roboam his son and said, "Thy father laid a grievous yoke upon us: now therefore do thou take off a little. . . . of his most heavy yoke . . . and we will serve thee." But Roboam after teasing them with a three days' delay, gave his verdict, "My father beat you with whips, but I will beat you with scorpions" (*III Kings* 12:14).

So once again the people of God had a king, a

magnificent king, but an oppressor of the people, a bloodsucker, a wise man turned fool (the worst kind of fool, an old fool), a renegade, a worshipper of Baal and Astaroth and of a dozen other obscene gods and goddesses.

Some historians call Solomon the Louis XIV of ancient times. Perhaps he was. At least he could say with Louis, "after me the deluge." When Solomon died the kingdom was split in twain. Rivals for both thrones abounded and there occurred the usual intrigues, treacheries, assassinations, civil wars and all the other tragic and sordid accompaniments and consequences of the rule of kings. In the end the Jews, disunited, disorganized, demoralized, were conquered, led away into captivity, oppressed, impoverished, slaughtered, dispersed amongst the Gentiles, and so they have remained to this day.

What would have been the fulfillment of their vocation as the people of God had they kept God for their ruler, we can only surmise. But it is safe to say that if they had held fast to God and been content with God, the history of the world would have been happier. Kings have been responsible for most of the woes of their peoples. When I say kings, I mean leaders with autocratic power, by whatever name they may be called, Pharaohs, Ptolemies, Grand Moguls, Khedives, Shahs, Caesars, Emperors, Kaisers, Czars, Duces, Fuehrers, men with a mania for rule, intoxicated with power, mad with ambition; conquerors, reaching out always for more worlds to conquer, deluding themselves and their people with the insane fancy, a thousand times proved false, that more land, more wealth, more power, more possessions, in a word, more magnificence, brings happiness.

Truly it is a wonder that any intelligent people after fifty centuries of history should still be deceived with the everlasting hallucinations that breed in the brains of kings, generals, conquerors, premiers, politicians and other megalomaniacs. It is said of one dynasty, the Bourbons, that they "forgot nothing and learned nothing." It would seem that people who place a man over them, give him autocratic power, and then follow him blindly, are stupider than the Bourbons: such people forget everything and learn nothing. It is for that reason that we still have wars as they had as far back as the record runs, on the stone tablets of Egypt or on the bricks of Babylonia.

It is a commonplace utterance that "the people don't want war." We don't want war: the French people, the English people, the Italian people, the German people, the Russian people, don't want war. Well then, who *does* want war? Some king, or in these days some one with another and more deceptive title who possesses the power once held by kings. *He* wants war. The calamity is that the people who don't want war, seem to want *him*. Like the Israelites of 3,000 years ago, they say "make us a king . . . to go out before us, and fight our battles for us . . . as all nations have" (I *Kings* 8:6, 20).

Think not I have in mind only the most obvious present instance of war-mad leaders. These are not the first and only men who, because of a delusion of grandeur, led their people to war against their will.

If they are mad, Bismarck was mad, and Wilhelm I and Napoleon and Disraeli and Queen Victoria, Queen Elizabeth, the war lords of the Orient and all other "Empire makers," who not content with a small people and a small nation go wild with imperialistic ambitions. Julius Caesar, Pompey the Great,

Mark Antony, Alexander, Genghis Khan, Thutmose III, they are all of the same breed, all stricken with the same insanity, the same mania for expansion, expansion, ever wider expansion, unmindful of the fable of the frog who blew himself up so big that he burst. Rome that was a little city gobbled up alien lands and alien people. Then the alien lands and alien peoples gobbled up Rome. There is the history of the world in a sentence.

The people as the people are not crazy for empire. But it is a laurel upon the brow of Caesar if he comes back from the wars and makes a present of Gaul and Spain and Britain to the Senate. It is a feather in the cap of Disraeli, a ribbon for his neck and a medal on his chest when he proudly throws India into the lap of Victoria, tickling her vanity with the salutation "Empress."

Now it was the first item in the program of the founding fathers of America to get rid of a king, and with the king, all kingly mania for extravagance, ostentation, conquest, empire, and as a means to the fulfillment of these lunatic ambitions, war.

It may seem harking pretty far back to Samuel and Saul and Solomon to find a warning for America. But that wonderful old Bible is a universal and timeless revelation. The history of men and the world is in that Book. Yes and of kings and wars. He who runs may read, but he who sits down and quietly reflects may read better.

Always therefore and especially in the present hectic condition of the world, we should sit down quietly with the Bible and permit the Divine Revelation to sink into our souls as a preliminary to the formation of a judgment as to what we shall think and what we shall do in regard to peace and war.

In particular I suggest a re-reading of the four Books of the Kings of Israel in which are incorporated "The Books of the Ways of the Kings of Israel," and then by way of contrast the Four Gospels of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

NATHAN TO DAVID

"Thou Art the Man" (II Kings, 12:7)

Address delivered on November 19, 1939

The institution of kingship has, historically, rested upon many fictions. The Pharaohs of Egypt and other ancient Oriental kings claimed to be sons of the gods. As such they were held to be in the strict sense of the word "Divine." Among savage tribes the king as god was supposed to be invulnerable. If an archer shot an arrow at the heart of a king, the arrow would be miraculously diverted in mid-air. If a warrior poised a battle axe to cleave the skull of a king, the warrior's arm would be paralyzed; the axe would fall harmless to the ground. Do I say savages held that superstition? Napoleon Bonaparte believed it. "There's such divinity doth hedge a king that treason can but peep to what it would," says the king in Hamlet when Laertes with sword unsheathed comes rushing at him. Kipling's Tommy Atkins in *The Man Who Would Be King* was "doing fine" at the job until one of the women of the tribe bit him, and the blood flowed. As late as the seventeenth century, kings were supposed to share in the prerogatives of the Deity, and to possess miraculous powers. King James of England defended the doctrine of the divine right of kings against St. Robert Bellarmine, and a hundred years later so intelligent a man as Doctor Johnson believed that the king's touch could cure scrofula.

But worst of all the fictions invented to bolster up the thrones of kings was the axiom that "the king can do no wrong." Modern experts in constitu-

tional law explain that axiom as being true only in a very much modified sense, but in ancient times it was taken literally. Only a generation or two ago Nietzsche said that a king, if he were ruthless enough, was beyond good or evil. Even to this very moment you may find persons who hold to a double standard of morals; a lenient one for kings and a strict one for common clay. In the statute books of all countries ruled by royalty, irreverence to the king, *lese majeste*, is considered a kind of political sacrilege.

There is, I believe, only one people of ancient times who recognized that kings are essentially no better than other men, and only one ancient document in which the sins and crimes of kings are honestly revealed and vigorously castigated. That people was the Jews: that document, the Bible. In the Book of Wisdom we read the words spoken by Solomon to disabuse the people of the idea that a king is a supernatural being.

“I myself also am a mortal man, like all *others*, and of the race of him, that was first made of the earth, and in the womb of my mother I was fashioned to be flesh . . . I was compacted in blood, of the seed of man . . . And being born I drew in the common air, and fell upon the earth . . . and the first voice which I uttered was crying, as all *others* do. I was nursed in swaddling clothes, and with great cares. For none of the kings had any other beginning of birth. For all men have one entrance into life, and the like going out” (*Wisdom* 7:1-6).

Being a man born of woman the king is not above right and wrong: “Hear therefore, ye kings,” says the writer of *Wisdom*, “and understand: learn,

ye that are judges of the ends of the earth. Give ear, you that rule the people . . . Power is given you by the Lord, and strength by the most High, who will examine your works, and search out your thoughts: Because being ministers of his kingdom, you have not judged rightly, nor kept the law of justice, nor walked according to the will of God. Horribly and speedily will he appear to you: for a most severe judgment shall be for them that bear rule. For to him that is little, mercy is granted: but the mighty shall be mightily tormented. For God will not except any man's person, neither will he stand in awe of any man's greatness: for he made the little and the great, and he hath equally care of all. But a greater punishment is ready for the more mighty. To you, therefore, O kings, are these my words, that you may learn wisdom, and not fall from it" (*Wisdom* 6:2-10).

These admonitions were not empty words. If a king of Judah or of Israel sinned, he was openly rebuked by the prophets, sometimes deposed, punished and humiliated before the people. Whereas on the royal tombs in Egypt we find inscriptions that have perpetuated for thirty centuries the sickening self-praise of the Pharaohs, in the Bible we find such forthright condemnation of royal sin and vice as this:

"When Solomon was now old, his heart was turned away by women to follow strange gods. . . . But Solomon worshipped Astarthe the goddess of the Sidonians, and Moloch the idol of the Ammonites. And Solomon did that which was not pleasing before the Lord, and did not fully follow the Lord. . . . And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because

his mind was turned away from the Lord the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not follow strange gods: but he kept not the things which the Lord commanded him. The Lord therefore said to Solomon: "Because thou hast done this, and hast not kept my covenant, and my precepts, which I have commanded thee, I will divide and rend thy kingdom, and will give it to thy servant" (III *Kings* 11:4-11).

The Sacred Scripture speaks of King David, Solomon's father, as a man after God's own heart. But that same Scripture with relentless honesty does not hesitate to expose the sins of that "man of God," as we shall presently see.

Nor is this biblical frankness to be found only in the Old Testament. The Gospels record the weaknesses, the sins, the cowardice, and the treachery of the Apostles of Jesus Christ, yes even of the prince of the Apostles, the first pope, Simon Peter.

I have often wondered whether certain pietistic writers of church history, of saints' lives, and of ecclesiastical chronicles have ever read the Bible; and if they have, why they follow so different a method from that of those who wrote under the Divine Inspiration. Too many writers, and be it added speakers, seem to have a phobia in regard to unpleasant truth. If they meet an unedifying fact, they shy away from it with the nervousness of a skittish horse. The four Evangelists are not so timorous.

Nor do they make use of the coward's device of vagueness and anonymity. Reading the 23rd chapter of St. Matthew, we can almost see our Sav-

ior pointing the finger at certain persons in the crowd and hear Him saying, "Hypocrites! I mean you, you that wear the broad badges of piety, you that accept the salutes of the people in the market place; you with the long fringes on your garments; you with sanctimonious words upon your lips, you Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, dignitaries in Church and State, you whited sepulchres!" In these less robust days it would be considered not nice of a preacher of the Word of God to hurl such vituperation full in the face of men in authority. It isn't done. It simply isn't done.

As for the sins of the Apostles: if the Gospel story had been committed to the pen of one of our modern hush-hush school of pietistic writers, I doubt if we would ever have heard of the story of Judas, apostate suicide apostle, and I am quite sure we would not have known that St. Peter in a miserable funk cursed and swore that he had never known Jesus Christ. As for Mary Magdalene: her name and her shame would be discreetly omitted. Indeed some overly timid censors if they had their way would probably delete the names of Pontius Pilate and King Herod, on the theory that since those functionaries represented the State, it might be subversive of the established order to speak disparagingly of them. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John would be censored and expurgated until all the color and life and truth were gone out of them. To such censors our Savior, I think, would say "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" What God has permitted to happen shall not man be permitted to know? Nothing is more disedifying or scandalous than fear of the truth. Suppression of truth is often

equivalent to a lie, and the use of roundabout phraseology is a mark of mental and moral cowardice.

Be that as it may, the Bible—thank God—has not yet been bowdlerized. If it had been, we should have lost one of the finest stories of all time, the story of the crime of King David, his rebuke by the prophet Nathan, his repentance, and the consequent outpouring of his heart in the moving eloquence of the penitential psalms.

We have in an earlier discourse spoken of the character of David as king. But as man, poet, saint, sinner, his personality is best revealed in that incomparable masterpiece of spiritual literature, the Psalms. If, as Buffon said, the style is the man, with more reason we may say that the book is the man. And says Rowland Prothero:*

“The Book of Psalms contains the whole music of the heart of man, swept by the hand of his Maker. In it are gathered the lyrical burst of his tenderness, the moan of his penitence, the pathos of his sorrow, the triumph of his victory, the despair of his defeat, the firmness of his confidence, the rapture of his assured hope. In it is presented the anatomy of all parts of the human soul; in it are collected ‘sunrise and sunset, birth and death, promise and fulfillment—the whole drama of humanity.’

“In the Psalms is painted, for all time, in fresh unfading colors, the picture of the moral warfare of man, often baffled yet never wholly defeated, struggling upwards to all that is best and highest in his nature, always aware how short of the aim falls the attempt, how great is the gulf that severs the wish from its fulfillment . . .”

*The Psalms in Human Life.

As in the Psalms all phases and moods of the inner life are recorded, so in the character of David all human characteristics are to be found: "passion, tenderness, generosity, fierceness; he is at once soldier, shepherd, poet, king, romantic friend, chivalrous leader, devoted father,"* man of God and man of flesh and blood.

Now though it seem to some a scandal to admit that such a man became guilty of adultery and murder the writer of the Books of Kings felt no scruple about revealing the ugly fact, and the Holy Spirit God inspired him to tell the whole truth about it.

David, having won many battles and established his kingdom, relaxes, abandons his early austerity, pampers his flesh with luxuries, and the inevitable occurs. Off guard, his mind and imagination on the loose, he falls victim to passion, commits adultery with the wife of a friend, Urias the Hethite. The victimized husband becomes suspicious, returns from the field of battle, camps upon the doorstep of the royal palace, refuses to enter his own home and meet the wife who had been debauched by the king. David resorts to a ruse that has been used, I suppose, a thousand times by murderers who have not the courage to kill an innocent man with their own hands: he sends Urias back to battle bearing a letter to Joab the general with the command, "Set ye Urias in the front of the battle, where the fight is strongest: and leave ye him, that he may be wounded and die" (II Kings 11:15). Adultery, cowardice, treachery, murder on the soul of the man after God's own heart!

But, as St. Paul was to say later, "Be not de-

*Smith, Bible Dictionary: S. V. David.

ceived, God is not mocked" (*Gal. 6:7*). Nor is He a respecter of persons. He sends Nathan the prophet to the king. If Nathan, like Moses before him and Jeremias and Isaias after him, feared to confront the mighty one, God answered his protestations as He did those of Jeremias when that hesitant messenger cried "Ah, Ah, Ah, Lord God: behold, I cannot speak, for I am a child." "Say not: I am a child," answers the Lord, "for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee: and whatsoever I shall command thee, thou shalt speak. Be not afraid at [his] presence: for I am with thee . . . saith the Lord" (*Jeremias 1:6-8*).

When Nathan was come to David he spoke to him in a parable: "There were two men in one city, the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many sheep and oxen. But the poor man had nothing at all but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up, and which had grown up in his house together with his children, eating of his bread, and drinking of his cup, and sleeping in his bosom: and it was unto him as a daughter. And when a certain stranger was come to the rich man, he spared to take of his own sheep and oxen, to make a feast for that stranger, who was come to him, but took the poor man's ewe, and dressed it for the man that was come to him.

"And David's anger being exceedingly kindled against that man, he said to Nathan: As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this is a child of death . . . And Nathan said to David: Thou art the man" (*II Kings 12:1-7*).

David is stricken silent, but the relentless prophet continues, rehearses in detail the sins of the

King, and declares in the name of God that the King who had sinned secretly should be punished "in the sight of all Israel, and in the sight of the sun" (II *Kings* 12:12).

And David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord" (II *Kings* 12:13).

Not only the people of Israel know that story. It has become the common heritage of Jews, Mohammedans, Christians, believers and unbelievers, the devout and the scoffers; to the impenitent and the reprobate it is one more cause for mockery, but an encouragement to uncounted souls in the last thirty centuries who have, like David, felt the sting of the flesh or even the impulse to kill, while in the depth of their souls they cherish the fear and the love of God. It is a bewildering psychological mystery, the coexistence of the beast, the lecherous and murderous beast, and the angel at the same time in the same man. Those who do not know what is in man deny its possibility; those who are ashamed to admit what baseness a man, even a good holy man can do, would be in favor of suppressing all evidence of the simultaneous presence of the divine and the diabolic in the soul. But God Himself has not seen fit to sacrifice truth and fact in the interest of prudery and timidity. As always, God knows best: the David-Nathan incident has been for all these centuries an answer to those who complain that sin in high places, always goes unrebuked; and it has been also a comfort and a consolation to those who like St. Paul have to confess that in them "the flesh lusteth against the spirit: and the spirit against the flesh" (*Gal.* 5:17). Sometimes they feel a dejection that casts them down as it were into the pit with

the damned, and again a mystic exaltation that bears them aloft almost to the realms of the blessed. But in sorrow and joy, in the depths of grief and on the golden peaks of exultation, they find their mood in the Psalms of David, and express themselves in his words. They cry now *De Profundis* and again *Jubilate* and *Gaudete*. They pray, "Rebuke me not, O Lord, in thy indignation; nor chastise me in thy wrath. For thy arrows are fastened in me: and thy hand hath been strong upon me. There is no health in my flesh, because of thy wrath: there is no peace for my bones, because of my sins. For my iniquities are gone over my head: and as a heavy burden are become heavy upon me. My sores are putrified and corrupted, because of my foolishness. I am become miserable, and am bowed down even to the end: I walked sorrowful all the day long. For my loins are filled with illusions; and there is no health in my flesh. I am afflicted and humbled exceedingly: . . . Lord, all my desire is before thee, and my groaning is not hidden from thee" (*Psalm 37:2-10*).

The Lord hears them; and they cry: "Shout with joy to God, all the earth, sing ye a psalm to his name . . . Let all the earth adore thee, and sing to thee: let it sing a psalm to thy name . . . O bless our God, ye Gentiles: and make the voice of his praise to be heard. Who hath set my soul to live . . . Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will tell you what great things he hath done for my soul . . . Therefore hath God heard me, and hath attended to the voice of my supplication. Blessed be God, who hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me" (*Psalm 65:1-20*).

And so, as an evidence that kings and other

powerful persons are to be rebuked by prophets and priests of God: as well as for the inspiration our own soul may obtain from this story of sin and repentance, this drama at once sordid and beautiful, let us be thankful that we have not been deprived of the incident of the rebuke administered to David by Nathan the man sent by God.

DANIEL TO BALTASSAR

"The Writing I Will Read to Thee, O King!"
(Daniel 5:17)

Address delivered on November 26, 1939

Those who are disheartened by the outbreak of the present war, while the ghastly memory of the world war is still vivid, have probably asked in desperation: "How long has this hideous custom of war-making been going on?" The answer may be given in the classic phrase of Blackstone, "It is a custom whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary." Three thousand years before Christ men were fighting in the valley between the two rivers Euphrates and Tigris just as now thy are fighting in no-man's land (call it rather, dead man's land) between the Siegfried and the Maginot lines. Some of the earliest known inscriptions on tablets of clay record that a Semitic chieftain named Sargon, in Mesopotamia, 2700 B. C. (some say 3800 B. C.) organized a body of archers and entered upon a career of foreign conquest. He pressed on north as far as the Taurus mountains on the edge of Asia Minor, and perhaps as far west as Cyprus. Four times he invaded Syria and Palestine; subdued those and other western countries and united them with Babylonia into a single empire. So there was at least one Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon thousands of years before those of whom we read in the usual text books of history. From the earliest days there always has been some megalomaniac whose own country seemed too small for him. He weeps for more worlds to conquer, keeps

his own people and others in a state of turmoil and, in defiance of the curse of God on Cain, commits multiple murders.

After two or three thousand years more of wars, rebellions, intrigues, political assassinations in Mesopotamia, the cradle land of the race, we come to an Assyrian king called Tiglath-Pileser III who built up an irresistible fighting machine, maintained a professional army that sallied forth from the capital every year in the spring as soon as the mud dried on the roads. His grandiose plan was to reduce the whole civilized world to a single empire. He terrorized the Medes, the Armenians, the Hethites, and the Phoenicians, and made himself ruler of Babylon. His successors held precariously what he had gained, though they lasted individually only a year or two as a rule (in one year there were three of them); and then came a general who seized the throne, called himself Sargon II, defeated his enemies at home and abroad and became emperor of Assyria and Babylonia combined. By a coincidence, this expansion of a little town to a great empire in the East was happening at the same time that a little village named Rome commenced to expand into a vast empire of the west.

Be it noted as a commentary upon the folly of war and the madness of warriors that in Asia as in Europe the process of building up an empire always ruined the conquerors. As one authority on the subject says, "the long struggle left Assyria, the conquering nation, maimed and exhausted. It had been drained of both wealth and fighting population; the devastated provinces could yield nothing with which to supply the needs of the imperial exchequer,

and it was difficult to find sufficient troops even to garrison the conquered populations.”*

Change the names of the kings and of the countries and you might think that the tale concerned not Mesopotamia of 3,600 years ago but Central Europe of 1939. Wouldn't you imagine that present-day conquerors would read a little ancient history? Not if you know the psychology of conquerors. These war-makers who think themselves wise and great and powerful are really, as the Apocalypse says, “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (*Apocalypse* 3:17), and, let us add, ignorant. To drop the archaic phraseology and put the truth in the vernacular, war makers and warmongers are “simps” and “saps,” like all other criminals.

Assyria conquers Babylonia, Nineveh and Egypt: Egypt turns the tables and conquers the conqueror; Babylonia rises, smites the Assyrian, Nineveh is annexed by Babylonia, and Babylon is again the center of the civilized world of the East.

The greatest and the most magnificent of the kings of the new regime at Babylon was Nabuchodonosor. Had he learned wisdom and humility from the vicissitudes we have been recounting? Nonsense! Kings and conquerors do not learn. Wisdom, humility, common sense are repugnant to them. Nabuchodonosor became the most extreme megalomaniac of them all. His madness is told in the Book of Daniel with authentic Oriental phrasing. It reads:

“King Nabuchodonosor made a statue of gold, of sixty cubits high, and six cubits broad, and he

* Morris Jastrow in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

set it up in the plain of Dura of the province of Babylon. Then Nabuchodonosor the king sent to call together the nobles, the magistrates, and the judges, the captains, the rulers, and governors, and all the chief men of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the statue which king Nabuchodonosor had set up. Then the nobles, the magistrates, and the judges, the captains, and rulers, and the great men that were placed in authority, and all the princes of the provinces, were gathered together to come to the dedication of the statue, which king Nabuchodonosor had set up. And they stood before the statue which king Nabuchodonosor had set up. Then a herald cried with a strong voice: To you it is commanded, O nations, tribes, and languages: That in the hour that you shall hear the sound of the trumpet, and of the flute, and of the harp, of the sackbut, and of the psaltery, and of the symphony, and of all kind of music; ye fall down and adore the golden statue which king Nabuchodonosor hath set up. But if any man shall not fall down and adore, he shall the same hour be cast into a furnace of burning fire. Upon this, therefore, . . . all the nations, tribes, and languages fell down and adored the golden statue which king Nabuchodonosor had set up" (*Daniel* 3:1-7).

The sequence every Bible reader knows. "The Hebrew children" as they are called, that is to say, three young men of the Israelites who had been led captive into Babylon, refuse to bend the knee either to the golden statue or to the king. They are thrown into the fiery furnace but are miraculously saved from harm. They sing in the flames a canticle of sorrow and of joy: of sorrow for their sins and the sins of their people; blending into a paean of

praise to God from all His creatures. That long canticle is eloquent and beautiful beyond almost any other similar poetry in any literature. The first part is in fact a resume of the spiritual history of the Jewish people. It runs:

“Blessed art thou, O Lord, the God of our Fathers, and thy name is worthy of praise, and glorious for ever . . . For thou hast executed true judgments in all the things that thou hast brought upon us, and upon Jerusalem the holy city of our fathers: for according to truth and judgment, thou hast brought all these things upon us for our sins. For we have sinned, and committed iniquity, departing from thee: and we have trespassed in all things: and we have not hearkened to thy commandments, nor have we observed nor done as thou hadst commanded us, that it might go well with us. Wherefore all that thou hast brought upon us, and every thing that thou hast done to us, thou hast done in true judgment: and thou hast delivered us into the hands of our enemies *that are* unjust, and most wicked, and prevaricators, and to a king unjust, and most wicked beyond all that are upon the earth . . . For we, O Lord, are diminished more than any nation, and are brought low in all the earth this day for our sins. Neither is there at this time prince, or leader, or prophet, or holocaust, or sacrifice, or oblation, or incense, or place of firstfruits before thee. That we may find thy mercy: nevertheless in a contrite heart and humble spirit let us be accepted” (*Daniel* 3:26-39).

Thereupon follows the canticle of praise. It would be a delight to repeat every word of it, but we have time for only a few verses of this incomparable *Benedicite*:

“Blessed art thou, O Lord the God of our fathers: and worthy to be praised, and glorified, and exalted above all for ever: and blessed is the holy name of thy glory: and worthy to be praised, and exalted above all in all ages. Blessed art thou in the holy temple of thy glory: and exceedingly to be praised, and exceeding glorious for ever. Blessed art thou on the throne of thy kingdom, and exceedingly to be praised, and exalted above all for ever. Blessed art thou, that beholdest the depths, and sittest upon the cherubims; and worthy to be praised and exalted above all for ever. Blessed art thou in the firmament of heaven: and worthy of praise, and glorious for ever.

“All ye works of the Lord, bless the Lord: praise and exalt him above all for ever. O ye angels of the Lord, bless the Lord: praise and exalt him above all for ever. O ye heavens, bless the Lord, praise and exalt him above all for ever. All ye waters that are above the heavens, bless the Lord: praise and exalt him above all for ever” (*Daniel* 3:52-60).

And so it continues—perhaps the most ecstatic prayer ever composed by man even under divine inspiration.

Nabuchodonosor is converted by the miracle: exalts the Hebrew children, and especially the chief of them, Daniel. The king has a dream: none of his own soothsayers can interpret it. He summons Daniel. Daniel with the courage and honesty of a prophet tells the king: “. . . thou, O king, who art grown great and become mighty: for thy greatness hath grown, and hath reached to heaven, and thy power unto the ends of the earth . . . This is the interpretation of the sentence of the

most High, which is come upon my lord the king. They shalt cast thee out from among men, and thy dwelling shall be with cattle and with wild beasts, and thou shalt eat grass as an ox, and shalt be wet with the dew of heaven: and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the most High ruleth over the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will" (*Daniel* 4:19-22).

Whereupon a miracle happens, a moral miracle: the potentate, the absolute monarch, accepts the prophecy and spares the prophet. And, says the Scripture with sententious brevity: "All those things came upon king Nabuchodonosor" (*Daniel* 4:25).

The king, repentant and chastened, resumes the throne. He dies: Babylon, exhausted with incessant warfare and with repeated orgies of drunkenness and lechery, is in decline. As always when States decay, the ruler and the people are unaware of impending disaster. They think themselves still in their age of gold; they are blind to the fact that the political and social structure has been undermined by war and immorality. "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play" (I *Cor.* 10:7). "In the days of Noe," says our Savior, ". . . they did eat and drink, they married wives, and were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark: and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise . . . in the days of Lot: they did eat and drink, they bought and sold, they planted and built. And . . . it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all" (*Luke* 17:26-29).

Likewise in Babylon in the day of Baltassar, doom came unexpected.

And now comes the scene that might well tempt but would surely baffle the most masterly playwright of classic or Elizabethan times, or of our own. The Bible tells it as mere narrative, with utter simplicity: but any one who cannot feel the throb of emotion in the lines must be curiously insensitive.

“Baltassar [successor to Nabuchodonosor] the king made a great feast for a thousand of his nobles: and every one drank according to his age. And being now drunk he commanded that they should bring the vessels of gold and silver which Nabuchodonosor his father had brought away out of the temple, that was in Jerusalem, that the king and his nobles, and his wives and his concubines, might drink in them. Then were the golden and silver vessels brought, which he had brought away out of the temple that was in Jerusalem: and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines, drank in them. They drank wine, and praised their gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, and of wood, and of stone. In the same hour there appeared fingers, as it were of the hand of a man, writing over against the candlestick upon the surface of the wall of the king’s palace: and the king beheld the joints of the hand that wrote” (*Daniel* 5: 1-5).

The king is dismayed and bewildered. The pagan sooth-sayers confess themselves helpless. Daniel is summoned. The king says, “Shew me the interpretation thereof, thou shalt be clothed with purple, and shalt have a chain of gold about thy neck, and shalt be the third prince in my kingdom. To which Daniel made answer, and said before the king: Thy rewards be to thyself, and the gifts of thy house give to another: but the writing I will

read to thee, O king, and shew thee the interpretation thereof . . .

“Thou . . . hast lifted thyself up against the Lord of heaven: and the vessels of his house have been brought before thee: and thou, and thy nobles, and thy wives, and thy concubines have drunk wine in them: and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and of gold, and of brass, of iron, and of wood, and of stone, that neither see, nor hear, nor feel: but the God who hath thy breath in his hand, and all thy ways, thou hast not glorified. Wherefore he hath sent the part of the hand which hath written this that is set down. And this is the writing that is written: MANE, THECEL, PHARES. And this is the interpretation of the word. MANE: God hath numbered thy kingdom, and hath finished it. THECEL: thou art weighed in the balance, and art found wanting. PHARES: thy kingdom is divided, and is given to the Medes and Persians” (*Daniel* 5:23-28).

Once again the Sacred Scripture resorts to the laconic: “The same night Baltassar the Chaldean king was slain. And Darius the Mede succeeded to the kingdom, being threescore and two years old” (*Daniel* 5:30-31).

I confess that I feel in regard to these powerful stories of the Old Testament almost precisely as I do about the parables of our Savior in the New Testament. The adage warns us not to paint the lily or gild refined gold. It often seems a kind of unwitting sacrilege when a preacher attempts with heavy, plodding, uninspired commentary to *elucidate* what was written by men in a condition of soul akin to ecstasy with inspiration from on high. Imagine if you can a school boy or for that matter a

school master rehashing Shakespeare's "To Be or Not to Be" or "All the World's a Stage." What we need is not a dusty-minded pedagogue to expound such passages but some intellectually competent and vocally brilliant Edwin Booth to speak them.

Similarly, what we should like to have is a dramatic presentation of such a scene as that of the fearless and (as the Holy Book tells us) handsome young Daniel standing before the king in that banquet hall, the king bleary-eyed with drink, but like all the rest of the roisterers stricken cold sober by the preternatural phenomenon of a hand writing what must have seemed a cabalistic inscription on the wall.

"The Moving Finger writes: and having writ,
Moves on: nor all your Piety or Wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line
Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it"

says the Persian poet who, being a neighbor to Babylon and of the race of king Darius, knew the story of Daniel and Baltassar.

Baltassar had little piety and less wit; but, like a good many other drunken fools he had tears aplenty—too late. But his tears could no more wash out the line that had been writ than Lady Macbeth's curses could wash the blood spots off her murderous hands.

But the leading part in this drama is carried not by the king, but by the young Hebrew prophet, prisoner, slave, member of a despised and conquered people standing boldly in the presence of the Oriental tyrant, and with superb disdain for the usual sycophancy that courtiers accord to kings, telling Baltassar: "You are weighed in the balance and

found wanting. Thy kingdom shall be divided and given to the Medes and Persians!"

Would to God that some divinely authorized prophet of today, if the race of prophets is not extinct, should stand before some of the present-day tyrants, drunken as they are not with wine but with blood, denounce them for their orgies and their sacrileges, declare their power broken, their kingdom divided and given back to the people, who in turn may bestow it this time upon some leader from whose heart simplicity and sincerity and humanity have not been banished.

MATHATHIAS TO THE ENVOYS OF KING ANTIOCHUS

"Although All Nations Obey King Antiochus
. . . I and My Sons . . . Will Obey the Law of
Our Fathers" (1 Machabees 2:19-20)

Address delivered on December 3, 1939

It is a matter for comment and wonder that the people of America, educated in the public schools, know so much about the heroes of Greek and Roman antiquity and so little about the heroes of the Bible. What school boy or girl is there who cannot tell of Leonidas, who with his three hundred Spartans made the desperate but magnificent stand at the pass of Thermopylae against a countless horde of Asiatics? What high school pupil is there who cannot recite for you stanza after stanza of Macaulay's "Horatius at the Bridge" rolling the sonorous lines glibly off his tongue:

"I, with two more to help me,
Will hold the foe in play.
In yon strait path a thousand
May well be stopped by three.
Now who will stand on either hand,
And keep the bridge with me?

"Then out spake brave Horatius,
The Captain of the gate:
"To every man upon this earth
Death cometh soon or late.
And how can man die better
Than facing fearful odds,
For the ashes of his fathers,
And the temples of his Gods'?"

But how many of these same children know that in the Bible are stories of valor even more splendid and stirring than those of Greco-Roman history or mythology?

Why do they know so much about Sparta and Athens and so little about Jerusalem? In the last generation or two there has been permitted to spring up a generation of young Americans to whom the Bible is a closed book, and the Biblical heroes, if I may slightly alter a famous line of Sir Walter Scott, are "unknown, unhonored, and unsung." Ask those youngsters about Julius Caesar or Alexander the Great and you meet an enthusiastic response. They know much if not all about Caesar, who in his day out-Hitlered Hitler; they have a strange admiration for the exploits of Alexander who drenched two continents in blood and died in a drunken debauch. But if you speak the names of Mathathias and Judas Machabeus you will get in return only a blank stare of unrecognition. You might as well mention Hermes Trismegistus or Apollonius of Tyana. Even the little ones in the primary grades can recite the legendary story of William Tell, but of the exploits of the Bible heroes, not legend, or folklore, but actual history, they have heard nothing.

But let us have the story of the Machabees and see if it be not as dramatic as that of Leonidas or Horatius or the mythical William Tell.

Now the king in this case—wherever there has been injustice and cruelty and persecution there was always a king, just as today there is some absolute ruler masquerading behind a more democratic title—the king in the case was Antiochus. I can introduce him in no better way than by quoting the picturesque wording of the first chapter of the First Book of Machabees:

"Now it came to pass, after that Alexander the son of Philip the Macedonian, who first reigned in

Greece . . . had overthrown Darius king of the Persians and Medes: he fought many battles, and took the strong holds of all, and slew the kings of the earth: and he went through even to the ends of the earth, and took the spoils of many nations: and the earth was quiet before him. And he gathered a power, and a very strong army: and his heart was exalted and lifted up. And he subdued countries of nations, and princes: and they became tributaries to him. And after these things, he fell down upon his bed, and knew that he should die. And he called his servants the nobles that were brought up with him from his youth: and he divided his kingdom among them, while he was yet alive. And Alexander reigned twelve years, and he died.

“And his servants made themselves kings every one in his place: and they all put crowns upon themselves after his death, and their sons after them many years, and evils were multiplied in the earth. And there came out of them a wicked root, Antiochus the Illustrious . . .” (I *Machabees* 1:1-11).

“There came out of them,” says the Scripture, condensing three or four generations of history. As a matter of fact, there were several kings named Antiochus. The one with whom the Machabees had to contend was Antiochus IV. The founder of his dynasty, Seleucus, had come into Asia with Alexander the Great. The son of Seleucus called himself Antiochus Soter, the Savior, either because he had saved Asia from the Gauls or because he was supposed to be divine; perhaps for both reasons. The next Antiochus called himself Antiochus Theos, Antiochus the God, like the Roman emperors from Julius Caesar down to the collapse of the Empire. Antiochus IV, hard put to it to find a more grand-

iose title, decided upon Antiochus Epiphanes, that is "Antiochus, God made Manifest," or as we should say "God Incarnate." To his face the courtiers called him Epiphanes: behind his back they twisted the word into Epimanes, the madman. And with reason. A capable, forceful warrior, he was by an unusual freak of heredity also intellectually brilliant, but in him as in some other men of genius the border line between high mentality and insanity was narrow and he often stepped over it. I find in Will Durant's new book *The Life of Greece* a graphic description of this Dr. Jekyll-Mr. Hyde king, this crazy combination of philosopher and buffoon, gentleman and beast, patron of civilization and agent of demoralization.

"Antiochus IV was both the most interesting and the most erratic of his line, a rare mixture of intellect, insanity, and charm. He governed his kingdom ably despite a thousand injustices and absurdities. He allowed his delegates to abuse their power, and gave his mistress authority over three cities. He was generous and cruel without judgment, often forgiving or condemning by whim, surprising simple folk with costly gifts, and tossing money with a child's ecstasy among the crowds in the street. He loved wine, women, and art: he drank to excess, and left his royal seat, at banquets, to dance naked with the entertainers, or to carouse with wastrels; he was a Bohemian whose dream of power had come true. He despised the solemnity and trappings of the court, played practical jokes upon his dignitaries, and disguised himself to know the luxury of anonymity; it delighted him to mingle with the people and overhear their comments on the King . . . The chief effect of his passion for things

Roman was the introduction of gladiatorial games in Antioch, his capital. The people resented the brutal sport, but Antiochus won them over by lavish and spectacular displays; when they became accustomed to the butchery he considered their degeneration a personal victory."

But when in his madness he challenged not the king of Egypt or of Assyria, or the people of Antioch, but the people of Israel, he blundered into catastrophe. The Bible says:

"He made war against Ptolemee king of Egypt, but Ptolemee was afraid at his presence, and fled, and many were wounded unto death. And he took the strong cities in the land of Egypt . . . And after Antiochus had ravaged Egypt in the hundred and forty-third year, he returned and went up against Israel. And he went up to Jerusalem with a great multitude. And he proudly entered into the sanctuary, and took away the golden altar, and the candlestick of light, and all the vessels thereof, and the table of proposition, and the pouring vessels, and the vials, and the little mortars of gold, and the veil, and the crowns, and the golden ornament that was before the temple: and he broke them all in pieces. And he took the silver and gold, and the precious vessels: and he took the hidden treasure which he found: and when he had taken all away he departed into his own country. And he made a great slaughter of men, and spoke very proudly . . . And after two full years the king sent the chief collector of *his* tributes to the cities of Juda, and he came to Jerusalem with a great multitude. And he spoke to them peaceable words in deceit: and they believed him. And he fell upon the city suddenly, and struck it with a great slaughter, and destroyed much people

in Israel. . . . And [his soldiers] shed innocent blood around about the sanctuary, and defiled the holy place. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem fled away by reason of them, and the city was made the habitation of strangers, and she became a stranger of her own seed, and her children forsook her. Her sanctuary was desolate like a wilderness, her festival days were turned into mourning, her sabbaths into reproach, her honours were brought to nothing" (I *Machabees* 1:19-41).

But of all the abominations introduced into Jerusalem the worst was heathen worship, and with it heathen vice glorified and deified as part of religion.

The temple dedicated by Solomon to the Only True God, was polluted by Antiochus and rededicated to Zeus. The worship of Ishtar and Aphrodite was introduced upon Mount Sion, and to the horror of pious Israelites all manner of indecencies and obscenities were done in the Holy Place.

Now there appears upon the scene Mathathias the son of John, the Son of Simeon, a priest of the sons of Joarib, and he abode in the mountain of Modin outside but close by Jerusalem. He had five sons, all of them like himself devoted to the purity of the worship of God, all of them as indignant as he at the sight of the profanities and the abominations perpetrated by the Gentiles and by certain weak-kneed, renegade, apostate, cowardly Jews. Mathathias cries out in his anguish:

"Woe is me, wherefore was I born to see the ruin of my people, and the ruin of the holy city, and to dwell there, when it is given into the hands of the enemies? The holy places are come into the hands of strangers: her temple is become as a man with-

out honour. The vessels of her glory are carried away captive: her old men are murdered in the streets, and her young men are fallen by the sword of the enemies. What nation hath not inherited her kingdom, and gotten of her spoils? . . . And behold our sanctuary, and our beauty, and our glory is laid waste, and the Gentiles have defiled them. To what end then should we live any longer?" (I *Machabees* 2:7-13).

He and his sons enter into a covenant, swearing to die rather than take part in the general apostasy. Antiochus hears of their rebellion, sends his agents to compel them to sacrifice to Zeus. The envoys approach Mathathias first with flattery and then with threats. "Thou art a ruler, and an honourable, and great man in this city, and adorned with sons, and brethren. Therefore come thou first, and obey the king's commandment, as all nations have done, and the men of Juda, and they that remain in Jerusalem: and thou, and thy sons, shall be in the number of the king's friends, and enriched with gold, and silver, and many presents" (I *Machabees* 2:17-18).

But the heroic father of that heroic family is not to be flattered and bribed into sacrilege. He answers with a loud voice: "Although all nations obey king Antiochus, . . . I and my sons, and my brethren will obey the law of our fathers" (I *Machabees* 2:19-20).

Perhaps I may be pardoned if I delay the action of this superb drama just long enough to observe that here we have a ringing manifesto that might well be heard from the lips of men and of nations in the present tragic circumstances. Christians (and especially Catholics) are inheritors of the fun-

damental religious principles of the Jews. To deny the continuity of our religion with that of the people of Israel would be to surrender our claim to be the True Religion. In our Bible, the Old Testament is bound with the new (symbolic fact); in our public and private worship the Psalms of David that were used and still are used in the Hebrew liturgy are recited and chanted together with the Creed and the Pater Noster; in the breviary, a prayer of approximately an hour's duration said every day by priests and monks and cloistered nuns, there is actually more of the Old Testament than the New; and at Holy Mass, the sacredest of all acts of worship, the names of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are linked with that of Jesus Christ. "I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" the law of Moses, said our Savior.

These Old Testament heroes, then are our own. And would to God that in every land, especially in those countries now writhing under the heel of dictators, there were another family of Machabees to fling their challenge into the face of the mad rulers who demand that all peoples shall bow the head, bend the knee, prostrate themselves and offer incense to the State as God. "I am the Lord thy God . . . thou shalt not have strange gods before me," says Jehovah. "Hear, O Israel," runs the liturgical prayer of the Jews, "The Lord your God is One God." Not Zeus, not Jupiter, not Isis or Orinis, not Baal and Astarthe, not Bacchus and Venus; not Appollo or Aphrodite, not Antiochus Epiphanes, false god, blasphemer, usurper of the prerogatives of the Deity; not the State or a leader who considers himself the incarnation of the soul of the State, not—surely not—the mummified cadaver of Lenin enshrined upon an altar in a temple in the Kremlin

Square, shall take the place of the One True God. "The gods of the Gentiles are demons" says David. Yes and these gods of the neo-pagans are diabolical imposters. When called upon to worship the statue of the Roman Emperor, the martyrs spat in its face, and so do we reject with scorn the suggestion that we bend the knee to some Moloch or Beelzebub representing the Totalitarian State. With Mathathias we lift up our voice and cry aloud "Although all nations obey king Antiochus—or any other pseudo-god—we will obey the law of our fathers."

There you have the climax of the rebellion of the Machabees. After that the action continues—terrific, magnificent, prolonged action—but the climax is what interests us and thrills us, even more than the subsequent exploits of the Machabees. They fled to the mountains, "lived after the manner of beasts," says the Bible, feeding on herbs, and from their mountain fastnesses descended again and again swiftly upon cities, towns, villages, to destroy pagan altars and with the altars such apostate Jews as had turned to the worship of devils. Antiochus sends a well trained army of Syrian Greeks to annihilate the Machabees. But the annihilation happens in reverse, the professional warriors are swept away by the untrained insurgents. Antiochus then sends a larger force, and with them a group of slave merchants, so sure were they of bringing back the Machabees and their volunteers in chains. But the second Greek army is defeated like the first. Judas Machabeus, son and successor to Mathathias, takes Jerusalem, routs the heathen, tears down the altars of the obscene deities, removes the abomination of desolation, cleanses the Holy Mount of all heathen pollution, and re-

consecrates the temple to the God of his fathers. But here again we must fall back upon the narrative of the Bible, simple, naive, eloquent:

“And it came to pass when the king heard these words, that he was struck with fear, and exceedingly moved: and he laid himself down upon his bed, and fell sick for grief, because it had not fallen out to him as he imagined. And he remained there many days: for great grief came more and more upon him, and he made account that he should die. And he called for his friends, and said to them: Sleep is gone from my eyes, and I am fallen away, and my heart is cast down for anxiety. And I said in my heart: Into how much tribulation am I come, and into what floods of sorrow, wherein now I am: I that was pleasant and beloved in my power! But now I remember the evils that I have done in Jerusalem, from whence also I took away all the spoils of gold, and of silver that were in it, and I sent to destroy the inhabitants of Juda without cause. I know therefore that for this cause these evils have found me: and behold I perish with great grief in a strange land” (I *Machabees* 6:8-13).

His repentance comes too late. He dies. His son, Antiochus V, is made king by Lysias the General, and then ensues a tremendous decisive battle. You may find in the sixth chapter of the First Book of Machabees, a description of it that surpasses in vivid eloquence the account of the battles in Homer between the Greeks and the Trojans, or in Julius Caesar between the Gauls and the Roman legions.

But as I say, we are not now concerned so much with battles and victories, but with the noble moral courage of Mathathias and his sons who in an apparently hopeless situation withstood a powerful

tyrant, so powerful and so habitually triumphant that he called himself God. And we venture to hope that this example of ancient heroism will stir some modern hero to arise and to fling into the teeth of the mad leaders of our own day that stirring challenge, "Although all nations obey [the tyrant] I and my sons, and my brethren will obey the law of our fathers."

JOHN THE BAPTIST TO HEROD

"It is Not Lawful for Thee to Have Her"
(Matthew 14:4)

Address delivered on December 10, 1939

There is probably not in all history or in any literature a personal duel better known than that between John the Baptist and King Herod. But it was more than personal: it was a conflict not merely of two men but of two forces, one physical, the other moral. In fact it was a visible embodiment of the conflict between good and bad, a clash between heaven and hell fought on this earth. The conflict of good and evil has been dramatized with great skill by the Greeks, by Shakespeare, Goethe, and a score more of master playwrights and poets. The present war in Europe is said by some to be one more instance of the ever-recurring duel between good and bad, right and wrong. Perhaps it is, but the issue is not and cannot be so clear-cut in international warfare as in a clash between two men, one a saint and the other a kind of human devil.

Let us, therefore, look at the two chief actors in this divine tragedy first as men and then as symbols. Take first the king, Herod Antipas. Certain psychologists have a theory that a man inherits characteristics from his grandfather even more than from his father. If that be so, Herod Antipas got off to a particularly bad start. His grandfather, Herod the Great, was a more inhuman monster than any other in history, or, for that matter, in Frankenstein fiction. As for present-day tyrants who have developed the "purge," the "pogrom," and

“liquidation,” I doubt if they out-Herod Herod. The following are a few evidences of the homicidal mania of this incredible ogre.

He killed Antigonus the high priest, uncle of his wife, Mariamne.

He murdered in cold blood forty-five adherents of Antigonus.

He killed his wife’s mother, Alexandra. Sensing danger in mere proximity to the maniac, she had schemed to be shipped in a coffin as though dead to her friend Cleopatra, in Egypt. Herod discovered the plot and killed her.

All in all, he had ten wives. How many of them he killed we do not know, but probably more than Henry VIII who after all had only six.

Being summoned to Rome at the instance of Cleopatra to give an account of himself he left the queen in charge of a court official with directions that she be killed if he were convicted. Summoned again, this time to Caesar Augustus, he gave the same instructions. Both times he was acquitted of crime—a commentary upon Roman justice—but he killed the queen nevertheless.

Next he murdered her son and his, Aristobulus, and then Antipater, a son by another wife Doris. Antipater had plotted with his uncle and aunt to poison the monster king, but the plot was discovered and instead of the son killing the father, the father killed the son.

Next, he murdered the second husband of his sister Salome.

Next: his son Alexander and three hundred guardsmen who sympathized with Alexander.

Then, Cortobarus and the sons of Babas, the last remnants of the great Machabee family.

Add to all these domestic murders uncounted thousands of others done for political advantage, or from fear, or ambition, or from sheer bloodthirstiness, and you may realize that Herod's command that all infants under two years of age in and near Bethlehem be killed, was only a minor episode, not even mentioned by the historian of those days, Josephus.

Not only Herod I but the whole family, with perhaps one exception—Philip—were a vile and terrible brood. If you look at their genealogical tree you will see "Antipater poisoned," "Joseph executed," "Phasaël a suicide" another "Antipater executed," "Alexander executed," "Aristobulus executed" and so on and so on.

I have hurriedly and imperfectly recapitulated the family history of Herod Antipas so that we may realize a little better the kind of man whom John the Baptist was to confront and rebuke. To the cruelty of his grandfather, Antipas added the meaner vices of the spy and the sleuth. One authority calls him a "vicious sneak." The gentle Jesus spoke of him as "that fox." Also he was superstitious like all those who try to rid their souls of religion but to their torture, cannot.

But the sin of Herod Antipas which concerns us now was the divorcing of his wife, the daughter of King Hareth of Arabia, and his marriage to Herodias, who was also a grandchild of Herod the Great. She had been married to Philip and with him lived in Rome. Herod Antipas, coming to the world's capital on political business once and again, engaged in an intrigue with Herodias, lured her away from Philip and went through a form of marriage with her. The union, doubly adulterous and

incestuous, was disgusting in the eyes of the Jews and even of the pagans. But no one in Rome or at Jerusalem dared complain audibly. The amatory adventures of kings are a matter of gossip but the gossip takes place behind one's hand or behind closed doors.

But there was one man within the ambit of the Herods so close to God that he feared neither man nor devil. John the Baptist was made of stern stuff. Destined for martyrdom, like all the prophets before him and like most of those who after him have dared to tell kings the truth, he had from his earliest days remained far from the corruption of the world. Like his Master, he was driven by the Spirit of God into the wilderness. There he lived a life of heroic self-denial, sanctifying himself with prayer and fasting. "No man can safely appear in public unless he loves solitude: and no man is fit to speak unless he knows how to be silent," says the author of the *Imitation of Christ*. John was to appear in public and he was to speak. His appearance was to be brief; he was to speak but little. But when he stepped into the court of Herod and opened his mouth to say one sentence, his whole life spoke with him. He spoke as one having authority, for he had listened to God; knew what to say and was not afraid to say it. Together with the authority of God, he had prestige with men. Let not that fact seem unique. The people know a saint when they see one. Sometimes they are tricked or browbeaten and frightened out of their loyalty to a good and great man. But their impulses are good and they have an instinct by which they recognize sanctity. At least they can see moral merit more quickly and surely than kings and others whose self-importance blinds them. It

might be interesting to delay upon that thesis. "O Father, Lord of heaven and earth," says our Savior, ". . . thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to little ones" (*Matt.* 11:25). Also it would be interesting—at least to me—to develop the idea that the people at large cannot be long deceived by "those who come to them in the clothing of sheep, but inwardly . . . are ravening wolves" (*Matt.* 7:15). But there isn't time: we must hurry on. Suffice it then to say that the people who left their homes and their fields to go into the wilderness and listen to John knew him to be, as Our Lord said, "a prophet . . . and more than a prophet" (*Matt.* 11:9).

Herod, blinded by his various passions and corrupted by vice, caught only a slight glimpse of the sanctity of the man from the desert. He knew that the people idolized John, and he seems to have had some lingering half-Jewish half-pagan consciousness of the danger of doing harm to a holy man. But his momentary glimpse of the power of sanctity was blotted out by two things which he imagined he had to take into consideration.

First: a tyrannical ruler must not permit a popular movement to gather force: it may develop into something political. "Something political": all that politicians know is politics. Their standard of value is politics. They measure all things in heaven and earth by politics. Is such and such a course of action good politics? Or bad politics? Faith, love, religion, idealism, the soul, the will of man, his highest aspirations, the deep forces that dwell in his soul and motivate his action, all these things are hidden from their eyes. To them there is only one element in human life, only one deter-

minant of the fate of nations: politics, the great god politics. So, as soon as the crowds followed John the Baptist, Herod clapped him into jail. "Political disturber" was the first and most absurd item in the indictment of the holy man from beyond the Jordan.

The second was even more serious. I have said that the erotic escapades of kings are not a matter to be spoken of in the streets. Walls, pavements, doors and windows have ears. But if any man feels that he must speak aloud any criticism of the administration of a tyrant, he had better confine his talk to war or taxes, or foreign policy. He had better not whisper a syllable: he had better not so much as lift a critical eyebrow or wink a knowing eye if some reckless chatterer mention the name of the king's latest "favorite."

But a saint is a saint partly because he doesn't share the cowardly inhibitions of other men. A saint does not flatter: he does not dissemble: he does not pretend not to see. He can keep silence when silence is called for, but when prompted by conscience to speak, his tongue cannot be stilled unless you pluck it out. The great American abolitionist, William Lloyd Garrison, shouted at his critics who bade him walk softly and be silent: "I am in earnest. I will not equivocate; I will not excuse. I will not retreat a single inch; and I will be heard." To give that man credit, he was as good as his word, he did what he said he would do, even though a mob dragged him through the streets of Boston with a rope around his neck, and all but lynched him. However, it must be admitted that such challenges do savor of bombast. The noblest hero or the greatest saint doesn't vociferate as to what he will do in

a crisis: he just does it when the crisis comes. So with our Savior, so with St. John the Baptist.

Herod was on the throne; beside him was his adulterous consort. John, the strange man in from the wilderness, is apprehended and brought into court. Standing in the presence of a king in whose veins ran the tiger's blood of the Herods; knowing full well that one word of the truth would cost him his life; with no theatricalism, no loud outcry, no rodomontade, no self-consciousness of being a hero; simply, definitely, he says, looking at Herod and pointing to Herodias, "It is not lawful for thee to have her" (*Matt.* 14:4).

It is not lawful: *Non licet!* That is the first in a long line of *non licets* uttered by Christian prophets, priests, martyrs straight into the teeth of adulterous murderous sovereigns. There is a long line of those *non licets* in the annals of our Church; many of them will leap to the mind of those who have read history. One of them known especially to Englishmen and Americans is that of St. Thomas More, who said *non licet* to Henry VIII and in consequence, like John the Baptist, had his head cut off.

In the instance that now concerns us, it seems to have been not so much the king but the queen who became furious upon hearing the truth. "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned." She waited for her opportunity: it came with the fateful banquet. Salome dances. The king, inflamed with wine and with lust vows, "Whatsoever thou shalt ask I will give thee, though *it be* the half of my kingdom" (*Mark* 6:34). Then comes the whispered consultation of the girl with her mother and the ghoulish demand: "the head of John the Baptist." The king, stupid, half drunken regrets his promise; supersti-

tiously he fears to break his word. He nods to the executioner; the headsman departs while the banqueters wait stricken sober and silent. The sword wielder returns with his gory burden, the severed head of the saint on a silver platter.

That scene has been written and painted and enacted upon the stage, though it is quite too ghastly for public presentation. But I do still think that the high point, the supreme moment in this drama of the prophet versus the king is when John, in from the desert, up from the dungeon, standing bare-footed, ragged, dirty on the polished marble floor of the court, faces the king, indicates the queen, and utters the momentous words "*Non Licet*": "it is not lawful for thee to have her."

Oh for a saint and a prophet in our day: a John, a Peter, a Paul, an Ambrose, a Boniface, a Hildebrand, a Thomas More: to come from the desert, sanctified, with the authority of the Lord, to stand in the presence of the modern tyrants who are now variously afflicting the world, and to say to them, one or all, in the hearing of the whole world, *Non licet*.

PETER TO THE HIGH PRIEST

"We Ought to Obey God Rather Than Men"
(Acts 5:29)

Address delivered on December 17, 1939

The Catholic Church has never, for any long period of time, been able to avoid conflict with great political powers. Consequently hasty readers of history are inclined to think that there must be something perverse about the Church which prevents her living in harmony with the State. More careful and deliberate study will reveal the truth that in most cases the State and not the Church has been perverse.

We need not go far back and unearth out of medieval or ancient archives evidence that the Church has generally if not always been on the defensive. Before our eyes today we have a sample of what has happened a hundred times in earlier epochs. Could any impartial observer pretend to believe that the Catholic Church in Austria or Germany or Poland attacked Hitler? Yet Hitler persecutes the Church, alleging of course that he does so in defense of the Reich. Only the other day, we saw in a Communist paper published in the United States, the brazen headline, "Red Army Hurls Back Invading Finnish Troops"? If a lie can be ludicrous, that is a ludicrous lie. Yet some will accept it as true. In the ancient fable the wolf claimed he had been bitten by a lamb. Wolves always suffer from the cruelty of blood-thirsty lambs. Pontius Pilate and King Herod feared the gentle Jesus and fearing Him, killed Him. Imagine if you can the inoffensive Nazarene as a menace to the Roman Empire! St. Peter the first pope, a fisherman, a peasant, was also

crucified as a threat to the throne of Nero! Now if the pagans in ancient Rome could be made to believe Christ a malefactor and St. Peter a conspirator; if the pagans in modern Moscow can be made to believe that an empire of one hundred and fifty millions of peace-loving Bolsheviki were attacked by a handful of merciless blood-thirsty Finns; if the most militaristic nation on the globe, Nazi Germany, accepts, as we are told it does, the preposterous theory that the Pope with no arms but some sixteenth century pikes in the hands of a comic opera guard of a hundred Swiss endangers their existence—if, I say, these lunatic fabrications can be accepted as true, what difficulty can there be in accepting the absurd idea that ancient and medieval popes were a warlike lot who just couldn't let kings and emperors remain at peace? The late lamented G. K. Chesterton said, "We sometimes hear the statement that such and such things cannot be believed in these our days. Nonsense! Anything can be believed in any day."

Now what in reality was the crime of St. Peter the first pope and his successors against the State? You may find it in the fifth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. Peter and his companion apostles had been put in prison, but had been miraculously released. Instead of stealing away quietly from Jerusalem, they went out again in the streets and preached. Preached what? Sedition? Rebellion? Revolt? Nothing so exciting, and yet something in a way far more exciting: they preached that Jesus who had been crucified was risen from the dead. So, the High Priest and the Sadducees had them arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin, the high court of the Jews. And the high priest said, "Commanding

we commanded you, that you should not teach in this name; and behold, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and you have a mind to bring the blood of this man upon us. But Peter and the apostles answering said: We ought to obey God, rather than men" (*Acts 5:28*).

Simple enough; nothing spectacular; nothing dramatic; no grandiloquent oratory. Peter was no Demosthenes, fulminating against Philip; no Cicero making the walls of the Roman Senate Chamber vibrate with denunciations of Catiline: he was no Patrick Henry flinging magnificent defiance in the face of a king; no Robert Emmet, going to death in a blaze of national glory. He was a simple fisherman with none of the fire and fury of the orator, none of the delusions of a demagogue; simply, quietly he said "We must obey God, rather than men."

I say there was no danger to the State in the preaching of Peter. And in the usual sense of the word "Danger," "Menace," "Threat," there was none. But in another sense that quiet utterance "We must obey God rather than men," is a live bomb. Kingdoms, empires, whole civilizations have come tumbling down at the promulgation of that principle, as the walls of Jericho crumbled at the impact of the blast from the trumpets of Joshua.

Here we come to a primary lesson to be learned from the history of mankind: when a concrete reality—an army, a government, an empire—comes into conflict with a spiritual truth, the concrete reality, the brute fact, though at first generally victorious, invariably, inevitably succumbs. When tyrants command popes and bishops, priests and people, to do this or that under penalty of extermination; and popes and bishops, priests and people, answer "*Non*

possumus”—“We cannot in conscience—the tyrants look upon them as visionaries, dreamers, fanatics. But eventually the moral principle conquers. The swashbuckling murderers now rampant in Europe and Asia will ultimately be overthrown; the Church and religion will survive. When Hitler and Stalin are through, Christ will again come into His own. “How do we know?” Well, we need not the supernatural powers of a prophet; we consult no horoscope; we gaze into no crystal globe; we do not pore over a chart of the zodiac. All we need is plain history, in particular the history of the Catholic Church. When the pessimist exclaimed petulantly to the optimist in the midst of a long protracted storm, “Will it ever clear up,” the optimist answered, “It always did.” So, will the tyranny and savagery of the totalitarian states play itself out? It always did. Will peace and justice and truth and religion come back? They always did. They always will.

Let us look briefly at the record. In the two hundred and fifty years after St. Peter there were thirty-three popes, most of whom were put to death. Those that were not killed at the command of the Caesars, had to hide away in the catacombs. When Constantine came to the throne, pope, priests, and people came up from under the ground. But they did not thenceforth bask undisturbed in the sunshine of unbroken peace. They had to contend with Christian emperors in place of pagan emperors. Kings, emperors, rulers of old, like politicians in our day, seeing the power of the Church, attempted to use it for their own aggrandizement. They fomented schisms and heresies. Time and again the emperors placed an Arian bishop or a Monophysite in every city where a Catholic bishop had his see. “Di-

vide and conquer" is very ancient strategy. The pope naturally would support the Catholic bishop, the emperor the heretical bishop, and the emperor would then penalize the pope for what he called political interference.

In the ninth and tenth centuries the emperors of the East, jealous of the domination of the West, encouraged a schism that split the Church into two parts, one at Rome, the other at Constantinople. In the eleventh century the emperor, Henry IV, attempted to play the role of head of the Church as well as of the State, and a titanic conflict arose in consequence between him and that other giant, Hildebrand, Pope Gregory VII. In the thirteenth century again occurred a duel between Frederick II and Gregory IX, at the commencement of the fourteenth between Boniface VIII and Philip IV of France. In that same fateful century the attempts of the French kings to subordinate the papacy to themselves brought about the so-called Babylonian Captivity at Avignon in southern France. For seventy years the popes remained under the eye if not under the thumb of the French kings. In the sixteenth century Henry VIII in England chopped off the heads of those who would not accept him as head of the Church as well as of the State. In the seventeenth century under the most powerful of all French kings, Louis XIV, there arose a quasi-heresy, Gallicanism, fostered by the king.

Joseph II of Austria in the eighteenth century claimed the right to censor and to veto communications between the pope and the Church. In the nineteenth century Napoleon Bonaparte tried to subjugate Pope Pius VII. Persons still living can remember that Bismarck the Chancellor of "Blood and

Iron" in the last quarter of the nineteenth century fought with the weapons of diplomacy, politics, persecution against Pope Leo XIII, who had no arms but pen and ink, prayer and the Grace of God.

Now it may be that Adolf Hitler or Josef Stalin combines in one person the forcefulness of Henry IV, Frederick II, Philip IV, Louis XIV, Napoleon Bonaparte and Bismarck; it may be that Hitler's Reich or Stalin's so-called Union of Republics has more stability than the Roman Empire—but even if both these incredible suppositions are true, if Hitler or Stalin turns out to be a superman; if they reveal greater military genius than Napoleon, greater political skill than Bismarck, more barbaric ruthlessness than Frederick and Henry; none the less the Reich and Soviet Russia, both built on tyranny, will ultimately fall, while the spiritual power of the Church and of religion will be re-established and reinforced. To any one not acquainted with the history of the Church from Peter to Pius XII, this may seem an empty boast. But no competent historian would question it.

Edward Gibbon in his Memoirs tells that the occasion of his decision to write his monumental work, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, was his "musing amidst the ruins of the Capitol while the barefooted friars were singing vespers in the Temple of Jupiter." Yes, the friars and the monks have always sung amidst the ruins of paganism, and they will some day be singing not vespers but a requiem over Hitler's Reich, Stalin's Soviets, and all other heathenisms. The pope, retiring to pray may seem to be waging but a pitiable conflict against battleships, bombing planes, magnetic mines, poison gas, flame-throwers, lying propaganda. and

conscienceless diplomacy. But the "captains and the kings depart" and the man on his knees in the Vatican remains. "All valiant dust that builds on dust" crumbles; all the blusterers, swaggerers, murderers come to the end of their bloody careers, but the "pope does not die." There is a story—perhaps only a legend—that when Napoleon, having Pope Pius VII virtually in prison, came again and again to the pope's apartment, stormed, ranted, cursed, threatened, in the attempt to persuade the Pope to do what the Pope's conscience forbade, Pius VII, bent almost double with age and infirmity, would look up from time to time and say softly "What an actor, what an actor!" And when Napoleon was beaten at Waterloo in 1815 and even when he died at St. Helena in 1821, the same feeble old Pope was still ruling the universal Church from the Vatican.

Hitler and Stalin would doubtless like to pretend that the preternatural figure in the Vatican creates no consternation in their soul. They may say they have weapons unknown to Bonaparte, Bismarck, Tiberius, Nero, Caligula, Diocletian. Hitler's *Shrecklichkeit* may surpass all previous *Shrecklichkeit* and Stalin be more ruthless than Herod the Great. But wait! Nazi-Bolshevik savagery will play itself out, or be smashed. If you doubt that "consummation devoutly to be wished," seal this statement in a tube of steel, bury it where it will be found after the devastation has passed; the statement that when Hitler and Stalin have gone to join Nero and Herod, the popes will still be carrying on; not bragging, not blustering or threatening, but just carrying on, possibly against new tyrants and new tyrannies, but carrying on. For the conflict is not really between man and man, Church and state, pope

and tyrant. The fight is between God and man. God fights in a leisurely way. God doesn't hurry. God uses His own means. But God always wins.

I say the tyrants might learn from the Napoleons and the Bismarcks and the Fredericks and the Henrys and the Neros. They might also learn from a gentle soul, a rabbi under the old law, preceptor of St. Paul, who warned the Sanhedrin when they were about to commit the crime that has been committed ever since, the crime of the slaughter of men and women for being true to conscience. "Take heed to yourselves what you intend to do . . . refrain from these men and let them alone . . . lest perhaps you be found even to fight against God" (*Acts 5:35*). Tyrants, unfortunately for themselves and for the rest of the world, don't read the Acts of the Apostles, or if they do, they take no more stock in it than they do in the story of the man who rotted away at St. Helena, or the man who stood in the snow at Canossa, or the man who paid for his imperial ambition with his blood at the foot of Pompey's statue in the Roman Forum.

True, these modern tyrants may finally get to the pope. They may mete out to him the fate they inflicted upon thousands of priests and hundreds of bishops in Spain, in Mexico, in Austria, in Poland, in Russia. It will not matter. It wouldn't be the first time a pope perished after the manner of Peter, after the manner of Jesus. One only thing matters, obedience to God. So from the time of Peter to the time of Pius XII, from the day of Nero to the day of Hitler and Stalin, the vicar of Christ on earth repeats that simple but magnificent principle, the principle that saves a Church, a man or a nation "We must obey God rather than men."

THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH

(John 1:14)

Address delivered on December 24, 1939

There is in the heart of man an everlasting, insatiable hunger for God. In spite of all cynicism, skepticism, pessimism; in spite of occasional momentary outbursts of atheism, here and there; in spite of melancholy prophecies and fears that faith may vanish from the earth, it remains incontestable that he has felt a craving for the Infinite.

This craving that gnaws at the heart is not always recognized for what it is. Some who know not human nature—even their own human nature—imagine that they can satisfy the demands of the spirit with goods of earth. Most of the sin and misery of human kind is due to that mistake. St. Augustine says “O ye children of men, why do ye still, still tread those steep and stony paths? Seek what ye seek, but it is not where ye seek it.” And again he says, in the most famous sentence that ever fell from his incessantly productive pen, “Thou hast made us for Thyself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee.” The whole history of man is in that sentence; all human hopes, ambitions, joys, agonies are explained by the fact that man persistently, generation after generation, is seeking to satisfy his soul. If he finds what he seeks, it is joy, heaven on earth. If he finds it not, the world and all that it contains can give him no lasting consolation. A well known woman poet speaks of “striking” a chord of music that was “like the sound of a great Amen.” She says. “It lay on my fevered spirit with a touch of infinite calm: it

quieted pain and sorrow, like love overcoming strife . . . it linked all perplexed meanings into one perfect peace." Obviously that chord of music was God, or the sense and the realization of possessing God. But it escaped her and she laments "I have sought but I seek it vainly, that one lost chord divine."

All who have had the experience of glimpsing and then losing God Whose Presence brings infinite calm, quiets pain and sorrow. and bestows perfect peace, cannot be happy until they find Him again. In the Garden of Eden, man caught sight of his Maker, walked with Him, talked with Him familiarly; then—now here is the supreme disaster of all time—man lost the sight and sound and touch of God. and has sought Him ever after up and down the ways of the world. The poet from whom I have quoted those few lines goes on to say that perhaps she shall never again lay hold upon God this side of Eternity: "It may be that Death's bright angel will speak in that Chord again: it may be that only in heaven I shall hear that grand Amen."

But whether or not we can in this world set eyes upon God, and as it were lay hands upon Him and possess Him, we never cease to hope and to long and to try. "A man's reach must exceed his grasp," says another and greater poet. By a law of our being, following an irresistible urge, we reach out to God, though we may not in this life securely possess Him. "As the hart panteth after the fountains of water; so my soul panteth after thee, O God" (Psalms 41: 2), says the Psalmist. St. Bernard in a hymn familiar to all devout Christians declares that the very thought of God and the search for God fill the breast with sweetness. "How kind Thou art to those who

seek; But what to those who find, Ah this, nor tongue nor pen can show."

Here indeed is religion; the hunger and thirst for God, the quest for God, the hope of catching hold of God and never losing Him.

Man lifts up his voice and cries: "O God when I had no being at all, Thou didst create me, calling me into life out of the abyss of nothingness: Thou hast bestowed upon me the gift of intelligence, the power to think and to reason, that I might not be like the insensate beasts, but might know the world about me, know myself, know Thee; Thou hast given me power to discern good and evil: freedom to choose the one and reject the other; Thou hast placed me in control of my own destiny, and for all these blessings I am profoundly grateful.

"But though Thou multiply Thy favors until they surpass in number the sands of the sea, or the stars of the sky; though Thou ransack Thy heavenly treasure house and pour all Thy gifts into this seemingly shallow heart of mine, Thou canst not fill it. For my heart is in truth a bottomless abyss; it remains empty, unless Thou fill it with Thyself. O God, I cannot be content with created gifts: I want Thee!"

Think not that such a prayer as that can be spoken only by a saint. All men have made that prayer, not of course in those very words but each in his own tongue and after his own fashion of speech. That prayer—some such prayer—has come up from the heart of mankind at all times, everywhere. The most important fact in human nature, the fact beyond all doubt for those who know how to read the heart is that man is forever unsatisfied until he find and hold his God.

This is what we mean when we say that man is by nature religious. This is what an excellent writer had in mind when he hit upon the expression "the inveterate mysticism of the human heart." Religion may indeed sometimes be distorted and perverted, like any other impulse or passion, just as the holiest of passions, love, can be corrupted until it becomes utterly vile. But religion, pure or debased, is essentially the hunger and thirst for God, yea for the living God, "a loud cry in the ears of God is the voice of the creature to the Creator, Thou art all mine and I am all Thine." No philosopher, no poet, no writer of history, no one who offers his fellows, under the guise of fiction or of verse, truths too wonderful or too terrible to be spoken plainly, no one who speaks or writes, or paints or sings or prophecies of man is wise, nor can his work be true unless he knows and interprets the religious instinct and impulse of man, the importunate craving of man for God.

The most eloquent utterance of this heart-hunger for the Divine is, as may be expected, in the Sacred Scriptures, especially in the Psalms of David and in the Prophecy of Isaias. "O my God, I shall cry by day . . . and by night." "Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the just: let the earth be opened, and bud forth a saviour." And that cry of longing and petition brings forth from on high one of assurance "Be comforted, be comforted, my people, saith your God." And thereupon issues in the thirty-fifth chapter of Isaias an inspired poem in which the wisdom and the eloquence of God and man combine to express in a superb prose passage, perhaps the most beau-

tiful ten verses in Scripture, the fact that God will come and regenerate the earth:

“The land that was desolate . . . shall be glad, and the wilderness shall rejoice, and shall flourish like the lily. It shall bud forth and blossom, and shall rejoice with joy and praise: the glory of Libanus is given to it: the beauty of Carmel, and Saron, they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the beauty of our God. Strengthen ye the feeble hands, and confirm the weak knees. Say to the fainthearted: Take courage, and fear not: behold your God will bring the revenge of recompense: God himself will come and will save you.

“Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall be free: for waters are broken out in the desert, and streams in the wilderness. And that which was dry land, shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water. In the dens where dragons dwelt before, shall rise up the verdure of the reed and the bulrush. And a path and a way shall be there, and it shall be called the holy way: the unclean shall not pass over it, and this shall be unto you a straight way, so that fools shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor shall any mischievous beast go up by it, nor be found there: but they shall walk *there* that shall be delivered. And the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and shall come into Sion with praise, and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.”

Literal-minded persons may complain that no such supernatural Utopia is now or ever has been visible in this vale of tears. But obviously those

ecstatic outbursts of the prophet are not to be cramped into an iron form of exact literal interpretation. Isaias is attempting to speak with the exuberance of poetic terminology, spiritual truths for which there can be no adequate material expression. There are such things as cannot be spoken in cold prose. But the human heart understands what the tongue cannot say.

However, not all the beauty and the glory of Christmas must be concealed behind and beneath poetic utterance. The Supreme Essential Truth, the Coming of God in response to the cry of man, is sober historical fact. "That which was from the beginning" says John the Apostle, "which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the word of life . . . was manifested; and we have seen and do bear witness, and declare unto you the life eternal, which was with the Father . . . hath appeared to us" (*I St. John* 1:1-2).

Never can this world be utterly desolate, or human life wholly desperate. We have a joy that no man can take from us. That has happened which circumstances no matter how tragic, can never obliterate. God Himself has come to save us: "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we saw his glory, the glory as it were of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (*John* 1:14). This is the essential, everlasting Glory and Wonder and Beauty of Christmas, God says to man "You have called for me and behold I am come."

May He indeed come not only into the world but into the heart of every one of us and so make our Christmas inexpressibly happy.

JESUS TO PILATE

"Thou Shouldst Not Have Any Power . . .
Unless It Were Given Thee From Above"
(John 19:11)

Address delivered on December 31, 1939

Not once but several times in the course of this series of talks and of the corresponding series a year ago, I have remarked upon the fact that playwrights have made so little use of the dramatic material to be found in the Bible. This neglect of hidden treasure is not only unfortunate but at first sight unaccountable. It reminds me of an incident narrated by a mining prospector whom I met on the boat that plies beautiful Lake Tahoe on the borders of California and Nevada. He told of the discovery, or rather the rediscovery, of a ledge in the mountain side that contained a phenomenally rich vein of gold. It seems that a friend of his, an old man who had fared well at gold mining, lay on his deathbed. With almost his last breath he whispered "John, mine that ledge, mine that ledge." The one who told the story heeded what he thought the whim of a dying man, and was rewarded by finding a fortune.

I do think that some one with a more acute sense of dramatic than of monetary values might, if only to satisfy his own soul, dig out of the Bible the story of Moses and Pharaoh, or David and Saul, or of the prophet Samuel, or of Judas Machabeus, or of Daniel and Baltassar. But perhaps the dramatists have reason to be timid about using the material of Sacred Scripture. Vasari in his fascinating *Lives of the Painters* tells that Leonardo da Vinci was balked and baffled in his attempt to conceive and to paint

the countenance of Christ. His one supreme attempt, the face of Our Lord in "The Last Supper", remains unfinished. It may seem unwise, therefore, to ask one less than a Shakespeare or a Leonardo to utilize the Scriptures as dramatic or artistic material. And it may be not only unwise but absurd for one of little talent, or no talent at all, to attempt to do with cold dead words what cannot be done with flesh and blood on the stage or with warm colors on canvas.

Yet it seems to be expected of quite ordinary preachers that they shall do what men of genius could not do. We, poor fools that we are, permit it to be announced that we will treat such a subject as the one that confronts us today, "Christ Before Pilate." Incompetents rush in where masters fear to tread. But perhaps the faith we have in the Son of God and the love we bear Him may be our excuse for an otherwise sacrilegious temerity.

So let us see if we can visualize the scene that took place on the first Good Friday when Jesus stood on the pavement in front of the Pretorium, menaced by the mob; and Pilate sat safe and secure on the balcony of his palace.

Of the two—the Galilean peasant and the Imperial Delegate—the latter held obviously the more advantageous position. Like a viceroy of the British Empire in India sitting in judgment upon an "Untouchable" coolie, sat Pontius Pilate to mete out life or death to a friendless, helpless Galilean peasant. If the people, as sometimes happens, had been on the side of the prisoner, the contest might have been fairer. But the people were against Jesus. No one spoke for Him; no voice was heard to cry *Parce*, to offset the multitudinous cries of *Crucifige*; no one stood at His side; no one was interested in seeing

that justice was done; there was no danger that some powerful person would report an injustice to Rome; so it didn't matter to Pilate whether justice were done or not. In the circumstances it would have been folly to expect justice, just as it would be folly to expect justice of a sheriff when a mob threatens to lynch some poor victim in whom no one is interested. Still there might have been some bystander to ask if not justice at least mercy. There might have been, but there was not: He "looked for one that would grieve together with [Him,] but there was none" (*Psalms* 68:21).

Lacking a champion, Jesus—so it seemed to His judge—had not the spirit or even the shrewdness to make out a case for Himself. He would not argue. He would not even plead. He was unaccountably mute. "Dost not thou hear?" said Pilate. "And [Jesus] answered him to never a word; so that the governor wondered exceedingly" (*Matt.* 27:13-14). "If only this poor peasant would say something," thought Pilate, "He might stumble upon a word that would give me an excuse to release Him." The Roman could not himself devise an escape; and he had no miraculous insight into the character of the victim. Like others of his breed in all ages, he had not even a natural understanding of spiritual things. To him Jesus was only a misguided zealot, harmless and helpless.

I say the conflict was unequal. All the advantage was on one side and none on the other. But—now here is the point I would make—the one who was ill at ease, who squirmed and fidgeted and hesitated, was not the helpless victim, but the judge. He appeared on the balcony and disappeared, interrogating the prisoner now in public and again pri-

vately. Evidently he was uncertain of himself. He asked questions, and receiving no answer seemed not to realize that his official dignity had been affronted, for he asked again and again. Once when Jesus threw a question back upon him, "Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or have others told it thee of me?" he showed petulance: "Am I a Jew?" And yet once again he returned to the primary question, "What hast thou done" (*John 18:34-35*)? Forgetting that he had publicly declared "I find no cause in him" (*John 18:28*).

Surely it was a strange spectacle: the lordly Roman groping around as it were in the dark, seeking a loophole through which both he and his strange prisoner might escape, and getting no assistance from the prisoner, who seemed to look upon the proceedings as if he were a mere spectator, or even a stranger.

But let us have no misunderstanding about this apparent apathy of Jesus. He was no dreamy idealist; He had not, like a visionary, hypnotized Himself. Nor was He by nature hard and insensitive. Quite the contrary. None are so sensitive as the sinless. He was suffering acutely, not only physical pain but such mental anguish as the phlegmatic can never know. But with all His suffering and in the midst of the furore, He remained Master of the situation. To the Roman this should have been significant. Here before him was a man—a mere peasant, he thought—who like a peasant might be expected to cringe and cry and beg pity. But *this* Peasant had the self-assurance of a stoic philosopher, of an aristocrat, of a king, and, if Pilate could have seen it, of Something yet more. If the Governor or the High Priest or any one in the crowd had possessed insight,

he would have said, like Marcellus in *Hamlet*, "We do [Him] wrong, being so majestic, to offer [Him] the show of violence." But there was no one there on that fateful day with even the dimmest vision for spiritual reality—no one except the Prisoner.

Poor Pilate—it seems strange to say poor Pilate rather than poor Jesus, but of the two Pilate was the more to be pitied—became bewildered. Something was mysteriously awry and he couldn't lay hand on it. With the palace at his back, soldiers at his side, the power and prestige of the Empire behind whatever decision he might make, he had quite lost his poise, while the poor, forlorn, half-naked, blood-stained victim down there in the midst of the murderous mob was perfectly in possession of Himself.

Drama? Drama so tense as to be insupportable. Such drama that the dramatists have been afraid to attempt it.

But let that pass. We are now no longer concerned with the dramatic possibilities of that scene. I have described it only because it forms a background to something more important, a profound and far-reaching principle of political philosophy which strange to say, came out of it.

In a final fit of impatience, Pilate said once more to Jesus "Speakest thou not to me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and I have power to release thee" (*John* 15-10)? Any one with even a moderately resourceful imagination can think of half a dozen answers that our Savior might have made. The most obvious might be "Power to crucify Me? Power indeed but no *Right*. Power to *release* Me? Then *reelase* Me." But oddly enough, Jesus, as if He were sitting at ease in some academic

circle discussing the basic philosophy of government, uttered a fundamental principle of everlasting application. "Thou shouldst not have any power against me, unless it were given thee from above" (*John 19:11*).

And there, if we will but recognize it, is an axiom even more imperatively necessary in the circumstances of nations today than it was in Palestine or at Rome nineteen centuries ago. In those ancient times the Jews acknowledged Jehovah, and the Romans Jupiter, as the source of right and justice; and Jews and pagans alike admitted in theory that no action was moral unless it met the approval of God or of the gods. But today certain nations are running amuck politically and morally, because they have rejected the fundamental and indispensable truth that God exists or that God has a part or right or concern in human affairs. International chaos has come as the inevitable consequence of theological nihilism. If there is no God, there is no Absolute. If there is no Absolute, all is Relative. Justice and Right are relative. Truth and Good and Honor are relative. If there is no God, there is no fixed standard. Truth is elastic. The true and the good are like quicksilver which when you attempt to clutch it, escapes your grasp. As for justice; if there is no God, or if God has no concern with man and the doings of man, then as Thomas Hobbes said, "Justice is what the State says it is."

In other words, if there is no God, man is his own god, or since man is an impotent sort of god, the most powerful entity that man knows, the State, is God. "There is no God" is an unthinkable proposition. There is always a God. "If there were no God, we should have to invent one," says Voltaire.

That is precisely what men have done; they have invented a god to take the place of the God they deny. "I have examined many philosophical and scientific systems, claiming to be godless," said Clerk Maxwell, a great scientist of a generation ago, "but I have always found a God concealed somewhere." Today you may examine a great many philosophical, economical, sociological theories, pretending to contain no God, but if you have eyes to see you will find a god concealed in every one of them.

For be it understood: God is not an old man with a long white beard, holding a sceptre in His hand, sitting on a throne in the clouds: God is the Absolute, the Eternal, Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last: God is the True and the Good and the Beautiful. God is the Unchangeable. "Oh Thou that changest not" is a description of God. If one says there is no God, he obliterates the Absolute, the Eternal, the True, the Good, the Beautiful. Nothing is either first or last, nothing is fixed and certain, all is Change.

Such a philosophy has been taught in the universities for many a year. But of late it has come out of its academic seclusion and taken command of politics, of national affairs and international relationships. So it has come to pass that in Hitler's Reich justice is what Hitler says it is. In Russia, justice is what Stalin says it is. If nothing is permanent, justice and right change with the times; they are different on different sides of a border line: indeed justice and right and good and bad and true and false are what any powerful party in the State or any superman declares them to be.

It is a delusion to imagine that the disturbances that affect the world today are economic or financial

or industrial. The root cause of all things good or bad is theological. "It is surprising," says Proudhon, "that at the base of politics we find always a theology." A good theology brings forth good fruit, an evil theology brings forth evil fruit. The theology at the base of politics is a bad theology, the theology of atheism—there is no God; or of Deism—God is far away; or of Pantheism—everything is god.

It is folly therefore to attempt to patch up a badly damaged economic or social or political system with economic or social or political measures. It is like pouring sand into a foundation of sand that is forever dribbling away. We must go down deeper until we get to a foundation that is permanent, that "changeth not," that is the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the Absolute. If we are to have a solid foundation we must go down to bed-rock. God is Bed-Rock.

Now all this and much more is contained in the one sentence spoken to the Roman governor by the Nazarene Peasant on that fateful afternoon in Jerusalem. Many things were wrought that day on that spot for our salvation. Not all of them have to do immediately and exclusively with the life of the soul of the individual man. Much that was said and done on that occasion was for the salvation of society, of civilization, of the world. Society, civilization, the world, will never be saved unless rulers and people return to a realization of the eternal truth in that quiet sentence spoken by Jesus to Pilate, "Thou shouldst not have any power. . . unless it were given thee from above" (*John 19:11*).

Power is from God: it is holy: it must not be abused. "Public office is a public trust," said a wise

statesman. Yes, and more: public office is a sacred trust: a religious trust for the exercise of which rulers will be held responsible on High. It is not for them to declare what is justice, or what is truth, or what is right. These things are forever fixed. They are but the outward expression of the Nature of the Absolute, the Eternal from whom power comes to man.

Until we return to that theology we shall have no peace or security. If we never return, we shall never have peace or security. But we shall return. "Heaven and earth shall pass," says Jesus, "but my words shall not pass" (*Matt 24-35*).

CARDINAL HAYES STATES PURPOSE OF CATHOLIC HOUR

(Extract from his address at the inaugural program 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.

94 CATHOLIC HOUR STATIONS

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