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THE CATHOLIC HOUR

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# What Are We Fighting For?

By

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The sixth in a series of nineteen addresses on GUILT, delivered in the Catholic Hour on January 19, 1941, by the Right Reverend Monsignor Fulton J. Sheen, of the Catholic University of America. After the series has been concluded on the radio, it will be made available in one pamphlet.

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National Council of Catholic Men  
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## WHAT ARE WE FIGHTING FOR?

What are we fighting for? When I say "we" I mean Americans; by "fighting for" I mean the purposes and motives involved either in our sympathies or in our assistance.

What we are fighting for depends on what we are living for. Men fight not because they hate, but principally because they love. Now there are three fundamental loves: Men may love the material, the economic, or what are generally called possessions; men may love human rights, liberties, order, and justice; and finally, men may love God.

Hence there are three reasons why men may fight; that is, because they love the economic, or because they love the human, or because they love the divine.

It follows that there are three kinds of wars: Horizontal, vertical, and crucial. If we are fighting to preserve the economic, then we are fighting a horizontal war, that is, a war on a two dimensional plane of length and breadth—a war either for the extension or retention of territory. If we are fighting to preserve the human, then we are fighting a vertical war, that is, a war of three dimensions, which seeks to preserve not only the length and breadth of the material but also the height of ideals.

If we are fighting to preserve the divine, then we are fighting a crucial war, for the word crucial is derived from crux or cross, and the cross has four dimensions: The "breadth, and length, and height, and depth" (*Ephesians* 3:18) of Christ's redeeming love on the Cross. The battle cry of a horizontal

war is generally "Freedom," the battle cry of a vertical war is generally "Justice," the battle cry of a crucial war is "God."

Completely ignoring all propaganda, slogans, and emotion, and relying solely on the immutable principles of Justice guarded and protected by the Church, we shall so present the case as to allow each of you to answer for himself the question: "What are we fighting for?"

Are we fighting a *horizontal* war?

We are fighting a horizontal war if we are fighting solely to preserve the conditions of a peace treaty born of revenge: "Woe to the conquered" which is nothing but "injustice under the cloak of justice" (*Summi Pontificatus*).

We are fighting a horizontal war if we are fighting to preserve that particular form of Capitalism and credit in which, in the words of Pius XI, "not alone is wealth accumulated, but immense power and despotic economic domination is concentrated in the hands of a few," resulting in a situation which "divides men on the labor market into two classes, as into two camps . . . [and] transforms this labor market into an arena where the two armies are engaged in combat" (*Quadragesimo Anno*).

We are fighting a horizontal war if we are fighting to preserve that particular form of Liberalism which declares, in the words of Leo XIII, "that each is free to think on any subject as he may choose and to do whatever he may like to do . . . That the judgment of each one's conscience is independent of all law . . . That the collective reason of the community should be the supreme guide in the management of all public affairs; and that all right and all duty reside in the majority."

We are fighting a horizontal war if we are fighting to preserve the present social order based on the morality of pragmatism which denies the "universal norm of morality as well for individual and social life as for international relations" and which results in "levity in entering into marriage, divorce, the break-up of the family, the cooling of mutual affection between parents and children, birth control, the enfeeblement of the race, the weakening of respect for authority, or obsequiousness, or rebellion, neglect of duty toward one's country and towards mankind" (*Summi Pontificatus* and *Sertum Laetitiae*).

If we are fighting to preserve these things, then we are fighting a horizontal war, or an unjust war, not a war for the vindication or preservation of an essential right. Instead of being essential to democracy, these things are obstacles to it. Because they are not worth living for, they are not worth fighting for. They are even difficult to live *with*. If we are fighting to preserve these errors because we live with them, then our cause is as vain as that struggle Shakespeare described:

"The imminent death of twenty thousand men,  
That, for a fantasy and trick of fame,  
Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot  
Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,  
Which is not tomb enough and continent  
To hide the slain". (Hamlet)

Are we fighting a *vertical* war, that is, a war for human rights, justice, and true liberty?

In order to fight this kind of war, two conditions must be fulfilled in the present state of the world: Some loss of the economic and a rebirth of justice. In other periods in history the first of these conditions would not be necessary because at other times men had a greater awareness of God. But

today love of the economic has so blinded men to the spiritual, that like the Prodigal they must be disillusioned before coming to the knowledge of Truth.

Suppose a wealthy man keeps all his negotiable securities in his house; suppose further he lives for the economic, thinks, sleeps, and eats his business, is conscious of no other obligation in life except to make money. His house catches fire and he loses everything wherein he trusted. But after a week of reflection he suddenly makes the startling admission: "Well, thank God I have my wife and children." He never knew he had them before. Disaster lifted him to a new set of values. He lost the economic, but he found the human. He had to die in order to be reborn.

Like a mighty oak, wealth has grown until it has shut off all sunlight and air from the flowers and grass which are also creatures of God. A storm can level the oak without uprooting the grass or the violet. Modern man must first have his trust in wealth smashed before he will hope in justice: "And I said: How long, O Lord? And he said: Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land shall be left desolate" (*Isaias* 6:11). The war is doing that very thing. As we said in an earlier broadcast it is smashing our illusions of human progress, the omnipotence of science, the self-sufficiency of the profit-motive. It has dropped the scales from our eyes that we may see; it has purged the outer envelope of the grain of wheat that it may grow; it has made the so-called wise insecure in their security. Indeed we are now

"A most poor man, made tame to fortune's blows;  
Who, by the art of known and feeling sorrows,  
Am pregnant to good pity" (King Lear)

But we are not fighting a vertical war merely because misfortune befalls us; the second and more important condition must yet be fulfilled, namely, a rebirth of the virtue of justice. At this stage a man talks less about freedom and more about justice, less about totalitarianism and more about righteousness.

Up until now the world has said: There is no right and wrong; no good and evil; they are medieval hang-overs from Catholicism. Good and evil are relative to a point of view. Has not Einstein proved that everything is relative?

But these very people who denied evil a few years ago are now pointing their finger across the water and saying: "These dictators are evil; they are wrong." But may we ask: "If they are wrong, then what is right? If they are evil then what is good?" As some men come to appreciate the blessings of health only after a long illness, so too they come to know good by experience with the devil. It was not a preservation of their baptismal innocence but a trial of their own philosophy which awakened them to justice.

Now to come to the point: If we are fighting to preserve not the Economic Man of Capitalism, nor the Psychological Man of Freud, nor the Beast Man of Darwin, nor the Class Man of Marx, but the Good Man ordered to Justice, then we are moving in the realm of the truly human. Any nation which can say in its conscience it is fighting to preserve these five basic principles of justice is fighting a vertical war:

1. To assure all nations great and small, powerful or weak, their right to life and independence.

2. To release nations from the slavery imposed upon them by the race for armaments.

3. To erect some juridical institution which shall guarantee the loyal and faithful fulfillment of the treaties.

4. To establish strictly legal rights for the real needs and just demands of nations, populations, and racial minorities.

5. To restore deep and keen responsibilities which measure and weigh human statutes according to the sacred and inviolable standards of the laws of God.

If any nation can say that in the spirit of justice it is fighting to attain these five objectives, then it is fighting a vertical war.

Finally, are we fighting a *crucial* war, that is, a crusade for God and for Christianity? I know the slogan is often evoked, but we are not concerned with slogans but truth. Are we fighting to save Christianity? No!

How can we be fighting for Christianity when we are not living for Christianity? To call Hitler anti-Christ does not mean we are for Christ. If at least 60% of the parents of the United States do not care enough about God to give their children a religious education, do you think they would fight to defend the rights of God? If 60% of Americans consider religion no more essential for their own peace of soul and the moral conduct of their children than a game of golf, would they be ready to die for religion any more than they die for golf? Men only fight for what they love.

How can we be said to be fighting God's cause when we call that nation which has driven religion from its borders, murdered millions, and officially



proclaimed atheism, a "friendly nation"? I mean Russia. How can we say we are fighting to preserve liberty, justice, and democracy, while embracing in friendly gesture that tyranny which has snuffed out the liberties of one hundred and sixty million people?

How can we be fighting a crusade when we pick and choose among our barbarians like comedians who poke fun at Hitler and Mussolini but are silent about Stalin? Justice demands the condemnation of evil irrespective of where one finds it. Let us not forget, when talking of the plight of Poland, Belgium, Holland, and Norway, pillaged by Germany, to think of Finland, ravaged by Russia, and Greece, attacked by Italy.

Mark these words: The enemy of the world in the near future is going to be Russia, which is playing democracies against dictators and dictators against democracies, which is using peace when it can and war when it must, and is preparing, when Europe is exhausted from war, to sweep over it like a vulture to drink its blood and make away with the spoils.

The Catholic Hour speaker referred, six months before it took place, to the likelihood of a union between the Nazis and Soviets. Now the warning is sounded again. Look out for Russia that walks like a bear and crawls like a snake.

But though this war is not a crusade to save Christianity, we must admit that a war can be just without being holy; and furthermore, that though for a nation a given war may not be a crusade, it can nevertheless be holy for certain individuals in the nation who regard it as a duty laid on them in order that God's law of righteousness be maintained among men.

If the cause of any nation today is just, it is not because it has chosen to defend Christianity, but because Christianity has chosen it. If God did make use of such a nation it would certainly be not on account of its righteousness, but on account of His Goodness.

Many nations would be honest if they said not that they were fighting to preserve Christianity but that they were forced to defend a nobler cause than they deserved. But though they are not fighting to defend Christianity itself, they may be fighting to preserve those basic fundamental liberties which are the natural foundation of Christianity. A nation which undertakes to right an act of wrong-doing is consciously or unconsciously providing a rallying point for Christianity.

If then this war is not directly a crusade, is it possible to have a crusade on the part of those who still are conscious they have immortal souls by "enlisting all unselfish and great-hearted men in an endeavor to lead nations back from the broken cisterns of material and selfish interests to the living fountain of divine justice"?

Crusaders of Justice and Charity—to that we are all called, and it is the most noble cause any man or woman can defend. What alarms us most is the decline of brotherly love, tolerance, and good will among our fellow citizens. We hiss in theatres; we denounce those who differ with us personally instead of rationally; we hate persons—all this because we have forgotten we are all creatures of God. To help remedy this deplorable situation we shall send free to any one who asks for it, a little booklet entitled: *What Can I Do?* For what purpose? To revive charity and justice towards one another and to God. It is written for Jew, Protestant, and Cath-

olic in a spirit of Divine fellowship. Will you enlist in that crusade? If so—we have our answer to the question: “What are we fighting for?” We are fighting to restore sacrifice, discipline, virtue, and love. Some things are not worth fighting for. Let the leaves of the oak of America fall; let the ephemeral things that die fall to the ground. Some things are not worth preserving. Let the tree for a while stretch out its naked limbs, bare but living. Our inner life is good and sound, only a few externals are bad. Once they have been swept aside by justice, the hidden buds will come forth at another season, strong in new life—and America shall be what the Founding Fathers said it would be: A nation that trusts in God!









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# THE CATHOLIC HOUR

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

The Catholic Hour was begun on a network of 22 stations, and now carries its message of Catholic truth on each Sunday of the year (and Good Friday) through a number of stations varying from 90 to 107, situated in 40 states, the District of Columbia, and Hawaii, including one short-wave station broadcasting to the entire western world. Consisting of an address mainly expository, by one or another of America's leading Catholic preachers, and of sacred music provided usually by one of Father Finn's musical units, the Catholic Hour has distinguished itself as one of the most popular and extensive religious broadcasts in the world. A current average of 40,000 audience letters a month, about twenty per cent of which come from listeners of other faiths, gives some indication of its popularity and influence.

The program's production costs now run to more than \$45,000 a year—less than eight dollars per station per Sunday—which must be raised entirely by voluntary subscription. The National Council of Catholic Men invites all those who are interested in the maintenance of this far-reaching and effective work of religion to contribute to its support.

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