

THE CATHOLIC HOUR

WHITHER GOEST THOU?

BY

FULTON OURSLER

An Editor of the Reader's Digest

JUL 3 1946

The first in a series of addresses by prominent Catholic laymen entitled "THE ROAD AHEAD," delivered in the Catholic Hour, broadcast by the National Broadcasting Company in cooperation with the National Council of Catholic Men on June 2, 1946, by Fulton Oursler, an editor of the Reader's Digest. After the series has been concluded on the radio, it will be made available in one pamphlet.

National Council of Catholic Men
Washington, D. C.

WHITHER GOEST THOU?

There is a famous tradition that, not long before his death, St. Peter was warned that he was in danger, and—listening to the urgent advice of his friends—decided to escape from Rome. He set forth on the ancient Appian Way but had gone only a little distance from the gates when he was halted by a vision. Before him appeared our Blessed Lord. In a trembling voice Peter asked the historic question:

“Quo vadis, Domine?” Whither goest thou, Lord? And instantly the reply came:

“I go to Rome to be crucified again.”

The vision disappeared. Turning face about there on the Appian Road, where stands today the Church of Quo Vadis, St. Peter walked back into the Eternal City. In a short time, he was to be crucified in the Emperor's Gardens—put to death, upside down, at his own request, because he felt unworthy to be slain in the same manner as was the Master.

Quo Vadis! Whither goest thou? Today, and in succeeding broadcasts, we are going to think about the future; about the road ahead, for the nations as a world group; for this country domesti-

cally and for ourselves as individuals.

Whither goes this world, this land—whither goest thou, and I?

It has been said that the fall of the Roman Empire happened 400 years before anyone knew it. As for our own times, men like Spengler, who wrote *The Decline of the West*, have declared that the sun is already setting on Christian civilization. Can this charge be true? If so, it is tragic news because this culture is unique. Not alone for material accomplishments is it incomparable, nor for intellectual advancement—primarily it is distinguished for ideals, freedom, respect for the dignity of the individual and brotherly love. If it did not attain the perfection of those ideals, it did espouse them. The mark, the distinguishing sign of Christian culture has rested on its belief in the supreme importance and responsibility of the human soul.

The principal choice which mankind must make on the road ahead is whether he shall continue to have faith in those ideals, or shall cast them aside in favor of a system of life without ideals or principles, and governed wholly by materialistic devices.

On that choice rests the fate of the world.

The greatest danger for the future is that we may come to believe the choice is made already and that it is too late to avert the catastrophe.

The greatest need of the present is a strong confidence that under God, His Kingdom yet may come, His will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.

The past gives strength to such confidence. The ages encourage us, as we look into the veiled years before us. Our faith is founded on a rock.

This Christian culture, which must be preserved on the road ahead, arose from Judeo-Christian origins in Palestine. Its good sense and deathless vision rest firmly on the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount. Because men believed in these teachings, and died for them in the teeth of wild beasts, in the amphitheatres of infidel cruelty, in the flames of the martyr's faggots and a thousand refinements of pagan torture, all life was made safer for the poorest citizen on three continents.

Through those teachings, man's inheritance of freedom came to be recognized. Because of the tragedy and glory of the life of Our Lord, humanity saw

a new hope. There came into the world a new reliance on faith, hope and charity. Men began to know the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. To replace pride, lust, gluttony, murder, men were shown the duty and the opportunity to comfort the afflicted, to forgive offenses, to bear wrongs patiently, to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to harbor the harborless, to visit the sick. They were taught that it was blessed to be merciful, and to be clean of heart and to make peace.

True, sin did not die out. Nor did we breed a race of Saints. But never before in the history of the world had men seen so far, or grasped so clearly what things are good and what are evil. The arts and crafts flourished under the inspiration of great faith. Mighty books were written, mighty music was heard, great cathedrals rose, great pictures were painted, great universities established. Learning advanced in magic boots. Invention improved upon invention, as man gathered to himself one power after another.

All this greatness, all this achievement has come down to us, as a heritage, not from the valor of Babylonian armies, not from

the intellectual profundities of Greek scholars and philosophers, not from the enterprise of the Romans in the panoply of their conquest—no, the fruits of this shining western civilization had their seeds in the stable of Bethlehem. Can any other culture show such fruits?

And yet while there is still time let us recognize that we are in danger of losing not only the fruits but the orchard where they grew. All that is truly significant in our culture is threatened today—as the world seems to shudder and pause in its rush through space, halted by the question: Whither goest thou? Which direction is the world to take? Forward under good or backward under evil? Up toward triumph, or down toward destruction? Left toward atheism, or right toward Almighty God?

Opportunists argue there is a middle course. There can be no middle course between good and evil. Mankind cannot live half-free and half-slave, half-good and half-evil. One or the other must and will prevail. That is why the choice of the nations on the road they will take in the future is a moral choice, and nothing less.

To look around us today is to see on every hand the visible signs of this conflict. It is also

to see the signs where weakness of leadership has already started us in the wrong direction. The details are complex but the whole is simple enough. One cannot look at the picture without wondering what has happened to morality in leadership. It was not so long ago when we were in no doubt whatsoever where morality lay in the future course of the nations. The decent people of the world applauded the Atlantic Charter as a moral document. In August, 1941, the official statement covering the meeting of President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill was issued from the White House in Washington. In that release, the names of Roosevelt and Churchill were appended as signers, thus pledging the good faith of two governments. Let me recall to you what was said in that official statement, and I quote:

“The President of the United States of America and the Prime Minister, Mr. Churchill, deem it right to make known certain common principles in the national policies of their respective countries on which they base their hopes for a better future for the world.”

Those are significant words. Remember—those are the common principles on which Roose-

velt and Churchill based their hopes for a better future for the world. You may easily have forgotten those common principles. Almost no one ever mentions them any more. They may even sound shocking in the light of what has happened since.

The first common principle was —“no aggrandizement.” Now what does aggrandizement mean? It means to increase, to become greater. So the common principles of no aggrandizement means that no country was to become greater—greater in territory or greater in possessions as a result of victory in the war.

How has this first principle worked out? One country alone has gained more than 200 thousand new square miles of territory and added more than 27 million human souls to its domination. Does no one call that increase, that growing, greater aggrandizement? Or is it aggrandizement to force multitudes of conquered people to work as slaves for their conquerors—and in a Christian age, and Christian culture, justify such practices in the name of vengeance? Was it aggrandizement to strip conquered countries of their possessions? Look at Europe today. Ask yourself whether point number one of the Atlantic Charter

was not a moral principle—and if it has not been cast out? Whither goest thou, world?

Point number two prohibited any territorial changes that did not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned. Ask the peoples concerned—in Finland, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland—and how many others? It would be idle to belabor the obvious fact that here another moral principle has been abandoned.

In point number three was enunciated the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live. It says “all peoples.” Will anyone contend that the peoples behind the iron curtain of eastern Europe have had anything really to say at all about how they shall be governed?

Now you may have heard a great deal of mockery flung at those who would suggest one gentle drop of mercy to fall upon our conquered enemies. Vengeance has been the cry! Indict a whole people, the tocsin! Reduce them down so low that they shall be sheep herders to the end of time. Such talk we hear today. Yet, listen, my friends—hear once more that Mr. Roosevelt and Mr. Churchill agreed upon in the

fourth point of their charter, and I quote:

“To further the enjoyment by all States, great or small, *victor or vanquished*, of access on equal terms to the trade and to the raw materials of the world which are needed for their economic prosperity.”

Victor or vanquished, they said. Anyone who would advocate economic prosperity for Germany today would be called a fascist dog. And yet Roosevelt advocated it and so did Churchill, less than five years ago.

The fifth point, too, makes no distinction when it calls for “improved labor standards, economic adjustment and social security”—for “all!”

The sixth point held out the hope that once Nazi tyranny was destroyed, fear and want were to be abolished from all lands. No fear? In Europe today—no fear? My friends, fear hangs over half the world like one continuous unlifting miasma. As for want—we are asked to tighten our belts, that millions of children may not die.

And seventh, all men are to traverse the high seas and oceans without hindrance. It is idle to depict the absurdity of this guarantee, as matters stand today. There is no free passage,

on land or water. Even flying over the territories of our friends, an American pilot is likely to be shot down. The American flag painted on his wings will not save him and neither will the seventh point of the Atlantic Charter.

The eighth point looked to the abandonment of the use of force by the nations. May God speed the day! Meanwhile we have a United Nations, with council sessions going on in New York, and they do go on—and go on, and go on, day after day. Meanwhile their governments at home are busy perfecting new and more devilish methods of force and destruction.

How far we have already retreated from the simple and elementary morality to which we consecrated the blood of our young in the battles that they won for us. How swiftly we have turned to those who affirm anew their faith in force, in power, in selfishness, cruelty and revenge—and all the other courses of hate and disbelief.

Our leaders know what they should do. With all its imperfections, with all that it neglected to say, the Atlantic Charter was created in a climate of Christian faith. It had a moral goal. Clearly now there is not

one road ahead for the nations—there are two roads. The world must take one way or the other. It can feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, perform the corporal works of mercy and the spiritual works of mercy in international relationships. It can take up its cross and follow down the Via Dolorosa. Or it can rush straight off the cliff—to the uttermost pit of destruction.

In the emergency of this coming time of choice, the duty of Christians is clear, and the duty of Catholics unmistakable. In our thoughts, in our actions and

above all in our constant prayers—prayers unremitting, prayers having in mind that the whole future of mankind is the issue—we must renounce as evil the counsels of greed and pride and power and vengeance and hold fast to the hard course of humility and service. Let us who are Catholics, let all who call themselves Christians, good men of every faith, pray with heart and soul that the good shall triumph, the nations choose the true path and that the counsels of the ungodly in the end come to nothing.

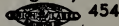
THE CATHOLIC HOUR

1930—Seventeenth Year—1946

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

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

Our Sunday Visitor Press
Huntington, Indiana



454