

# THE CATHOLIC HOUR

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## COURAGE OR CRUCIFIXION

BY

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National Council of Catholic Men  
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Dear Fellow Americans: It was in the first year of the ministry of Jesus Christ. The Master had already declared Himself, when in driving the hucksters from the Temple, He had dramatized His utter contempt of those who would use religion to achieve illicit and unjust gains. The Sanhedrin, the Supreme Council of the Jews, had on a former occasion sent an embassy to John the Baptist which had enabled the Precursor to declare himself and at the same time to bring into bold relief the greatness of Jesus. "He it is who is to come after me, who has been set above me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to loose" (*John 1: 27*). Now there comes to Him one from the Sanhedrin, Nicodemus, a rich man who was influential in Jerusalem not only by reason of his wealth of worldly possessions but also because of his high order of intelligence and his distinction of noble rank.

Witness to the wonderful deeds done in Jerusalem by Jesus, Nicodemus had decided his belief in Christ. Deep, deep down in his heart there was *the conviction*, but yet as the historian narrates, "This man came to Jesus by *night*, and said to

Him: Rabbi, we know that thou art come a teacher from God; for no man can do these signs which thou dost, unless God be with him" (*John 3: 2*).

As Nicodemus was taking his leave of Jesus the dawn was lighting up the Eastern sky. Through the night position and conviction had struggled for supremacy in this man's soul. Jesus made one last exhortation to strengthen this vacillating man. "Thou art a teacher in Israel and dost not know these things? Amen, amen, I say to thee we speak of what we know and we bear witness to what we have seen; and our witness you do not receive. If I have spoken of earthly things to you, and you do not believe, how will you believe if I speak to you of heavenly things?" (*John 3: 10-12*). And behold, the Saviour concluded, the cause of judgment! "The light has come into the world, yet men have loved the darkness rather than the light, for their works were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light that his deeds may not be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light that his deeds may be made manifest, for they have been performed in

God" (*John* 3: 19-21). Nicodemus stole away not only from the presence of Jesus but tried likewise to steal away from the insistent promptings within his mind and heart.

It would seem that something in the nature of a parallel could be observed between the history of Nicodemus and the history of our Country in which values that were so clearly stated at its founding have been progressively lost sight of with the passing of the years. Let our prayer be that we will not have to suffer crucifixion in order to declare our conviction as a Nation. As our Country seeks to bind up the wounds of a stricken world and seeks likewise to establish this wounded world on the secure props of true democracy, it becomes increasingly evident that she suffers from not having formulated her basic premises into a philosophy of government.

When our representatives sit in conference with delegates of foreign powers and work with them to establish a new world order out of which will come the promise of a peace nostalgically longed for by men everywhere, they are at a disadvantage. Foreign representatives possess a political philosophy different from our own and they know

well the ends they seek, the means to achieve those ends and more important the "why" of these ends and means. Theirs is a philosophy in action.

It is true that we can speak emotionally in terms of Democracy, Liberty and Freedom but we find these terms flung back at us with entirely different connotations. I do not doubt the sincerity of those who use these terms differendy. In their scheme of living words have taken on a new meaning and old values, rooted in absolute truth, have become obscure because the substance that gives them meaning and vitality has been watered down until they remain but emotional catch-phrases emptied of the persuasive force of truth.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident," so believed and so stated the founding Fathers of our country, self-evident, admitting of no contradiction, carrying within themselves the force of persuasiveness. Those with whom our country must build if there is to be One World and peace in that world, even though they use our terminology by way of comment on this most fundamental declaration of our country's profession, in effect say "so what," to use a colloquialism. It is tragic but it is

true that their casual and searing retort finds a re-echoing response in many quarters throughout our land.

Thank God this re-echoing response does not come from the minds and the hearts of the school children of America. These minds and these hearts, untouched by the pragmatism of a callous world, still cling at least emotionally to the principles which have made our country the highest exemplar of human liberty among the nations of the world. When I say the school children of America I do not speak simply of those of tender years but I refer as well to those young people who are fast approaching the end of their formal academic training but whose maturing years have not blighted the vision of youth.

I recall, if I may speak personally, a meeting which I attended on the campus of a Teachers' College in our Southland. The meeting was called by a religious organization which enjoyed the prestige of faculty recognition, and in attendance by invitation were faculty and student representatives interested in the spiritual welfare of the student body. Likewise in attendance were the ministers of the city in which the college was located and the speaker, a Cath-

olic priest. The student body numbering some sixteen hundred represented a good cross-section of the state and the college itself was state supported. The students for the most part were members of the major non-Catholic denominations.

In addressing the meeting the speaker remarked that the youngster of today is not unlike the youngster of the generations which have gone before him, for he too wants to believe. His heart likewise reaches out in its quest for an explanation of things. He differs from those who have gone before in that he does not accept on the testimony of his elders but wants to know the why and the wherefore of Faith. Emotionally he still clings to the values which give meaning to his way of life but he lacks the training to establish these values intellectually. By way of illustration it was pointed out that the youngster of today wants to come to realize that Christ Jesus is not only a powerful emotional factor but is, indeed, an historical reality concerning Whom history bears clearer and more irrefutable testimony than it does of any other whose name adorns its pages. As the speaker continued to describe students and youths generally, as he had come to

know them from close observation and intimate conversation, he was interrupted by a student who exclaimed enthusiastically: "That is what we want, just as Father has described. Too many people come out of homes where emotionalism serves as the basis of Faith. We want reasons for believing."

And reasons there are, so solidly grounded in common sense and so firmly established in correct thinking that the Founding Fathers of America could say of those which were to constitute the fundamentals of the nation's political structure that they are self-evident truths, admitting of no contradiction, convincing by their very nature.

Now these reasons, these truths are challenged, challenged as never before in the history of Christian civilization, challenged by a philosophy of negation in action, a philosophy which by its very denials is a complete contradiction to all that is implied in the phrase, the American Way, but which uses our terminology to confuse us and to achieve its ends.

Why does this philosophy succeed in confusing us even as it uses our own terminology? Because we, as a nation, have contented ourselves with an emotional acceptance of these truths,

religious truths mind you, which are the bases of the American Way of Life. We, as a nation, have not been confronted until now with the necessity of rationalizing these truths.

Catholic schools teach the religious principles which inspired our form of government and upon which its survival depends. The graduates of Catholic schools view in the perspective of religion the duties and privileges of American citizenship.

Their understanding of citizenship is by no means alien to the American tradition in education; even a casual reference to the history of American education will reveal that the American schools which our founding fathers attended laid great stress upon religious instruction as an indispensable element of training for citizenship. Were it not for the hysterical bigotry of the Civil War period, religious instruction would never have been banned from the public schools. Indeed, the utter secularization of contemporary public education has far outrun the intention of the sincere men who tried to quell sectarian contentions by eliminating religion from the public school. Many clergymen and educators are now agreed that the whole question of the relationship of re-

ligion to public education needs to be reexamined in the light of present-day conditions. We cannot trust the future of America to religious illiterates.

Despite their fundamental differences, the public schools and private schools conducted by religious denominations are not competing institutions. The private schools are not needless duplications of the public educational facilities, nor are they a divisive force in the community. On the contrary, the two systems of education, public and private, are partners in American education. The two are related by a common public purpose, the training of the American citizen and by mutual helpful contact which frequently draws together representatives of the two systems in projects for the social betterment of the community.

In fact, democracy in American education is safeguarded by the continued existence of two systems of education—both approved by the State, both aware of their important public obligations, both enjoying full freedom from control of one by the other. Eliminate the private religious schools, and the result in American education is uniformity. In that event, education would become the potential tool

of the destructive influence of totalitarian rule, wherein one party, the Government's Party, alone has the right of suffrage; wherein the citizen conforms or suffers liquidation.

The observance of American Education Week should prompt the thoughtful citizen, and God knows each citizen should be thoughtful, to evaluate anew in the light of threatened changes in our world's political thinking, the Educational System of today. This is imperative because out of this system will come the guardians of tomorrow's liberties and tomorrow's freedoms. Either we of today stand guard now or tomorrow we may stand atop another Calvary at the foot of another cross.

Crucifixion is a threatening and discouraging term but no more threatening and discouraging than current newspaper headlines. Perhaps crucifixion will prove the crucible out of which will be distilled with greater clarity our Country's basic political philosophy. Crucifixion must inevitably follow unless the genesis of our Country's ideals and standards is rationally understood by the rank and file of our citizens.

Let us ask ourselves again if there can be a parallel between the history of Nicodemus and

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the history of our own country as she seeks to hold fast to her political convictions. Until now those political convictions have not been formulated into a distinctive philosophy of government. Because of hostile groups among her citizenry our Coun-

try has been fearful of making a forthright declaration of the truths which give meaning to her aspirations. Must we, perforce, as a people, stand at the foot of a cross before we will openly declare our convictions? God spare us crucifixion!

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# THE CATHOLIC HOUR

1930—Seventeenth Year—1946

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

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

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